

Hoardings from Hellenistic to Kushan Central Asia: Towards Some Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the interpretation of diverse examples of hoards (intentional deposits of valuable objects) from Central Asia's Hellenistic and Kushan periods that are traditionally understood in utilitarian terms. As a means of comparison, it first reviews useful insights from the study of hoards in Bronze Age Europe and coin hoards, where simplistic classifications and interpretations of hoards (especially as representative of strictly ritual or utilitarian behaviour) have been increasingly problematised. The case of the Begram hoard is then discussed in reference to these insights. Arguably, this find represents not the remains of a palatial treasure or merchant's cache, but perhaps rather material selected from the property of a religious institution that was deposited and abandoned as late as the early 4th century AD, and reflecting both ritual and utilitarian considerations. The interpretations of additional cases of diverse hoards from Ai Khanoum, Taxila, the Oxus Temple, Dal'verzintepe, and Mir Zakah are then reconsidered, highlighting common shortcomings in the interpretation of coin hoards in the field, the diverse ways these finds shed light on economic, social, and ritual behaviour, and the necessity for critical interrogation of frequently presumed direct links between unrecovered hoards and expected invasions.

KEYWORDS

Archaeological classification of hoards; intentional deposition; ritual deposits; coin hoards; Begram; Bactria; Gandhara.

Deposits of valuable artefacts are widespread in the global archaeological record, and are often described as hoards in scholarship. In some fields, considerable attention has been devoted to the interpretation, classification, and explanation of hoards, i.e., what they are, and why they were deposited. Although positions tend to vacillate over time – not only in reference to the contents and contexts of hoards, but also the period and tradition within which a scholar works – an interpretative line has often been drawn between the utilitarian and the ritual: whether a hoard seems to have been deposited for a diversity of practical reasons, or if its deposition is better interpreted as an action in a wider religious framework.¹ Yet, problems have also been raised with the ritual-utilitarian dichotomy too, a point I will explore further below. For now, I rather wish to highlight a field-specific lacuna: such interpretative issues are rarely examined in scholarship on hoards in Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia, a point which became clear to me through doctoral research on the Begram hoard (see MORRIS 2021).

The present article is thus concerned with exploring how insights and approaches from the examination of hoards elsewhere may be productively applied to hoards in a Central Asian

1 Of course, the term 'ritual' is slippery. All rituals do not necessarily pertain to the realm of the sacred. Moreover, there is a longstanding (and often lampooned) tradition in archaeology to use the term to describe phenomena that are either non-functional or otherwise unexplainable (see HODDER 1982, 164; BRÜCK 1999a). Likewise, 'ritual' often is used as a descriptor for religion itself, rather than as an element of a wider religious framework (INSOLL 2004, 12). The term is retained here for its prevalence in scholarship on hoards.

context. I begin by clarifying my terminology, then outline some pertinent theoretical and methodological developments in the study of hoards especially in two domains: hoards of bronze artefacts in Bronze Age Europe, and of coin hoards among coinage-using populations. I then consider the Begram hoard as a case study, highlighting problems and patterns in the interpretation of this find in past scholarship, and consider how theoretical and methodological impulses from elsewhere combined with a re-examination of the archaeological data might lead to a different interpretation of this material. Finally, I consider some further examples of different kinds of hoards in Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia found in areas north and south of the Hindu Kush, underlining the theoretical and methodological challenges in their interpretation, and points of potential for future enquiry.

WHAT IS A HOARD?

There are now numerous overlapping terms in circulation in the scientific literature to describe the broad spectrum of intentionally deposited material in the global archaeological record. To cite only English-language examples, we have hoards, caches, treasures, treasure troves, structured deposits, odd deposits, unusual, symbolic, non-domestic, placed, intentional, and ceremonial deposits, and special deposits (see RICHARDS – THOMAS 1984; BRÜCK 1999b, 152; HILL 1995, 95–96; HAMEROW 2006).

I have chosen to retain the traditional, if problematic term ‘hoard’ here for two main reasons. The first reason is that the term feels appropriate enough to describe the Begram hoard, viewed from a conventional English-language definition: ‘An accumulation or collection of anything valuable hidden away or laid by for preservation or future use; a stock, store, esp. of money; a treasure’.² The second reason is that I do not think that imperfect terminology, in principle, inhibits the following discussion. Hansen has noted, for example, in reference to German-language scholarship of the last decades on Bronze Age hoards, that the problematic terms ‘*Hort*’ and ‘*Depot*’ themselves have not hampered efforts towards interpretation (HANSEN 2002, 96). Therefore I use ‘hoard’ as a general term to describe specific archaeological finds in Central Asia which may be broadly comparable to the situation at Begram.

Here, I understand a hoard to be an assemblage of more than one valuable object that appears to have been intentionally concealed or deposited. I have chosen to focus on depositions that typically attract utilitarian rather than ritual interpretations. The latter group of finds encompasses many easier-to-interpret deposits in known contexts, such as grave goods, *stūpa* deposits, and groups of votive offerings or debris thereof deposited in cult buildings and sacred spaces, such as those in the Oxus Temple. Such deposits are frequently characterised by a permanent aspect, while the hoards considered here are often interpreted to have been temporarily concealed for safekeeping, and intended for later recovery. It should be noted that the archaeological residue of regular accumulation and storage of material in designated spaces should not be considered as representing hoards in a proper sense, although storage and accumulation processes are certainly of interest for thinking about hoard formation.

The rest of my criteria are admittedly contrived, more in reference to how such deposits are recovered and recognised in the archaeological record, than the human activity which produced them. The ‘more than one’ criterion is artificial, in reference to the difficulty of identifying intentionality as opposed to accidental loss or discard from imperfect archaeological data. Of course, single objects may be deposited for the same reason as multiple. Likewise,

2 Hoard, n.1 in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* 2018.

'value' is partly culturally-constructed, a point which has been debated elsewhere in reference to hoards.³ That said, value can be conceptualised upon a spectrum, and I do not think it is problematic, as a starting point, to consider money (especially of gold and silver, coined or bullion), jewellery, and plate as approaching the upper end of this spectrum, alongside artefacts that had considerable antiquity, rarity, or distance from their place of production at the moment of their deposition. Ideally, a hoard should have been intentionally concealed or deposited, regardless of whether the agent understood this deposition to have a temporary or permanent aspect. Hoards deposited with a temporary intentionality become part of the archaeological record only accidentally, presumably in most cases with the loss of knowledge of the hoard's location (e.g., the death of the owner). Yet, a hoard with temporary intentionality may become permanent if the hoard becomes worthless. In many cases, detecting the intentionality of a hoard's non-recovery is difficult. Indeed, some coin hoards should represent accidental losses of a purse, but conventionally we do not call them anything else but hoards.

VIEWS OF HOARDS ELSEWHERE: POTENTIALS AND PITFALLS

As we lack a robust literature on the interpretation of hoards specifically in reference to the archaeology of Central Asia, here I wish to highlight some important insights produced especially in two subfields of archaeology that have dealt extensively with the classification and interpretation of hoards: the archaeology of Bronze Age Europe, and the study of coin hoards. By signposting potentials as well as pitfalls already encountered in these discourses, I hope to highlight some useful impulses that can be transferred to the interpretation of hoards in Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia.

Since the mid-19th century, scholars of Bronze Age Europe have attempted to classify and interpret the ubiquitous phenomenon of deposits of bronze artefacts. These could include a variety of whole and fragmentary implements, as well as uncast or waste metal. The debate in this field is especially instructive in its negotiation of theoretical and methodological difficulties to make sense of often inadequately-documented archaeological evidence. Hoards have traditionally been classified according to find place and contents as either ritual or utilitarian in nature, a tendency which has roots already in the late 19th century (for example, see the discussion in MÜLLER 1897, 422–443). Shortly after, further classifications of utilitarian hoards were developed. We thus see hoards classified into votive offerings, then personal valuables hidden in times of danger, traders' hoards for convenient and safe storage of wares, and the remnants of smithing activity (SCHUMACHER 1903, 90, 99–100). Such attempts are not fruitless, but have depended on sometimes faulty assumptions about the contents of hoards. For example, so-called *Brucherzhorte*, characterised by fragmentary objects, were long regarded as utilitarian deposits related to smithing activity, but studies of recent decades point to votive interpretations (for an overview, see HANSEN 2016).

Another assumption current for much of the 20th century concerned chronology; hoards were regarded as assemblages of everyday articles in use at the same time, and thus helpful for questions of dating and typologies (HANSEN 2016, 197). Regardless, continued observations of wide time spans between artefacts observed in single hoards, accompanied by the increasing application of archaeometric techniques to independently establish artefact and deposition ages, have helped to dismantle this notion (HANSEN 2016, 196–197).

3 For critical comments in reference to hoards of the Roman period, for example, see MILLETT 1994, 99–103 and JOHNS 1995 for a response.

Indeed, the arbitrary quality of many classifications is evident when one notes strong regional trends of interpretation, even when dealing with very similar archaeological evidence (EOGAN 1983, 4). Yet, somewhat more successful classifications have been developed from regional perspectives with an eye to identifying patterns in the content and context of hoards. For example, Levy's framework for distinguishing between ritual and non-ritual hoards of Bronze Age Denmark proposed polarities in location (wet places, or places with limited retrievability, restricted in practical or ritual terms, versus dry or marked places), types of objects deposited (ornaments, weapons, ceremonial objects, associations with food, etc., versus broader ranges of types, tools and raw materials), and the conditions and arrangement of the objects (complete or near-complete objects, formally arranged, versus fragmented, damaged, and broken objects) (LEVY 1982).

Otherwise, ideas about location and retrievability have instigated further developments in the debate through the contextual approach advocated by Bradley (see BRADLEY 1990; 2017). Looking to hoards in British prehistory and especially of the Bronze Age, Bradley has tracked distribution patterns of hoards over land- and waterscapes with a mind to paleo-environments, and indicated that the differentiation between dry and wet places of deposition is simplistic, and that the space between ritual and utilitarian can often be problematized or collapsed. Furthermore, Bradley (2017, 10) has noted that hoards tend to be unsatisfactorily explained in an anecdotal manner – recalling strongly how the Begram hoard has been treated in scholarship (see below) – and has also challenged purely practical explanations for the deposition of valuables (i.e., with the aim of safekeeping) on the grounds of the predictability of deposition locations, juxtaposed with the frequency of their survival (BRADLEY 2017, 28, 49). In sum, Bradley's work highlights the potential of tracking deposition context to observe patterns in behaviour, as well as the weaknesses of inflexible classificatory schemes especially when ritual and utilitarian hoards may also respectively have elements of the utilitarian and the ritual in each. This ritual-utilitarian dichotomous model of interpretation was also criticised by Needham, among others, who instead highlighted the flow of metal through diverse exchange systems (NEEDHAM 2001). More recent studies working beyond the Bronze Age have similarly advocated for biographical approaches to the contents, arrangements, and formation of hoards, by looking at phenomena such as use wear, evidence for repairs and fragmentation (see, e.g., GARROW – GOSDEN 2012; DIETRICH 2014; JOY 2016). This approach opens new possibilities for making claims about accumulation and deposition processes and the social meanings that may lie behind them, and does not necessarily require a comprehensive comparative dataset.

In a parallel manner, the study of coin hoards has also generated a significant volume of scholarship largely from the 20th century, developing and debating ideas about their classification and interpretation. It should be noted that sometimes what is referred to as a 'coin hoard' in scholarship, or analysed as such, actually includes other objects. These may be items of jewellery and plate of precious metal (including bronze or pewter), but there are cases also of lead, ivory, glass vessels and clay figurines (ROBERTSON 1974, 26).

Unlike the case of Bronze Age hoards, interpretations in the domain of coin hoards have leaned almost exclusively towards the utilitarian. A primary reason for this is that coin hoards usually fall under the purview of numismatists, and are accordingly viewed from a monetary perspective (AITCHISON 1988, 270). Classifications have also been proposed, primarily from the contents of hoards. For example, Grierson distinguished between accidental losses, emergency hoards, savings hoards, and abandoned hoards (GRIERSON 1975, 130–136). Here, accidental losses are understood as purses or containers with an uneven sum of money, representing currency used in daily transactions. Emergency hoards are thought to have been concealed for safekeeping in anticipation of danger (such as warfare), representing denominations in

circulation at the time of the event, with according significance for dating purposes. Savings hoards are thought to include higher-value, and relatively unworn coins minted over a more extended time period. Abandoned hoards are largely classified from contextual judgments, being apparent deposits without intention of retrieval, as in funerary, foundation, or votive deposits. A similar scheme offered by Casey omits the ‘abandoned’ hoards, adds that purse hoards (i.e., ‘accidental losses’) should contain smaller numbers of coins of different denominations, that savings hoards may sometimes become emergency hoards, and that the inclusion of precious metals or jewellery indicates an emergency hoard (CASEY 1986, 56–57). It has also been recognised that hoards may be deposited and not recovered if their contents were rendered worthless, i.e., after a coinage reform (REECE 1981, 86–87).

Reece has repeatedly scrutinised the validity of such classifications outlined above, especially when the available data is only approximate. He has argued that the difference in the contents between ‘emergency’ and ‘purse’ hoards is not detectable, and also that, presuming a saving period of twenty years, this is not long enough to differentiate between coins in circulation and coins only in savings pools (REECE 1987, 61). However, he would agree that evident selection of higher-weight coins should indicate saving behaviour (REECE 1987, 63), and that the presence of die links and coins in unworn condition within a hoard are indicators of a close presence to the beginning of monetary circulation, via mints and state servants responsible for payments (REECE 1987, 63–65). Moreover, by tracing the history of coins since leaving the mint, it is possible to make suggestions about a hoard’s owner and patterns of monetary circulation. It should be emphasised here that the practice of hoarding coins itself cannot be associated a priori with threat, although is presumed in cases of ‘emergency’ hoards.⁴ We have insight only into what enters into the archaeological record – presumably unintentionally in many cases – and accordingly only a partial awareness of how routine hoarding may have been.

Despite the complexities in classifying coin hoards, it remains worthwhile to develop interpretations from their composition, date, frequency, and spatial distribution. It is obviously insufficient to simply plot coin hoard distribution on a map, and to draw conclusions about presumed invasions. For example, an influential study by Kent demonstrated the increase of unrecovered coin hoards during the English Civil War (1641–1649), but saw no correlation between areas of fighting and their distribution (KENT 1974).⁵ With reference to the potential of hoards to inform historical interpretations, Reece has pointed out that an increase of unrecovered coin hoards must first be demonstrated spatially and temporally; if coin hoards should indicate unrest, similar hoards should be absent in areas surrounding the invasion at the same date. Temporally, the absence of similar hoards from before and after the invasion should also be argued (REECE 1981, 85).

Parallel to the discussion above, there are well known examples of coin hoards associated with ritual activity, although the best examples are accumulations of long-term depositional

4 The usually-cited example for this behaviour is from the diary of Samuel Pepys in 1667, presented at length in PAINTER – KÜNZL 1997. Pepys – worried by the advance of the Dutch fleet up the Thames estuary – extracted as many gold coins as he could from his wealth in London, sent them back to be buried on the family estate in Northamptonshire, and later recovered most of the hoard, after considerable difficulty locating where his wife had buried the since-rotted bags. Aitchison (1988, 272) maintains that this analogy is invalid in reference to antiquity, due to Restoration England’s specific societal and economic context.

5 A recent study in BESLEY 2015, with the aid of many new discovered hoards, however, argues for a correlation after all.

practice in reference to veneration of springs and other watery features.⁶ Coventina's Well in Northumberland, for example, is such an accumulation of around 16,000 coins and other artefacts deposited as votive offerings between the 2nd-5th centuries AD (see generally ALLASON-JONES - MCKAY 1985). The Frome hoard from Somerset is 52,503 coins of base silver (160 kg) of the late 3rd century AD found in a pot buried in a field which had hosted several springs and produced another hoard of siliquae from a century later. As the pot could not have borne the weight of the coins, it must have been placed into the ground empty, with the coins added thereafter (BLAND 2013, 224-248). Aitchison has pointed out other instances where ritual motives may be detected, namely in patterned deposits and hoards of Roman coins at funerary monuments in Ireland (outside of their circulation in a monetary economy), and also within England, likely reflecting native pre-Roman ritual practice (AITCHISON 1988, 275-277). Significantly, Aitchison also observes that the contents of most coin hoards exhibit degrees of selection - e.g. the inclusion of antique and exotic coins, or those with less intrinsic value - which do not always follow monetary criteria (AITCHISON 1988, 272-273).

A CASE IN POINT: THE BEGRAM HOARD

To see how the above insights and examples can provide productive impulses for the interpretation of hoards in Central Asia, we can first consider the case of the Begram hoard. This necessitates a few words on the context of its discovery. During Joseph Hackin's directorship of the DAFA, excavations undertaken at the urban site of Begram's 'new royal city' (i.e., the southern rectangular tepe, 150 × 450 m) focused extensively on the excavation area Site II (1937-1940). This area was dominated by a large edifice (**Fig. 1**), at the centre of which were two rooms (rooms 10 and 13), the original entrances of which had been walled up. In these rooms, hundreds of objects were recovered in 1937 and 1939, many having been produced in diverse workshops across Afro-Eurasia. The finds from rooms 10 and 13 were published in two volumes of the *Mémoires de la DAFA* report series, the latter volume after the deaths of the excavators Joseph Hackin, Ria Hackin, and Jean Carl in 1941 (MDAFA IX and XI, respectively HACKIN - HACKIN 1939; HACKIN *et al.* 1954). Already since the late 1930s, these finds from Begram have often been described in the literature as a treasure (*trésor*) or hoard (e.g., AUBOYER 1938, 217), if sometimes hedged in more recent works with the qualifier 'so-called' (e.g., MEHENDALE 1996, 51). The Begram hoard has attracted much scholarly interest from the moment of its discovery, particularly for its remarkable contents produced within the orbit of the Roman Mediterranean, the Indian Subcontinent, and Han China. But evaluating the contents and context of relevant material excavated at Site II from the published reports has never been straightforward, a point which has clearly impeded scholarly appraisals of the nature of this find.⁷ Indeed, the Site II structure had also been explored during Meunié's work

6 On coin deposition in reference to spring veneration within and beyond the Roman Empire, see SAUER 2011.

7 For a long time there was neither a synthesis of the excavations at Begram nor an easily-consultable account of the finds from Site II. The finds from the Hackin excavations are dispersed in MDAFA IX and MDAFA XI, alongside finds from other areas, where they are recorded with a description, dimensions, depth below surface, date of registration, allocation to Kabul or Paris, and sometimes an indication of association or other contextual detail. Furthermore, a single catalogue entry does not correspond to a single object in very many cases. In MDAFA IX, the finds are listed according to order of registration, and in MDAFA XI according to material class. The matter is further complicated as many documentation errors have crept into MDAFA XI prior to publication. For the scope

in 1938 (HACKIN *et al.* 1959, 103–105), and Ghirshman's excavations in 1941–1942 (GHIRSHMAN 1946, 28, 67–69). In reference to unpublished archival documentation, I have now recently re-organised and analysed this material at length elsewhere (see MORRIS 2021). Therefore, I limit my following remarks to a basic account of the material, the main problems emerging from past scholarship on the nature of the hoard itself, and some findings of my longer term research on this point.

Of course, the Begram hoard is foremost synonymous with the famous finds from rooms 10 and 13. More specifically, in room 10 (6×8.4 m) these were dispersed between horizons 2.10–2.70 m below a fixed surface point (see MORRIS 2021, 167–172), and are largely represented by a vast quantity of glass vessels, two bronze aquariums, leaded brass basins, anthropomorphic bronze balsamaria, alabaster vessels, worked ostrich eggs, and parts of ivory and bone furniture such as footstools, furniture legs, isolated plaques, and perhaps elements of an ornamental railing. Seven copper coins were also found here in association with the hoard, all at a horizon of 2.60 m (MORRIS 2021, 172–174, 378–379). The finds of room 13 (6×9 m) exhibit even more diversity, and were dispersed between horizons 2.30–2.80 m below the surface. Fewer glass vessels are present, with more copper alloy vessels, many isolated cast bronze decorative elements, a balsamarium, figurines and utensils, over fifty plaster casts, then lacquerwares, ivory furniture elements (primarily backrests and a furniture leg), two examples of glazed pottery jugs, vessels made of porphyry and of rock crystal, some unworked lapis, a marine shell, and some fragmentary iron artefacts, including two arrowheads, as well as six copper coins. Plans of rooms 10 and 13 and the distribution of the finds within were published only in 1953 and 1954 by Hamelin (HAMELIN 1953, pl. II; HAMELIN 1954, pl. XLI), who worked on the excavations briefly in 1939 (HAMELIN 1954, 154). For various reasons, these plans can only be regarded as broadly accurate (MORRIS 2021, 53, 67–69).

Curiously, however, a small amount of objects comparable to those in rooms 10 and 13 were also found in other rooms of the Site II structure, especially in the nearby room T, which had apparently been left unsealed. Although Ghirshman's finds from this same room have now long been clearly reported (GHIRSHMAN 1946, 67–79; MORRIS 2021, 175), these and further relevant finds from the Hackin excavations have largely remained overlooked in scholarship on the hoard. This has presumably not been helped by an error in the preparation of MDAFA XI that caused the findspots of all catalogued objects from 1940 to be shifted to the previous catalogue entry in the printed report (MORRIS 2021, 72–73). Having reviewed the data, it is now clearer that the relevant deposits in room T, beginning from the horizon at 2.50 m below the surface, included (among other objects) some bronze figurines, detached metalwork elements, an ornately decorated box, and two glass vessels – one remarkably appearing to have been attached to two gold spouts in the form of elephant masks (see MORRIS 2021, 174–176). Furthermore, a bronze decorative element and the remains of a quadrangular device, being perhaps a miniature shrine, were found at comparable horizons in the blocked off central corridor (i.e., directly to the west of rooms 10 and 13), as well as some coins, a pottery lamp, and a terracotta spindle whorl (MORRIS 2021, 176). The few other comparable finds from elsewhere in the building, unfortunately difficult to more precisely localise, include a bronze decorative corner element of the same type found in rooms T and 13, as well as a bronze spoon and two gold pendants (MORRIS 2021, 176–177).

These additional finds make clear that we must think of the rich and diverse material deposited at Site II in a more expansive way – certainly beyond the confines of its two famous

of these legacy data, their re-organisation, and a new catalogue of the hoard objects, see MORRIS 2021, 50–56, 61–77, 148–177, 185–393.

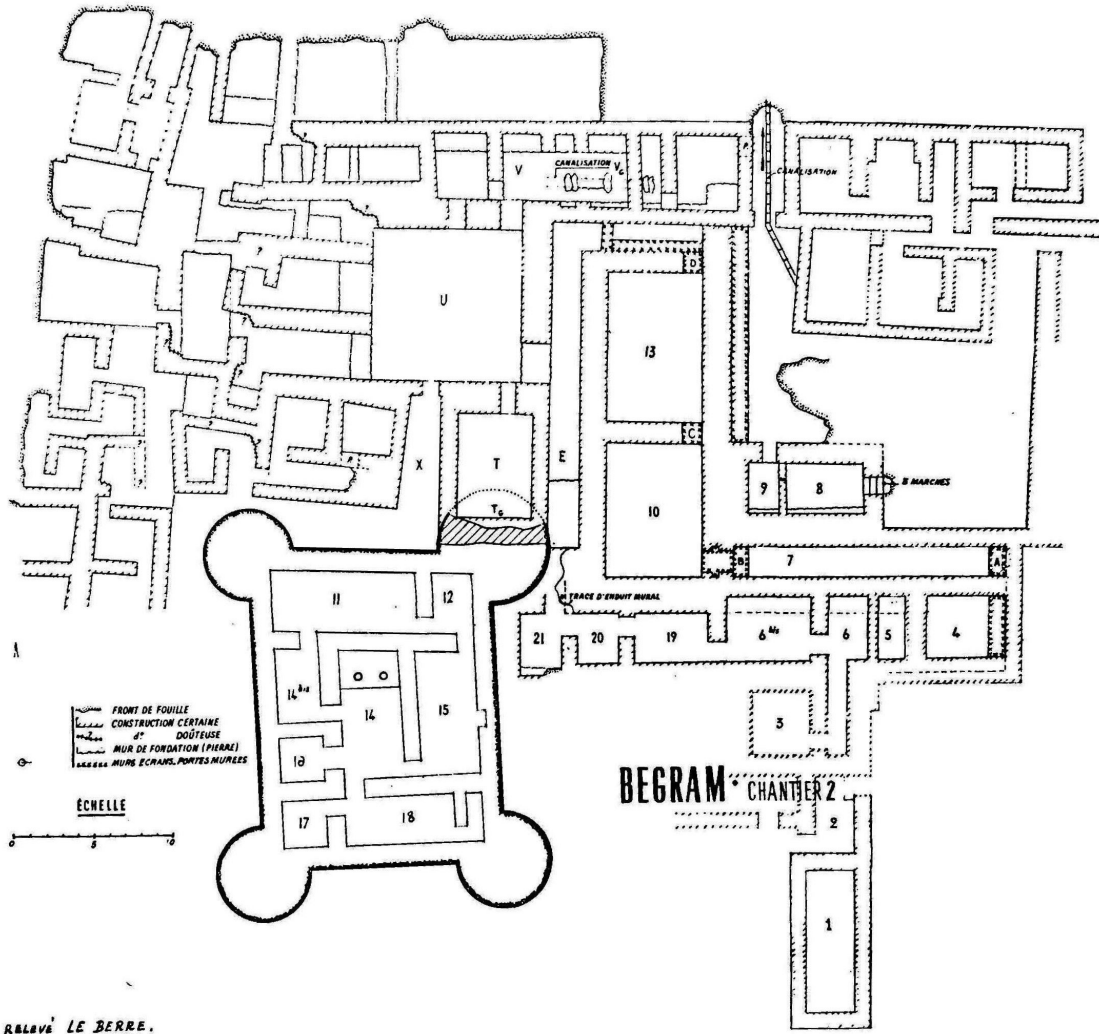


Fig. 1: Plan of Site II at Begram's New Royal City after excavations in 1937-1942, composed by Marc Le Berre in 1947, *Délegation archéologique française en Afghanistan* (HACKIN *et al.* 1954, 9).

walled-up rooms. Accordingly, I understand the Begram hoard broadly as a set of assemblages of intentionally deposited objects – typically distinctive and valuable – that had been sealed in rooms 10 and 13, as well as placed in room T and the central corridor. However, my position is partly a practical and artificial one, and I acknowledge that boundaries between ‘hoard’ and ‘not-hoard’ in this space are frequently ambiguous (MORRIS 2021, 166–177). I will outline the implications of this a little further below.

By this juncture, I hope to have already conveyed a sense of the difficulties of the surviving archaeological data from Begram, as well as the interest and importance of the finds that they document. This precise imbalance of affairs seems to have shaped much of past scholarship on the hoard; indeed, although only some of the finds from Site II might cohere well with a popular or archaeological conception of a hoard, I would contend that decades of scholarship has effectively *made* them into an ideal hoard or treasure. To clarify what I mean by this, the key problem is that most scholars writing about these objects, beginning already with the Hackins and their collaborators, typically did not engage deeply with their archaeological find

context. Certainly, the data produced by the Hackin excavations are difficult and imperfect, if also internally consistent (MORRIS 2021, 46–77), but this tendency of scholarship has persisted even despite Ghirshman's later excavations at Begram that developed a periodisation for occupation at the site, Begram I–III (GHIRSHMAN 1946). Indeed, Ghirshman proposed that the relevant phase Begram II ended with a putative invasion of Shapur I between 241–250 AD (GHIRSHMAN 1946, 100), but several rejected this date because it seemed too late in comparison to the hoard objects (see MORRIS 2021, 16).

Most work on the Begram hoard has instead been concerned with the dates and places of manufacture of its constituent objects largely in reference to comparable material found elsewhere, as well the broader historical phenomena their existence might illuminate; these variously include the development of diverse kinds of arts (e.g. Indian ivory carving, Roman luxury glass production), wider patterns of Indian Ocean or 'Silk Road' trade, the role of the Kushans as middlemen of such transit trade, the kinds of sources that could have contributed to Gandharan art, or the Kushans' cosmopolitan or eclectic taste (see MORRIS 2021, 13–20). Essentially, the Begram hoard has become progressively conceptually decontextualised in scholarship and transformed into an ideal collection of wondrous and mysterious objects, as well as a blank slate for diverse interpretations that are rarely extensively rationalised by their advocates.

The long scholarly impasse on the date of the hoard is a particularly remarkable symptom of these patterns. Sometimes reference has been made in this debate to coin finds and Ghirshman's periodisation, but arguments have always largely revolved around comparisons for the hoard objects themselves – a perennially difficult point, considering that many of the relevant objects are extremely unusual or unique in the global archaeological record (see discussions in MORRIS 2017, 79–81; MORRIS 2021, 14–15). In short, there have long been two competing positions: a late date, and an early date. Proponents of the late date include those who have argued that at least some of the hoard objects might have been produced in the later 2nd or even 3rd or 4th centuries AD (e.g., COARELLI 1962, 319; MENNINGER 1996, 91), while proponents of the early date consider the hoard objects as more or less coeval, having been produced in the 1st or the 1st–early 2nd centuries AD (e.g., agreed upon by the contributions in HACKIN *et al.* 1954, 14, 54, 108, 155; more recently in WHITEHOUSE 1989, 99; MEHENDALE 1997, § 5.5; WHITEHOUSE 2001, 444). The early date has been most popular in scholarship of the last decades, and Whitehouse and Mehendale also extended their arguments to argue that the hoard should have been concealed within a generation of 100 AD (WHITEHOUSE 1989, 99; MEHENDALE 1997, § 6.4). These kinds of arguments, of course, comparatively recall the problematic assumption in some 20th-century scholarship that articles deposited in hoards of Bronze Age Europe should be coeval. Moreover, I have demonstrated elsewhere that three post-Vasudeva Oesho with bull coins found in room 10 in association with the hoard objects provide a *terminus post quem* for their deposition at least around c. 260 AD (MORRIS 2017, 81, 89, 95–97). Indeed, already from the perspective of the relevant material deposited in the Site II structure alone, I also support the late date: the majority of these objects might have been manufactured in the 1st–2nd centuries AD, but some might have been produced already in the second half of the 1st century BC, and others at least in the second half of the 3rd century AD (MORRIS 2021, 387).

In reference to the hoard's find context, the question of the function and development of the Site II structure has received limited attention in past scholarship. This building has traditionally been taken to represent a palace, although some doubt has also been cast on this identification. Certainly, its large size, original rectilinear structure, and powerful walls of pakhsa on a mixed stone socle, as well as traces of decorative wall painting in room 13 (HAMELIN

1953, 122, n. 3; CAMBON 2006, 100–101; see now MORRIS 2021, 155–157) and the use of earthen benches in rooms 10 and 13 all indicate its importance and uniqueness in the excavated environment at Begram. It is hardly comparable to the many simple habitations which dominate the rest of the new royal city (e.g., at Site I, Site B, around the city entrance). Joseph Hackin did not comment directly on the function of this building, but Ghirshman and Hamelin both later referred to it as a palace (GHIRSHMAN 1946, 28; HAMELIN 1953, 123), Ghirshman partly in reference to the small sector he excavated. Of course, these interpretations were also shaped by the discovery of the hoard objects as well as Foucher's identification of Begram as the capital of Kapisa visited by Xuanzang and possible location of the summer seat of the Kushans (FOUCHER 1925, 269–270). Some have also pointed to indices of the development of this building over time. Namely, Rapin hypothesised the existence of an earlier structure of the Indo-Greek period, and considered rooms 10 and 13 to have functioned as storerooms due to their thick walls (RAPIN 1992, 277, 383–385), while Hamelin stripped back apparent later renovations to propose the layout of a Kushan-period palace proper (HAMELIN 1953, pl. 1). Simpson more recently observed that rooms 10 and 13 were not designed as storerooms, but the presence of earthen benches and wall paintings indicate their original purpose as private reception or banqueting rooms (AMBERS *et al.* 2014, 8). However, Mehendale questioned whether royal and palatial associations for this building are appropriate, considering that it 'lacked rooms of the size and grandeur... one would expect for the summer "palace" of a Kushan emperor and his court' (MEHENDALE 1997, § 5.2).

These interpretations and ambiguities have fed into the few explicit proposals as to the nature of the Begram hoard offered by past scholarship. Although Joseph Hackin was silent on the matter, the subsequent works of his colleagues began to express ideas that were presumably already circulating within the DAFA, as well as picking up on Ghirshman's proposal that the phase Begram II ended with a Sasanian invasion in the mid 3rd century AD. Thus to Hamelin, '*les circonstances mêmes de la trouvaille permettent de dire*' that in a single operation, many treasures were deposited in the palace when a Kushan king was pressed by a Sasanian invasion, that the king had intended to return and recover the treasure, yet he was not able to, nor had anyone let the conquerors or descendants in on the secret (HAMELIN 1953, 122–123). Foucher likewise considered the hoard as the precious belongings of a great Kushan lord or king, which had been hidden for safekeeping as they were too fragile or cumbersome to be carried away before fleeing the Persian invasion, but their owner did not eventually return (HACKIN *et al.* 1954, 2).

A different perspective was offered by Wheeler, who however also regarded the objects as valuable and the hoard's context as implicitly a palatial one. Instead, he framed the collection of this material in terms of transit trade. Specifically, he proposed that the hoard was an accumulative deposit made over 150 years, and additionally asserted that 'the easiest explanation is doubtless the correct one. The store was probably a Customs depot for the receipt of dues in kind collected by the kings or viceroys of Kapisa from the caravans which traversed the adjacent highway in the luxury traffic of Orient and Occident' (WHEELER 1954, 163–164). The sealing of the rooms was left unexplained. Later, in a brief treatment, MacDowall and Taddei (1978, 257) alternatively proposed that the hoard consisted of precious objects (with the materially worthless plaster casts being nonetheless valuable in the context of an art workshop), taken from a 'palace' (their scare quotes, indicating some vague hesitance with the identification) and a royal atelier at a moment of danger.

More recently, Mehendale picked up on similar ideas to Wheeler's about Begram as a node of transit trade to influentially argue that the hoard objects were not especially precious, and that the hoard is rather a trader's stock (possibly also containing objects manufactured at

Begram itself) accumulated for commercial purposes, and had been awaiting further distribution. Thus she proposed that it was possible that the hoard might have been sealed during the regular course of trade activity, i.e., while a merchant was away, or that it contained stock impounded by government officials in the case of unpaid duties. Supposing that this occurred in the early 2nd century AD, and that the abandonment of the hoard coincides with the demise and abandonment of Begram at this time, she suggested that this demise might be ascribed to economic decline (MEHENDALE 1997, § 6.4).

Although these interpretations offer quite different accounts of the nature and deposition of the Begram hoard, they share some remarkable parallels: they are largely anecdotal explanations that treat the hoard as an isolated phenomenon, they are strictly utilitarian in orientation, they often allude to dangerous or unforeseen circumstances resulting in the non-recovery of the hoard, and they make little reference to specific archaeological contextual data or comparative evidence in order to rationalise their claims.

An example of one exception to the latter point is Mehendale's elaboration on the possibility that the hoard represents impounded trade stock: 'given the accounts in ancient literary sources such as Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* to the effect that taxes were regulated very strictly, it is not inconceivable that if duties were not paid, the stock would have been sealed' (MEHENDALE 1997, § 6.3). Yet, if we would hypothetically be happy to take such normative, early historic śāstric literature as relevant for explaining human activity at Begram, it should be noted that the same texts also attest to the habitual concealment and non-recovery of hoards of valuables. Specifically, in Book 8 of the *Manusmṛiti*, in the excursus on lost and stolen property, we are informed that the king should keep unclaimed property in deposit for three years, and several proscriptions are detailed for what to do when a treasure (Skt. *nidhi*)⁸ is found. For example, 'when a learned Brahmin finds a treasure-trove that had been buried by his ancestors, however, he may take the whole of it [...] When the king discovers an ancient treasure-trove buried in the ground, he should give one-half of it to Brahmins and deposit one-half in the treasury; the king, by giving protection, is entitled to one-half of all ancient treasure-troves and of minerals in the ground, for he is the supreme lord of the earth' (*Manusmṛiti* 8.37–39; OLIVELLE 2005, 168–169). Thus, according to this text, the burying of valuables as well as the non-recovery of such ancient hoards were common (and problematic!) enough phenomena in early historic India to warrant legal guidelines for determining their ownership. In any case, for reasons I will make clearer below, I do not think this text is relevant for interpreting the situation at Begram.

Indeed, the broader conception of the Begram hoard as composed of goods in transit trade through the city is very difficult to sustain for three main reasons. First, in reference to the studies mentioned above that highlight the significance of the condition of deposited objects, Begram's hoard objects had already been in poor, incomplete, repaired, or otherwise manipulated condition prior to their deposition, indicating a longer history of their accumulation and use over time, as well as probable changes in their functions; for example, the ivory and bone furniture elements were typically deposited in disarticulated and incomplete condition, with some of their decorative plaques entirely missing or deposited separately from their original piece of furniture (MORRIS 2021, 387–389). Second, objects truly comparable to those found in the hoard are not yet archaeologically documented much farther along the trade routes putatively running through Begram, a point seen clearly in respect to Roman glass (MORRIS

8 Here, Olivelle also translates this term as 'treasure-trove' (i.e., also the legal term referring to found treasure with no apparent owner) which is an equally accurate expression of the meaning of the word in this context.

2021, 400–406).⁹ Third, many of the objects in the hoard are extremely unusual, even unique in the global archaeological record, and were clearly selectively accumulated, most plausibly in reference to local elite consumption patterns (MORRIS 2021, 419–439). It may also be noted here that, although the presence of objects produced from material of low ‘intrinsic’ value such as bone and plaster in the Begram hoard has been problematised, the relative value of these objects is clear through the major costs implied in their production and transportation, as well as their scarcity in the broader region and the fact of their intentional deposition. Furthermore, examples of detached gold elements and nails within these deposits suggests that items partly produced from this precious metal had once been accessible, if not included in the material left at Site II (see MORRIS 2021, 395–398).

Is our only viable alternative to anecdotally interpret the Begram hoard as the concealed but forgotten treasures of an unlucky sovereign fleeing a Sasanian invasion? At first sight, a *terminus post quem* for the deposition of the hoard after ca. 260 AD might still cohere with such a reconstruction, if already indicating that Ghirshman’s date for the end of Begram II was too early. However, ongoing numismatic research suggests that formal Kushan rule in the Kapisa region ended during the reign of Kanishka II (ca. 230–246 AD) with Kushano-Sasanian acquisition under king Peroz I (ca. 245–270 AD), and a Sasanian proper recapture under Shapur II (ca. 309–379 AD) in the mid 4th century AD (see CRIBB 2021, 105–106). Moreover, a broader re-examination of the development of Begram in reference to comparative, well-dated material from the urban site of Barikot in the Swat valley suggests a different picture. I have thus proposed elsewhere that Begram II not only ran longer than Ghirshman proposed, but was also probably not brought to an end by an invasion; instead, it seems more plausible that the 3rd century AD at Begram was marked by the progressive contraction and decline of urban settlement at least on the new royal city type, and that this part of the site – including the Site II structure – was finally abandoned by its urban elites perhaps around the early 4th century AD (MORRIS 2021, 179–181).

In fact, to stress the significance of the find context, it is also not clear whether the Site II structure is best interpreted as having functioned as an elite residence throughout its life. The plans at our disposal present serious difficulties for interpreting the functional, residential use of this space, including reading the rooms 10 and 13 as purpose-built reception rooms (MORRIS 2021, 148–160). Indeed, although neither the architecture of the Site II structure nor its finds point unambiguously to a religious context – something which would have surely been noticed by past scholars – Luca Maria Olivieri has drawn my attention to promising potential parallels with urban cult complexes at Barikot of the 3rd century AD, which had moreover been developed in the spaces of former elite residences (e.g., Temple K in OLIVIERI 2012; see MORRIS 2021, 160). Although these comparisons remain to be fully evaluated by further research, it looks entirely plausible that the Site II structure had been transformed at some point over its long life into an urban cult building, i.e., a temple.

For these reasons, I think the abandonment of the Site II structure and the deposition of the Begram hoard might be better read as the result of diverse activities that could be variously

9 On a related note, the idea that the hoard objects might have been requisitioned as customs duties in kind is also quantitatively implausible. This is because the hoard includes several examples of groups of objects that were apparently produced coevally in either single workshops or small numbers of related workshops, such as the 26 ichthyomorphic glass flasks or the 37 leaded brass basins (see MORRIS 2021, 239–245, 260–267). Taking a speculative levy of 10% or 20% on imported merchandise in reference to rates cited in the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the taxed cargoes putatively represented by such goods at Begram would have to be either improbably enormous, or transiting through the city implausibly frequently (MORRIS 2021, 398–399).

described as utilitarian or ritual. Some brief remarks on the sealing of rooms 10 and 13 are necessary here, although these blockages, as well as those in other areas of the Site II structure, are poorly documented. The blockage between corridor 7 and the southeast entrance of room 10 was described only as a *'mur de briques crues'* (HACKIN - HACKIN 1939, 9) and we know that the northeast door to room 13 likewise *'avait été murée, de la même manière'* (HACKIN *et al.* 1954, 8). Le Berre's plan from 1947 (**Fig. 1**) indicates, more precisely, *'murs écrans, portes murées'* at several points. It is not impossible that certain of the doubled walls might have been built to support an upper floor, as proposed by Hamelin (1953, 122, n. 1), but this already seems difficult to argue from a structural standpoint in respect to the walls directly north of room 13. Perhaps the doubled wall directly to the east of room 13 might have rather served to raise the height of the ceilings of rooms 10 and 13 alone (MORRIS 2021, 155). The bigger question is whether the diverse blockages throughout this building can feasibly be read to belong to a single 'programme' of practical (if somewhat overzealous) concealment. Certainly, the doorways to rooms 10 and 13 were not blocked as a result of rushed decisions. The responsible party was able to have mudbricks sourced and installed, and even the filling and closure of these rooms was progressive, with room 13 apparently filled and sealed before room 10 (see MORRIS 2021, 177–178). And yet, some valuable objects were left in the unsealed room T, and more dispersed in the central corridor as well as throughout the wider building. How can we explain this in purely utilitarian terms, if rooms 10 and 13 were putatively successfully sealed to safeguard their contents, although their owner ultimately did not return?

Following a cohesive re-examination of the surviving documentation, much of which remains extremely ambiguous (MORRIS 2021, 406–417), I would rather tentatively hypothesise that the objects in the Begram hoard might have been selected from the contents of a temple's property (including its treasury) and deposits of votive offerings (including pits) in its premises (compare such pits at the Oxus Temple in LINDSTRÖM 2016, also discussed further below). If the last phases of the building truly represent a temple, it was apparently a wealthy institution that attracted significant elite patronage. The institution's property could feasibly have included items oriented towards the production of religious art or offerings (such as the plaster casts), and might have been stored in diverse primary storage areas over long periods, including perhaps room T. As the material is so ambiguous, I do not want to speculate much on the orientation of possible cult activity associated with this building. However, the enormous prevalence of luxurious drinking vessels as well as the remains of rich ivory seats and footstools in the hoard suggests to me a parallel with some contemporary *stūpa* reliefs in Swat that depict elites (mostly men) participating in open-air, ritual wine consumption, sacrifices, and ceremonies in the framework of local festivals perhaps connected to the wine-making season (see FILIGENZI 2019, 65–75; MORRIS 2021, 413–414).

In any case, the abandonment of the Site II structure – occurring in the broader landscape of the abandonment of Begram II – seems to have been predicated by a series of activities: the gathering and sorting of these properties and offerings, the possible removal of items and elements representing high-value, portable, easily convertible wealth (e.g., precious metal coinage, jewellery, plate, or composite artefacts), and the deposition of most of the remaining goods in room 13 and then room 10. These were carefully and systematically sealed, and subsequently abandoned. Considering possible broad parallels with the sealing and 'ritual death' of the temple at Kyzyltepa explored by Wu (2023), perhaps these actions at the Site II structure also served to mark the end of the building's life in ritual or symbolic terms. More specifically, the entrances might have been blocked to protect abandoned former offerings and properties both in practical terms (i.e., safeguarding them from contemporary, low-effort looters) and in a symbolic sense (i.e., creating a taboo to shield items which had become sacred)

(see MORRIS 2021, 178–179). Certainly, at this stage I see little reason to maintain that these processes occurred with the future recovery of the objects in mind.

To summarise, I have used the Begram hoard as a case study here to explore how theoretical and methodological impulses from the study of hoards elsewhere might be combined with a re-evaluation of archaeological data to propose a different interpretation of this important find. In broad terms, I find it especially productive to challenge assumptions that objects in hoards must be coeval, to more closely interrogate deposited objects themselves alongside their selection and arrangement, to stress the primacy of deposition context, and to dissect explanations that are essentially anecdotal and strictly utilitarian. The case of the Begram hoard remains in many ways ambiguous, but also highlights the difficulty of strictly classifying many examples of hoards, and probably reflects the interplay between ritual and utilitarian considerations in its formation, as well as the circulation of its constituent objects between different domains of use over time.

OTHER HOARDS IN HELLENISTIC AND KUSHAN CENTRAL ASIA

Of course, the Begram hoard is just one example of such a deposit, and arguably a unique find. In light of the above discussions, I will now explore how various potentially comparative hoards from Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia may be interpreted. Here, I lay emphasis on depositions that are usually explained in solely utilitarian terms, beginning with coin hoards. Throughout, I also highlight theoretical and methodological challenges which arise, and areas of potential interest for future enquiry.

Coin hoards – which also sometimes contained other objects – constitute a significant body of evidence for the study of Central Asia in antiquity. In the last decades, they have emerged at a marked frequency, either accidentally found (e.g., during construction) or from illicit excavations.¹⁰ Their partial contents often emerge on the market, having been divided for sale. Accordingly, coin hoards in Central Asian numismatics tend to be mined primarily as a source for new individual coins, helping to clarify sequences, areas of circulation, and thus chronological and historical questions. Indeed, part of the methodological appeal of the new influx of die studies in this field is to avoid complicating evidentiary factors, by instead focusing on the ‘intrinsic’ qualities of coins instead of the ‘extrinsic’, i.e., ‘*comme le contexte archéologique d’un trésor*’ (BORDEAUX 2018, 17). The validity of such a distinction is debatable; after all, the coins available for such a study come to us largely through the selection and deposition processes entangled in hoards. Accordingly, hoard formation and deposition processes should remain of interest.

Yet, numismatists working on Central Asian material rarely explicitly consider how coin hoards ought to be interpreted. Holt is one exception, who regards coin hoards of the Hellenistic period as most often gathered and deposited for safekeeping with the following interpretative implications: that they reflect currency in circulation at the time of deposition, thus they make it possible to sequence otherwise undatable coinage, and that they potentially furnish a ‘misery index’ of disastrous periods when more quantities of hoards were left unclaimed (HOLT 2005, 138–139). As we have seen in the discussion above, these views cannot be taken for granted; beyond the necessity of proving such periods of unrest temporally and

10 See for example BOPEARACHCHI 1999, 55–67 for a list of hoards discovered between 1990 and 1998. Otherwise, for late punch-marked coin hoards generally see ERRINGTON 2003, and for Kushan coin hoards see GORIN 2011 on finds in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

spatially, coin hoards are not required to reflect currency in wider circulation, nor to be especially synchronous in content.

To illustrate my point, an excavated example of what has been interpreted as an ‘emergency hoard’ (to use the terminology of others) is the coin hoard recovered in the extramural house at Ai Khanoum (site XXIII) in 1973 (PETITOT-BIEHLER – BERNARD 1975). It contained 63 tetradrachms amassed together by a since-decayed organic container, found in a hole in the west wall of cuisine 18. These coins were issued over a period of around 150 years (posthumous ‘Alexanders’ to Eucratides I), but the earlier issues may still have been acceptable in local currency. Within the 49 Graeco-Bactrian coins, the full span of silver-issuing rulers is represented, minus Pantaleon (whose issues are very rare regardless) and Demetrius II. After Euthydemus I with 26 coins, Demetrius I to Eucratides I are represented with one to three coins each.

This hoard is thought to have been concealed in a hurry by the last Greek occupant of the house (LECUYOT 2013, 130–131), although – as Bernard acknowledged earlier – the stratigraphic position of the hoard, 35 cm above the post-Greek reoccupation floor, does not actually tell us this explicitly (PETITOT-BIEHLER – BERNARD 1975, 58). Rather, the argument is from the presence of the tetradrachm of Eucratides I, widely agreed to be the last ruler at Ai Khanoum. As with other ‘emergency’ hoards, its contents have been treated as significant for wider phenomena. Comparing its composition to another hoard from Ai Khanoum (but found unofficially outside of excavations in 1973/1974), Holt concluded that Euthydemus I had more coins in circulation there than his successors, and the low number or absence of coins of certain successors in both hoards ‘may mean there was economic turmoil in Bactria during this period’ (HOLT 1981, 30).

However, I do not think either of these hoards conveys unbiased ratios of coinage in circulation at Ai Khanoum, or neutral economic information. First, they are biased towards older issues. Second, the ratios of production outputs calculated by Glenn from numbers of known obverse dies of tetradrachms demonstrate that while Euthydemus I’s output was more than twice of all other Graeco-Bactrian kings, Eucratides I’s was about threefold of the latter (GLENN 2015, 314–316). Given the strong association of Eucratides I with Ai Khanoum, the low representation of his coinage here seems unusual. If later Graeco-Bactrian issues had been removed from the hoard prior to deposition, the retaining of a few coins from each ruler indicates selectivity. Furthermore, the worn Alexanders in the excavated hoard indicate a high level of connectivity with the wider economic network of the Hellenistic world that is worth further investigation. Finally, although it is not implausible to regard this hoard as a selected portion of an individual’s wealth, which may have been a ‘savings’ turned ‘emergency’ hoard, it may also have deposited prior to the abandonment of the city or during its reoccupation phases. If it belonged to the main occupation phase, one may wonder why the kitchen was chosen (indeed, it exhibited two levels of later occupation; LECUYOT 2013, 130, 133), and why the hoard would not have been simply taken with the fleeing party, as it only weighed about a kilogram. Clearly, there is space for further examination of such hoards in the future.

Other hoards whose presence might potentially be associated with invasions or unrest may simultaneously shed light on social, economic, and ritual behaviour. For example, there are numerous unrecovered hoards within houses at Sirkap (Taxila) associated with stratum II,¹¹ which were most likely directly reoccupied after Kujula Kadphises’ invasion (ERDOSY 1990, 669). Many of these hoards are largely comprised of gold and silver articles of jewellery

11 Found at varying depths below the floors of this stratum, judged as intrusions in the 6th and 5th strata in MARSHALL 1951, 65, 123–124. In the following, I operate under the assumption that these interpretations are correct.

(often inlaid or accompanied by precious stones) and silver plate, although they sometimes include coins, and copper ornaments or plate, or other objects.¹² Yet, they were not necessarily all buried in anticipation of invasion. Sirkap was evidently a wealthy city, and concealment of wealth within household confines may have been the most viable option for many to keep their belongings safe (see the discussion of treasure-troves in the *Manusmṛti* above). Because of their find contexts, these hoards appear to represent individual or familial wealth, rather than institutional.

Yet, further information can be picked out from the contents of these hoards. For example, jewellery frequently does not appear in complete sets, and in one case, a pair of silver bangles were found damaged and twisted (Block D' House 3 Deposit D; MARSHALL 1951, 188). This indicates the hoarded jewellery was not in regular use, but had been accumulated elsewhere prior to deposition. Furthermore, three hoards found within another house (Block D' House 4; MARSHALL 1951, 188–189) reveal a broader conception of valuables, including items related to a craft and perhaps also objects of private use; one contains primarily copper dies and ornaments apparently for jewellery production (Deposit G), the second is a sum of 120 copper coins (Deposit F), and a third contains a diverse assortment of gold jewellery, silver and copper plate, copper coins, stone weights, and a range of elements, pieces and fragments of glass, agate, rock crystal, lapis, shell, and jade (Deposit E).

Additionally, the frequent presence of silver plate – apparently antique in some cases – in these hoards is remarkable viewed from Sirkap II's economic context; from the end of Azes II's reign, silver coinage circulating around Gandhara was progressively debased (first observed in MACDOWALL 1977). The hoards in this stratum thus appear to indicate that plate and jewellery of purer silver was being deliberately stored simultaneously to this debasement, perhaps being understood as a more stable form of wealth.

Finally, even these apparently utilitarian hoards may have been formed in reference to ritual considerations. A well-known bronze statuette of Harpocrates was found buried two feet above a hoard of silver plate and gold jewellery in an earthenware pot (House 1E; MARSHALL 1951, 159–160), which does not appear accidental. Harpocrates held multifaceted appeal by the time he entered into common personal worship in the Graeco-Roman world, and other statuettes of this deity found in Central Asia suggest at least a broader phenomenon of his private worship. Although the aspect Harpocrates takes in this context is not obvious, perhaps it is a protective one.

If we look again to Begram, we see another example of a coin hoard which appears (at first glance) to relate to the abandonment of the city at Begram III. It was found clearly associated with the third occupation level recorded by Meunié at the city entrance, and contained 65 post-Vasudeva copper coins (Oesho with bull, seated Ardoxsho types), matching the site finds recorded for this occupation layer by Ghirshman (HACKIN *et al.* 1959, 112, fig. M1, no. 78; GHIRSHMAN 1946, 43, 85–86). However, its location tells us a different story: the hoard was found directly in the centre of the city's entrance. Interpretations as an 'emergency' hoard buried for safekeeping, or an accidental loss both seem to fail from a practical perspective. Rather, perhaps this hoard could be interpreted as a ritual foundation deposit after renovations at the city gate.

12 See, for example, MARSHALL 1951, 147, 159–160, 155–157, 180, 180–181, 186, 187, 188–189 for hoards in House 3b (sq. 31.47'), House 1E (sq. 77.66'), House 2D (sq. 58.47'); Block G' (sq. 108.87'); Block G' (101.86'); Block D' House 2 Deposit A (sq. 64.92'); Block D' House 3 Deposit C (sq. 62.113'); Block D' House 3 Deposit D (sq. 62.113'); Block D' House 4 Deposit E (sq. 59.114'); Block D' House 4 Deposit F; Block D' House 4 Deposit G (sq. 58.116').

Turning back to Ai Khanoum, another coin hoard that has been linked with invasion can reveal more nuanced information about economic and political relationships. This hoard of 663 Indian debased silver punch-marked coins and 6 silver drachms of the Indo-Greek king Agathocles was found in an oversized ceramic flask buried insufficiently in a hole in the floor of room 20 of the palace, overlaid with two stone mortars.¹³ Noting heavy re-use by later occupants in room 20, Audouin and Bernard suggested that these occupants had found separate hoards elsewhere, and had concealed the present assemblage because of '*une catastrophe soudaine, sans doute une ruée de nomades*' (AUDOUIN – BERNARD 1973, 241). As both coinages derive from a different currency system – and thus cannot reasonably be thought to mutely reflect widespread circulation patterns at Ai Khanoum – Audouin and Bernard instead regarded the Agathocles coins as part of a single transfer of cash collected in the Punjab, indicating the beginning of active economic exchange between Bactria and south of the Hindu Kush (AUDOUIN – BERNARD 1974, 39). Within the punch-marked coins, they remarked upon the predominance of series Ia and Ib (76 % of the hoard, now referred to as type GH575; ERRINGTON 2003, 80) as indicating a provenance from Taxila, a '*thésaurisation rapide*', and commercial relations (AUDOUIN – BERNARD 1973, 287–289). However, the die links and wear of the coins in this hoard may reveal a more precise story. The six coins of Agathocles are virtually pristine, of which four (nos. 3–6) share the same obverse and reverse dies, and two share the same obverse die (nos. 1–2). While such observations about die links do not work for punch-marked coins – they are already classified into tight groups according to combinations of punches – Audouin and Bernard commented on the remarkable lack of wear on the GH575 coins, despite the initial blurry appearance of obverse signs, apparently caused by striking on softened or a non-homogenous metal (AUDOUIN – BERNARD 1973, 277). With reference to the discussion above, such die links and lack of wear indicate a close link to the beginning of monetary circulation, via mints and state servants responsible for payments. Here, I mean a link in a 'network' sense, rather than physical proximity. Accordingly, I would be inclined to interpret the constituent parts of this hoard as derived from direct and formal state payments (such as taxes or tribute) conveyed to Bactria, rather than reflective of broader economic or commercial relations. This aligns well with interpretations of the records on vases in the treasury of round sums of 10,000 *kasapana* as tribute or taxes extracted from domains conquered by Eucratides I.¹⁴

Close attention to the contents of coin hoards elsewhere can also reveal ritual associations. Remaining on the topic of punch-marked coins, the second hoard reported at Bhir Mound (Taxila) – virtually a chance find near the dig house – is a good example. This hoard included 166 debased silver punch-marked coins, an unworn gold stater of Diodotus (MARSHALL 1951, 843), and 'several pieces of gold and silver jewellery, besides some miscellaneous objects and a number of small pearls, amethysts, garnets and pieces of coral' (MARSHALL 1951, 110), to which Marshall adds further details later. Of the punch-marked coins, 90 % are the familiar type GH 575 (ERRINGTON 2003, 80). Errington suggests this may indicate a short time span for formation (ERRINGTON 2003, 84), but as above, we may consider a close link with the beginning of monetary circulation. Indeed, just as for the punch-marked coins from the hoard at

13 Thirteen additional punch-marked coins were found in the earth covering this deposit and are considered together with the hoard in AUDOUIN – BERNARD 1973, 240–241.

14 For the relevant inscriptions see RAPIN – GRENET 1983, 326–336, nos. 4c, 5, 6, 8d, 9–11, 12a. For their interpretation as tribute see RAPIN 1992, 283 (although Rapin also suggests here that they may be booty, which is not impossible), and MAIRS 2014, 50 in considering these also as sums extracted via taxes or tribute.

Ai Khanoum, Walsh remarked that the coins in this hoard were not worn, despite the blurred appearance of the obverse strikes (in MARSHALL 1951, 851). Yet, the inclusion of the Diodotus stater – outside of its area of circulation and being older than the punch-marked coins – also demonstrates selectivity, which (in consideration of the other hoard objects) is not guided by solely monetary criteria. In addition to the above, there was a gold and lead amulet, two miniature silver ‘reliquaries’, gold beads, pendants, disks and part of a bracelet, two copper bracelets (one gilded), stone seals, two shell pendants, one in the form of a *triratna*, a drop of green glass, and a small earthenware vessel (MARSHALL 1951, 111). This curious range of material recalls the *saptaratna* (the seven precious substances), which was probably understood in early northwest South Asia as gold, silver, blue precious stones, transparent precious stones, red jewels, pearls, and coral. Together, they are conceptually associated in Buddhist texts with wealth, happiness, and paradises, and were considered appropriate donations to accompany *stūpa* relic deposits (LIU 2009, 182–183).¹⁵ Similarly, *triratna* beads deposited at Dharmarajika (Taxila) *stūpa* B6 indicate these were also ‘considered appropriate for making offerings in the relic cult’, presumably having religious and amuletic connotations (RIENJANG 2017, 285). It is thus possible that this hoard is composed of intended donations for such a *stūpa* deposit and perhaps also donations to the Buddhist community, which – in the case of the punch-marked coins – may have been given by an agent close to the beginning of monetary circulation. Yet, although Cunningham pointed to at least three *stūpas* of unspecified periods in parts of Bhir Mound (DAR 1993, 107, n. 55), we have no more contextual information to further explain the deposition of this hoard.

It is worth mentioning here that, besides the cases of *stūpa* or foundation deposits, hoards of coinage found in Buddhist monastic contexts do not automatically have to be associated with donations or ritual. Despite the rule against the handling of gold and silver and engagement in ‘buying and selling’ by monks and nuns in *vinaya* texts, there were very numerous exceptions; in particular, a broad range of economic activities for monks are sanctioned in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* (referring to a time frame between the later Kushan period to the 6th century AD in North India) (SCHOPEN 2000, 103–105). Thus we should not be surprised to find coined money circulating and hoarded occasionally in monastic contexts in the forms of private wealth.

In considering coin hoards and ritual associations, the four found in the Oxus Temple (ZEYMAË 1997) provide important evidence that coin hoards can also act in a votive manner. Yet, some appear to have simultaneously been formed with more practical motives. Through close re-examination of excavation documentation, Lindström has recently observed that two containing Kushan coins (ZeymaË’s hoard 3 and hoard 2 respectively) were deposited directly above ‘Bothroi’ 4 and 3, which appear to have been previously emptied of valuable and recyclable offerings during Kushan-period works (probably in the 2nd century AD). Lindström (2016, 302–303) suggests that the coin hoards were accordingly deposited as compensatory offerings (all sanctioned by the cult personnel), presumably of lesser value. Additionally, the curious almost five-century span of coinage in hoard 2 – a copper coin of Antiochus I (1), Euthydemus I (1), silver imitations of Phraates IV (69), silver and copper Heraios coins (1, and 3), and copper coins of Vima Kadphises (2) – indicate, at the very least, a long accumulation elsewhere prior to deposition.

15 For a comparative excavated example see the deposit of gold sheets and disks, silver sheets and disks, a piece of quartz, crystal beads, a green beryl bead, green glass beads, a piece of red garnet, pearls, and a piece of turquoise accompanying bones (the relics) at Kalawan, Taxila in MARSHALL 1951, 327.

A further point worth raising is that even when objects in hoards are inscribed, this information is only partially helpful. To cite a case that looks fairly straightforward, of the nine silver bowls (some also gilded) published by Falk, reportedly found in a hoard at the Mohmand Agency (Pakistan), three were inscribed. The first two clearly refer to votive offerings; the first is inscribed with Greek and Gāndhārī texts recording its dedication by Kalliphon to *Chaos/Boa (No. 2), the second with a Gāndhārī inscription indicating the object's dedication by Samangaka (*samagakeṇa... karavite*) who had become an adorant (No. 8). The third, in Greek is translated as 'Through [Διὰ] Phantoklēs, the Meridarchos. Dr(ahmas) 40' (No. 4) and interpreted by Falk as also accompanying a dedication (FALK 2009, 26–27, 29–31, 34–35). Falk deduces that the hoard indicates the existence of a shrine and/or temenos where such dedications could occur (FALK 2009, 40). I do not dispute this, but would only add that we do not know whether the hoard itself was found in such a space, and the third text, moreover, is more ambiguous in content and may refer to another process.

Similarly, it often remains unclear whether a common formula encountered in inscriptions on silver plate in other hoards – being a personal name in the genitive case, sometimes accompanied with titles or relations, and sometimes the weight of the object – should be interpreted as representing the owner or donor of said object. The hoard of gold jewellery and silver plate from House 2D at Sirkap resembles others discussed above from stratum II in content, but six of its vessels are inscribed with various combinations of this formula, with five different names of owners/donors represented, including the *kṣatrapa Jihonika* (MARSHALL 1951, 155–157).¹⁶ The number of different names represented, and the proximity of the house and hoard to the so-called 'apsidal temple' – which Marshall interpreted as a Buddhist *grha-stūpa*, but is more plausibly a temple dedicated to a Brahmanic/Shiva cult (COLLIVA 2007, 24–25) – led Marshall to consider, but not commit to the possibility that these were temple donations, and that the house was occupied by someone connected to the temple, or temple management (MARSHALL 1951, 155–156). Yet, the presence of a silver plate inscribed with the name and title of Aśpavarma the *strategos* in another household hoard (Block D' House 3 Deposit D) lends support to the private ownership interpretation (MARSHALL 1951, 188).

A comparison with the unprovenanced silver hoard of 45 pieces of silver plate, primarily composed of drinking vessels (some fragmentary) reported from Buner in Pakistan is warranted here, as it exhibits objects inscribed with the names of six different owners/donors. Baratte already took note of the chronological delays involved in the assemblage of this hoard from an art-historical perspective, and wondered how its formation took place as the names appear to be totally unconnected (BARATTE 2002, 46–50). Falk variously referred to the names as those of owners and donors, although he indicates the former in his translations with '[Property]' (BARATTE 2002, 58–60). Although it is possible that this hoard derives from a deposit of donations, the familiar material, the traces of damage and repairs, and the epigraphic formulae, invite comparison with the Sirkap II hoards and interpretation as objects of individual wealth. This hoard thus may also relate to the economic and historic circumstances connected to the accumulation, deposition, and non-retrieval of the Sirkap II hoards.

Another difficult case is the hoard of 115 gold objects in DT-5, the 'residence of a wealthy city-dweller' ('Жилой дом богатого горожанина') at Dal'verzintepė. The hoard had been buried in an earthenware pot beneath the phase 2 floor in room 13 (6.8×2 m, separated from room 9 during renovations), and was never recovered after the house succumbed to a fire (PUGACHENKOVA – RTVELADZE 1978, 35). The hoard included a variety of intact, bent, and fragmentary

16 Here, I follow the reading of the *ka* 191 in the *Jihonika* inscription as a weight – 191 *ka* (*hapana/havana*) (Skt. *ārṣāpaṇa*) – rather than a date as in CRIBB 1999, 196–197.

pieces of jewellery, as well as blanks in the form of threads, wire, plate, and tubes, disc-shaped ingots, and rectangular ingots, 10 of these featured Gāndhārī inscriptions (Nos. 1, 2, 4–11). Pugachenkova suggested that some objects may come from a jewellery workshop, and that – as some jewellery had been broken up and flattened in an apparent attempt to squeeze more into its container – the hoard was connected with extraordinary events. Further, she noted similarities between some of the jewellery and that found at Sirkap, suggesting the house's owner had belonged to the Kushan military nobility, and had brought back this jewellery and the ingots while participating in the campaigns into Northwest India (PUGACHENKOVA 1976, 65–66).

Unfortunately, the interpretation of the ingot inscriptions is not straightforward, not least because the published plates are not entirely clear. At least, names and weights are evident: 'was given by Mitra' (*mitreṇa dīto*) appears on four (nos. 1, 2, 4, 5) and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya indicates this may denote a treasury official (VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA 1976, 76). Yet, her reading of the names of recipients in parts of nos. 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 (including for nos. 6–10 *ś[r]amanai* 'Buddhist monk') should be reviewed.¹⁷ Based on the latter, Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya had suggested that the ingots and jewellery may derive from gifts to the Buddhist community, intended to have been used for casting statuettes of the Buddha and ornaments for temple sculpture (VOROBYOVA-DESYATOVSKAYA 1976, 78). Indeed, while Mitra can, *sensu lato*, be described as a donor here (as he has given something), a Buddhist or religious association is not necessary, and the question to whom and for what purpose these ingots was given should remain an open question until a new edition can be produced. Furthermore, there is no need to presume the deposition of this hoard was provoked by extraordinary circumstances alone; room 13, judging from its dimensions, appears well-suited to a storage function.

Moving beyond inscriptions, the interrogation of hoards deposited in difficult-to-access and/or watery places, which globally tend to have ritual associations (if not exclusively), may prove fruitful for the future. For example, two relatively recently-reported coin hoards, the Khauzikhelai hoard and the Vaiśali hoard, were apparently respectively recovered in a broken vase in the bed of the Swat River and in an earthen pot in 'the dried river bed' by villagers collecting clay (respectively BOPEARACHCHI 1995, 624 and BOPEARACHCHI – GRIGO 2001, 22). Yet, to determine whether they were originally deposited in rivers would require more precise verification of these reports, and indications that both rivers ran along the same course in antiquity.

The potential is more salient in reference to Mir Zakah I and II, the two deposits associated with a spring near the village of Mir Zakah, lying along the route connecting the Gardez region to the Kurram valley (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 67). The finds from Mir Zakah and the religious practices they speak to are discussed by Grenet (2023) in detail in this volume; here, I restrict my remarks to the interpretation of these deposits as hoards. Indeed, it is the scale of these deposits which reiterate the high stakes of avoiding close interrogation of hoard formation processes in Central Asia. With an estimated 555,000 silver, copper, and gold coins (about four tons in weight), and 350 kg of gold and silver objects including statuettes, plate, jewellery, and votive plaques appear, they may constitute the most valuable hoard of antiquity (BOPEARACHCHI – FLANDRIN 2005, 155). The chronological span of their contents is wide, including objects from the Achaemenid to the Kushan period. Yet, the picture is only partially documented. Limited excavations could at least be undertaken at Mir Zakah I (1947–1948; CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 68–69, 93–99). Mir Zakah II (1992–1993) came to wider attention

17 Falk in BARATTE 2002, 54, n. 3 demonstrates that Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya has separated a weight measurement into two words in the cases of inscription Nos. 2 and 4, and that *ś[r]amanai* should be put to doubt.

through acquisitions made by the Miho Museum, then represented as coming from Bactria, and accordingly considered by some as a second part of the Oxus Treasure (as in PICHIKYAN 1998). Bopearachchi's research has been instrumental in recovering any conception of the second deposit, tracing its path from the villagers' excavations to the global antiquities market (see, for example BOPEARACHCHI 1995, 612–616 and BOPEARACHCHI – FLANDRIN 2005).

Here I would like to offer only a few remarks about Mir Zakah's classification and interpretation. Curiel and Schlumberger first considered that Mir Zakah I's burial and abandonment could be related to the Sasanian invasion, from the presence of coins of Vasudeva I (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 90). After the 1948 excavations, they suggested that the remains of rough stone walls and wooden beams had represented two sacred basins, into which small objects and coins were thrown as offerings, due to predominance of small denominations, votive plaques, and the chronological span of the coins, many of which were unworn (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 99). Bopearachchi cast doubt on this conclusion after Mir Zakah II's emergence, citing the high value of the objects, the absence of structures in the vicinity, and the unlikelihood that religious officials would have never cleared the basins (BOPEARACHCHI 1995, 615). He instead suggested that the deposits are composites of collections from different origins and periods – for example, the Zoroastrian votive plaques from a looted Achaemenid temple or treasury in the Oxus valley, the Graeco-Bactrian, Indian, and Indo-Greek objects and coins from sacked treasuries or temples – that were deposited at the end of the first quarter of the 3rd century AD (BOPEARACHCHI – FLANDRIN 2005, 163–166, 245; see also the discussion and similar conclusions in GRENET 2023). Indeed, considering the interpretation of the Begram hoard that I have outlined above, the possibility arises that the Mir Zakah deposits – and even the earlier Oxus Treasure, with its findspot only very generally localised (most plausibly) at Takht-i Kuwad/Qobad¹⁸ – could be parallel manifestations of the kind of materials plausibly extracted from the property of the putative temple at Begram's Site II before its sealing and abandonment by absconding elites: items of high-value, portable, and convertible wealth (see MORRIS 2021, 410–412).

That being said, it simultaneously appears that the Mir Zakah deposits were also ritually formed, at least in part. The spring at Mir Zakah itself may have been a special or ritually-loaded place. It is also possible that the non-recovery of the deposits was not a fluke of fate; the vast volume of material involved makes it difficult to imagine that its deposition was covert or fast, and occurred unnoticed by others. This is essentially speculation, but the excavation results from 1948 certainly deserve re-examination. Curiel and Schlumberger noted that the 'basins' of Mir Zakah I were not cemented or paved, but formed instead a natural pond or collection from a spring (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 99). It is possible to be more specific here. Evidently, there was a natural spring at the site – the preservation of the wooden beams indicates a totally waterlogged environment – and the excavated structures appear to represent an artificial catchment installation, even if its precise function is not clear. The covered wooden gutter running along the wall GH is possibly an overflow drain. However, while almost all finds were reported in the thin layer (6–10 cm) of greenish sand excavated at Site II and noted at Site I, this cannot be the sole origin of all finds reported from Mir Zakah. The '*terrain humide et gravillonneux*' immediately under this deposit, regarded as sterile ground by the excavators (before the trench refilled with water) (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 94, 99), also seems like an unsuitable foundation for a catchment installation, and may be further sedimentary infill. The finds besides coins, jewellery, and plate also deserve more attention. How should the ironwork, wood fragments, and pottery sherds picked up by Kohzad (CURI-

18 See also the discussion of this find in GRENET 2023; WU 2023.

EL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 69) be interpreted? Likewise, the raised portion of Site IV abutting onto wall GH, interpreted as infill, contained ‘*quelques monnaies, des tessons de poterie et des ossements d’animaux*’ (CURIEL – SCHLUMBERGER 1953, 94). What coins were these, and were they analogous to those found the deposit? Finally, although the Mir Zakah deposits are exceptional, like the Begram hoard they should not be treated as isolated phenomena. Indeed, as I have noted above, they may even represent parallel manifestations of similar processes, although the deposition of the Begram hoard does not seem to be directly linked to the Sasanian invasion and the retreat of Kushan power to India. For now, I highlight this example as only another reminder that proposed ties between archaeological abandonment events and invasion scenarios are frequently weak, and that this genre of hoard explanation remains practically anecdotal unless sustained from a wider archaeological perspective.

CONCLUSION

Many hoards in Hellenistic and Kushan Central Asia – especially those usually interpreted in utilitarian terms – have only been subject to cursory theoretical and methodological examination in scholarship. The aim of this article has thus been to explore how insights and approaches from the examination of hoards in other domains of archaeology can be productively applied to a Central Asian context. After highlighting especially pertinent developments in the study of hoards in Bronze Age Europe as well as coin hoards among coinage-using populations, I explored how these might provide some impulses for a different interpretation of the Begram hoard alongside a re-examination of the archaeological data. Thus, instead of an inadvertently abandoned palatial treasure or a trader’s stock, I tentatively hypothesise that the Begram hoard may rather represent a selection of objects from the property of a religious institution localised in the Site II structure, with objects representing portable, high-value, and convertible wealth having been removed from this assemblage. The intentional abandonment of valuable objects in the Site II structure, and the arrangement and sealing of many of these objects in rooms 10 and 13 specifically, appears to have coincided with the wider abandonment of this part of the city by its elites. As I propose, this occurred perhaps in the early 4th century AD, and was probably predicated by a process of urban decline over the previous century. Among other points, the case of the Begram hoard highlights difficulties with classifying hoards strictly along a ritual-utilitarian dichotomy, probably reflects both ritual and utilitarian considerations in its formation, and contained objects circulating between ritual and non-ritual domains over time.

To provide further context for these interpretations, I have also considered a diversity of Central Asian hoards from the Hellenistic and Kushan sites of Ai Khanoum, Sirkap and Bhir Mound at Taxila, the Oxus Temple, Dal’verzintepe, and Mir Zakah, as well as hoards with little contextual information from the Mohmand Agency and Buner. Throughout, I have argued that hoard formation processes should take a more central role in numismatic discourse, and moreover that hoards in Central Asia are a remarkably diverse archaeological phenomenon, and often tend to resist easy classification into strict utilitarian or ritual boxes; indeed, they also shed light on economic, social, and ritual behaviour in unexpected ways. Coin hoards do not mutely reflect neutral economic information, seemingly utilitarian hoards may be ritually formed, and inscriptions may be only partially helpful in matters of interpretation. So far, I have noted some issues of interest for future research, including a more nuanced approach to coin hoards and the investigation of deposits in watery features. One key future challenge that I have only signalled briefly, however, will be to gain insight on broader patterns of hoard-

ing in specific times and places. This task would likely benefit from the application of GIS and statistical methods tailored to the imperfect data at our disposal. Then it may be possible, for instance, to determine if hoarding practices are responsive to land- and waterscapes, if certain varieties of hoards are prominent in certain times and places, if broader patterns in coin hoard formation can be detected with potential interest for economic history, and finally which groups of unrecovered hoards might be explained by invasions after all.

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