

## **Begram and maritime trade in the Indian Ocean**

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The ancient site at Begram is situated near the confluence of the Ghowrband and Panjsher rivers in eastern Afghanistan. The considerable fame of Begram rests on the discovery, during the 1937 and 1939 campaigns under the direction of Joseph Hackin, of a large number of extraordinary objects that were neatly stored in two, apparently anciently sealed off, rooms in that part of the "New Royal City", which the excavators came to refer to as the "Palace". The objects found in these sealed rooms consisted of numerous pieces which evinced a high degree of artisanship and which, fascinatingly, had their origins in various and distant parts of the world, including bronzes and glassware from the greater Roman Mediterranean, lacquer ware from China and carved ivory and bone objects from the Indian sphere. Since their discovery in 1937 and 1939, these objects have been the subject of extensive stylistic analyses in an attempt both to indicate their places of origin and to date the pieces. Initial efforts at stylistically dating the objects placed several pieces two or three centuries apart. This led some scholars to the notion that the objects had been gathered over several centuries, a hypothesis which simultaneously supported and was confirmed by the assertion that the artifacts as a whole were a royal "treasure" or "hoard", and that the particular portion of the site was a Kushan imperial summer "palace".

Current research into the finds and the nature of the settlement, however, suggests something somewhat different: namely, that the so-called Begram treasure could well have been merchants' stock deposited at the site along established trade routes.