Looted, Recovered, Returned: Antiquities from Afghanistan

A detailed scientific and conservation record of a group of ivory and bone furniture overlays excavated at Begram, stolen from the National Museum of Afghanistan, privately acquired on behalf of Kabul, analysed and conserved at the British Museum and returned to the National Museum of Afghanistan in 2012

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Foreword by

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Foreword

Dr Omara Khan Masoudi

(Director, The National Museum of Afghanistan)

The ivory and bone carvings from Begram are one of the most important archaeological discoveries of the past century in Afghanistan. Over the decades following the outbreak of war in Afghanistan, in 1988 some of the contents of our National Museum were packed and shifted to the centre of Kabul for safe keeping and improved conservation and fortunately we still have these objects with us at the National Museum of Afghanistan. Sadly, the upper part of the museum building was destroyed by shelling in May 1993. During this period of confusion and destruction many of our most important and beautiful objects were stolen, totalling almost 70% of our collection. The fate of these exquisite ivory inlays was unknown and we feared them to be lost forever.

Some of these important pieces have since been generously bought for us by a small number of private individuals. The group of twenty published here are the largest number to be returned to us. We are very grateful to the person who has helped us on this great occasion and for his kindness and generosity. We are pleased to announce that these important pieces have been safely returned to us and are now once again part of our collection in the National Museum of Afghanistan.

We also thank all of those others who have helped us on this occasion, especially the British Museum for its conservation and important scientific analyses of these pieces. This work helps us better understand the high level of craftsmanship behind the objects from Begram and the close relations between our country and our neighbours.

We look forward to seeing more of our stolen treasures returned to our museum and hope that this great act of generosity and collaboration will inspire others to continue in this way to work with us for a better understanding of the rich culture of our country.

Preface by the Sponsor

Bank of America Merrill Lynch is proud to have supported the conservation of the beautiful Begram Ivories through our global Art Conservation Project. These pieces featured in the British Museum's fascinating 2011 exhibition: *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World,* which we also had the opportunity to support. We are therefore delighted to be working with the British Museum once again on this important publication, to share vital knowledge on the restoration process, and to shed light on the historical relevance of the ivories.

As a company serving customers and clients in more than 100 countries, we understand how the arts create meaningful connections between people, communities, and cultures. We do this through sponsorships, sharing our collection through our Art in Our Communities® programme, outreach and public access initiatives, and through our Art Conservation Project. This initiative provides grants to not-for-profit institutions to conserve artworks that are significant to the cultural heritage of a country or region, or important to history of art. At the same time, the project highlights the crucial need for support of art conservation and the importance of preserving cultural treasures for future generations.

Since 2010, Bank of America Merrill Lynch has provided grants to museums in 25 countries supporting a total of 57 conservation works. Recent projects have ranged from Gustave Courbet's monumental 'L'Atelier du peintre', Augustus Saint-Gaudens' celebrated sculpture 'Diana', an eighth-century Qur'an, a double-sided oil painting by German Expressionist Ludwig Meidner anticipating the horrors of WW1, large scale mural cartoons by Diego Rivera, and a selection of paintings by South African artist Gerard Sekoto.

This book is a fitting testament to the important academic research and conservation work already carried out. It also marks the spirit of international collaboration and mutual understanding which have enabled a wide audience to view these rare and stunning relics and for them to be returned to the Afghan nationals. We hope that you enjoy and learn from these pages as much as we have.

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Acknowledgements

Without a great act of generosity, the objects which are the subject of this book would not have returned to the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and the work detailed within this volume would not have been carried out. We therefore owe a great vote of thanks to the single individual who purchased these objects on behalf of the museum in Kabul and entrusted the British Museum with their conservation and secure return.

The conservation was made possible by the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Programme and we are very grateful to them and those who made this possible. This work was carried out under intense pressure of time and we are indebted to all of those concerned, especially the scientists and conservators who worked directly on these objects, but also others across the museum who backed this project from the outset, especially Neil MacGregor, Andrew Burnett, John Curtis, David Saunders, Catherine Higgitt, Carolyn Marsden-Smith, Claire Everitt and Jennifer Suggitt. The scientific research was carried out by Emma Passmore, Janet Ambers, Catherine Higgitt, Giovanni Verri, Caroline Cartwright and Duncan Hook, and the conservation undertaken by Clare Ward and Barbara Wills.

The objects were exhibited in the British Museum as the highlight to the conclusion of its special exhibition, *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*, from 3rd March to 17th July 2011. They were mounted for display by Sarah Choy and Xavier Duffy of the Department of the Middle East, with the assistance of Petra Rea (Department of Prehistory & Europe). They were later packed for return to Kabul in 2012 by Sarah Choy, and condition photographs taken by Jerry Baker. The return of these sensitive and fragile objects was one of the most challenging parts of the project, and we are very grateful to Sir David Richards, then Chief of the British Armed Forces, for agreeing to directly facilitate this. Many others helped at this stage, both directly and indirectly, and we should mention Jonathan Tubb and Dean Baylis from the British Museum side, many others from the British Armed Forces whom we cannot name individually, and various other individuals, including Dr Robert Knox and Jolyon Leslie.

This publication was edited by St John Simpson and incorporates all of the scientific analyses and conservation treatment records completed by the colleagues listed here as co-authors. The scientific images were taken by Janet Ambers but the remaining photographs were enhanced for publication by St John Simpson. The introductory map is by Paul Goodhead and was used in the exhibition. Other images are credited as appropriate and we would like to thank Dr Volkmar Thewalt, Mrs Cathy Stephens, Paul Bucherer-Dietschi and the late David Whitehouse for kindly providing some of these. We are also very grateful to Dr Masoudi for permission to use photographs taken by Thierry Olivier on behalf of the National Museum of Afghanistan of objects exhibited in the recent travelling exhibition, and to Dr Ph. Marquis and the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan for permission to reproduce some of the original excavation photographs. We are also grateful to various other colleagues, both within the museum and outside, for their comments on these objects, including Dr Sanjyot Mehendale, Dr Lolita Nehru, Dr Elizabeth Rosen Stone, Dr Michael Willis and Dr Richard Blurton. Moreover, we owe thanks to a large number of individuals who have shared their observations and experiences of the situation in Kabul after the civil war and their efforts to safeguard dispersed contents of the museum. This publication was peer reviewed and we are very grateful to the anonymous referee for their comments prior to publication.

Publication of this monograph was made possible through the generous support of Bank of America Merrill Lynch.

Introduction: from Archaeological Discovery to Museum Display

St J. Simpson

Abstract

French archaeologists excavating the site of Begram, in northern Afghanistan, made spectacular discoveries over the course of two seasons in 1937 and 1939 when they uncovered huge numbers of objects hidden in two blocked-up rooms in the heart of a building which they initially referred to as a palace. These included Chinese lacquer bowls, Roman painted glass, bronzes and other objects imported from Egypt, and over a thousand carved ivory and bone plaques originally attached to wooden furniture. These became known as the 'Begram ivories' and belong to a period when Afghanistan, Pakistan and northern India were united under rulers of the Kushan dynasty. They are widely considered to be miniature masterpieces of Indian art and are one of the largest collections of excavated ivories from antiquity. They also represent one of the most significant archaeological discoveries in Afghanistan. Divided between the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and the Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet in Paris, the collection in Kabul suffered a disaster during the civil war which ravaged the country during the 1990s. Some of the pieces were successfully concealed by museum staff but most were stolen, hundreds have since been reported in different collections and only a very small number were recovered prior to 2010.

In 2011 a group of twenty bone and ivory plaques was generously acquired for the National Museum of Afghanistan by a private individual. These were scientifically analysed, conserved and exhibited at the British Museum and returned to Kabul in 2012. The results shed important new light on how these were made and particularly the use of pigments to enhance their appearance. The following extended introduction describes the story of how and when they were found and what their significance is. It discusses the question of their dating and then gives the first detailed timeline of their journey from excavation to museum, followed by theft during the civil war and how they came to be finally restored to their rightful home in the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul.

Archaeological discovery

The story begins at the site of Begram which lies in a fertile basin next to the confluence of the rivers Ghorband and Panjshir, in the modern province of Parvan in northern Afghanistan, and some forty-five kilometres north of Kabul (Ball 1982: vol. I, 55–57, site 122, vol. II, 9).[1] The position is an important one, commanding the junction of two major routes connecting northern Pakistan and the Kabul area with Bactria to the north, one through the Bamiyan valley and the Shibar pass in the direction of Balkh, and the other to Kunduz over the Khwak pass (Figs 1–3). The main archaeological site includes two elevated mounded areas (Fig. 4). The northern mound is a high citadel on the right bank of the river confluence measuring 100 metres north/south x 200 metres east/west and is known locally as Burj-i Abdullah, and later termed the 'Old Royal City' by French archaeologists. The second main mound lies approximately half a kilometre to the south, on the edge of a low projecting ridge, and consists of a rectangular walled area measuring 150 x 450 metres across which was termed the 'New Royal City' by the excavators. The intervening area, which presumably constituted the main residential part of the city, is covered by fields, and the area of ancient occupation also extends south of the fortifications of the 'New Royal City' (Hackin 1939: 5).

The site was discovered in July 1833 by the English soldier and explorer Charles Masson (1800–1853), who collected a huge number of coins and minor antiquities from the area, many of which were later acquired by the British Museum.[2] Although the earliest objects he collected date only from about 200 BC and other objects range up to the nineteenth century (Errington ed. 2007: 11–14; 2008), Masson proposed that it was the site of Alexandria ad Caucasum, one of the cities founded by Alexander the Great (356–323 BC). Archaeological excavations were only undertaken a century later. In September 1922 Alfred Foucher, acting for the French government, signed a treaty with the Afghan government in Kabul. This gave French archaeologists a virtual monopoly on research and gave diplomatic status to the newly created Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan [DAFA] (Oliver-Utard 1997). In the following year André Godard, then Director General of the Archaeological Service of Iran, was appointed its first director of excavations. The principal focus was art-historical and on sites which could provide information on the eastward diffusion of Hellenism, the origin of Gandharan art and its relation to Buddhist art, and the extent of Silk Road trade through Afghanistan. Several sites were investigated, including Begram, which was identified by Foucher (1947: 140) as ancient Kāpiśī, the summer capital and residence of the Kushan kings whose powerful state stretched from northern Afghanistan to

[1] The modern place and military base are known as Bagram but the neighbouring site is known in the archaeological literature as Begram. This follows the usage established by the excavators although they noted that it should be properly known as Bagrām (Hackin *et al*. 1954: xi).

[2] These are divided between the Departments of Asia and Coins & Medals, and have been the subject of a long-term cataloguing project directed by Dr E. Errington. The objects are registered on the British Museum database and can be accessed through its Collections Online.

FIG. 1 AFGHANISTAN AND THE LOCATION OF BEGRAM (DRAWING: PAUL GOODHEAD).

FIG. 2 VIEW OF THE SITE AND ENVIRONS OF BEGRAM (PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID WHITEHOUSE).

Fig. 3 Begram: recent view (Google Earth).

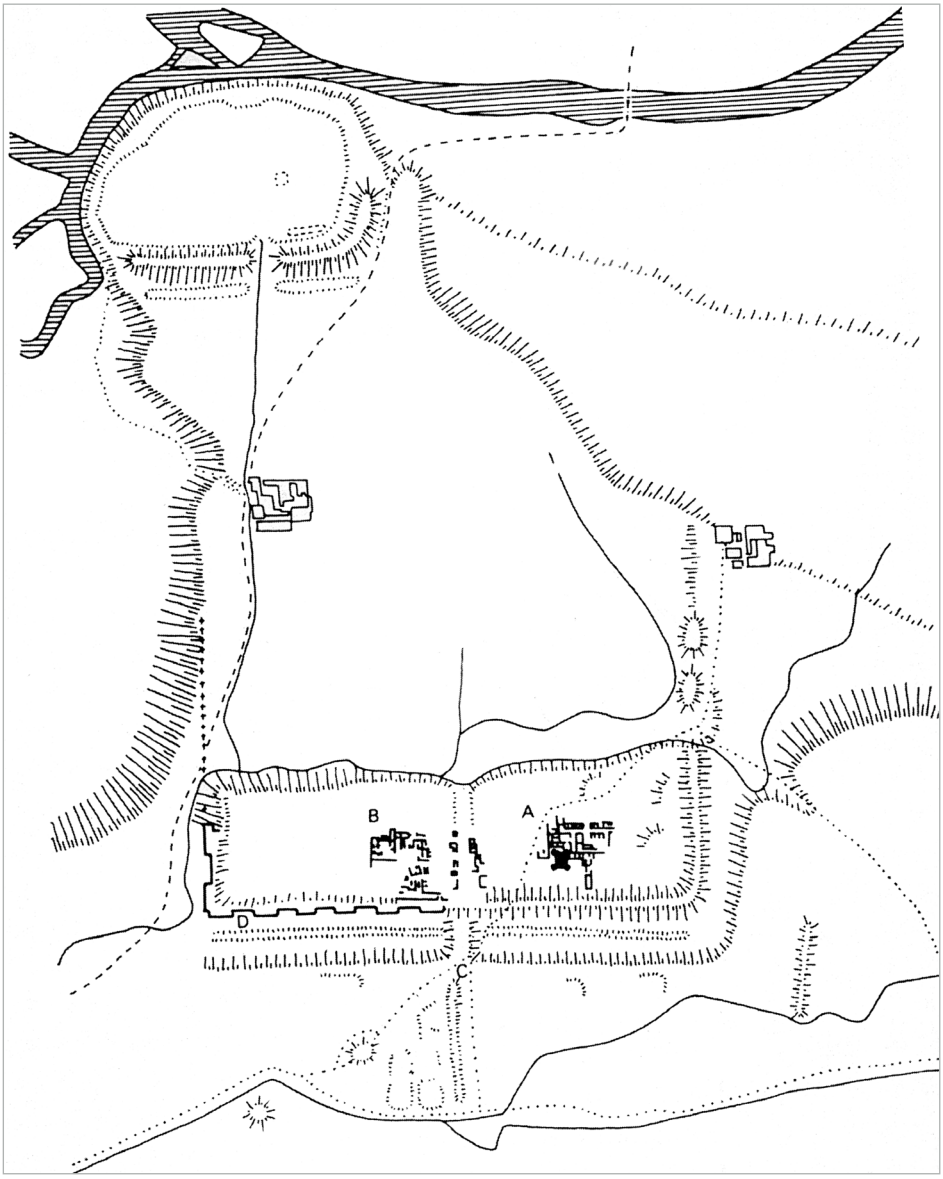

Fig. 4 Plan of the site at Begram marking the position of the two areas excavated in the so-called 'New Royal City' (after Jarrige & Cambon *et al.* 2006: 120).

Fig. 5 View of the Site II building at Begram (Google Earth).

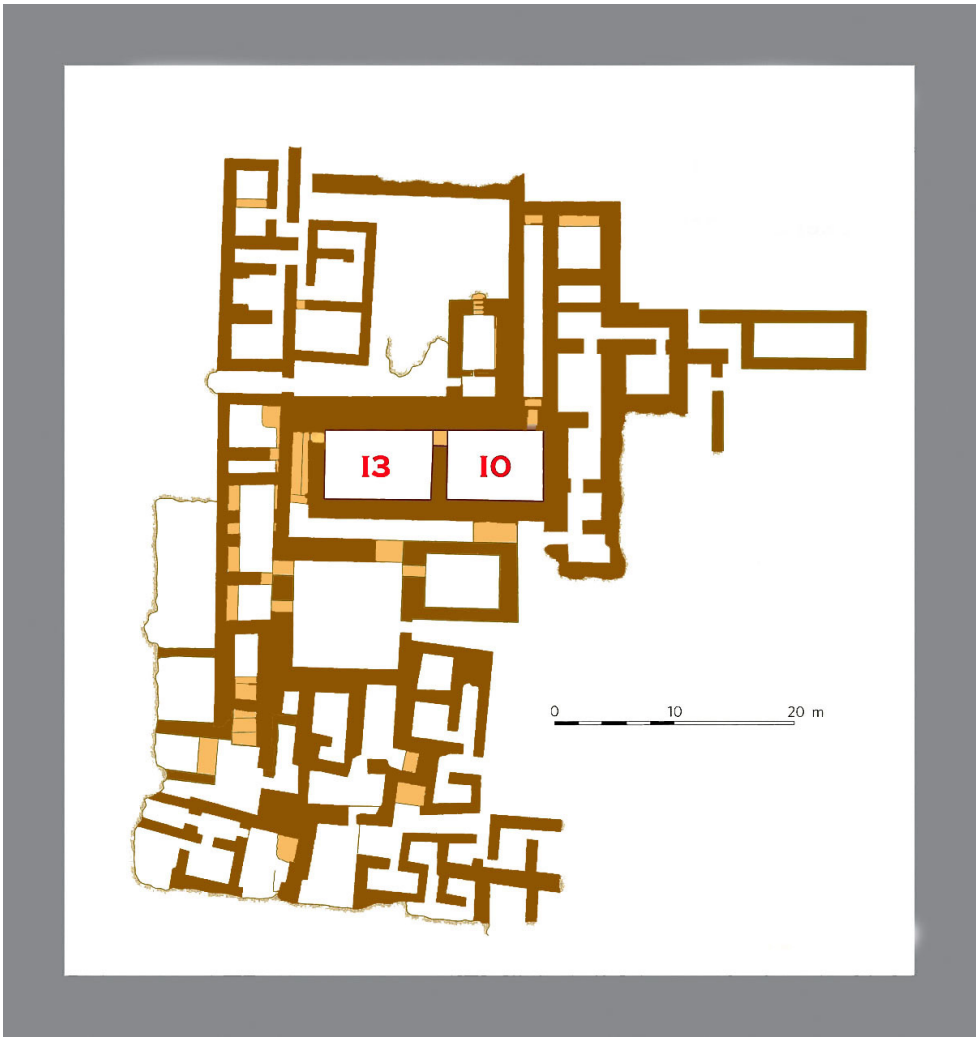

Fig. 6 Plan of Rooms 10 and 13 (adapted from Simpson 2011a: 12–13).

northern India and flourished between the first and fourth centuries.

Following an initial sounding made by Jules Barthoux in August 1925, systematic excavations at Begram were begun by Jean Carl and Jacques Meunié in April 1936. They were continued by Meunié with Joseph and Ria Hackin until 1940, resumed by Roman Ghirshman in 1941–1942, and concluded by Meunié in 1946. Several areas were investigated in both of the main mounded parts of the site. Two areas were excavated in the 'New Royal City', namely the so-called 'Bazaar' (Site I) and part of a large building which was later explored some two hundred metres to the east, usually referred to as the 'Palace' (Site II). The discoveries in two of the rooms in the latter complex proved to be spectacular (Fig. 5). These finds were made in two separately walled up but adjoining rooms at the heart of the building, and designated Rooms 10 and 13 respectively (Fig. 6). The first room was excavated between May and July 1937 and revealed large numbers of bronze, alabaster, glass and ivory objects (Hackin 1939). Most of the ivories were found in the northern part and along the eastern edge of the room. They included three spectacular ivory standing female figures, each representing a *yakshī*, or female guardian spirit, standing on a *makara*, a mythical composite beast (Figs 7–8). In addition, several ivory furniture legs and a large number of plaques originally attached to a row of thirteen footstools were found *in situ* in a line along the eastern wall. The concentrations of finds were initially assigned group numbers and the pieces were then individually catalogued, e.g. Group 325 was later defined as Footstool V, composed of sixty-four different pieces (Hackin 1939: 74–80). A total of 470 bone and ivory pieces were individually catalogued from this room (Hackin 1939: 51–117).

Room 13 lies immediately north of Room 10 and was originally connected by a doorway which had been blocked in antiquity. It was discovered two years after Room 10 and excavated between 19th May and 23rd August 1939. It yielded similar items, but also contained several large panels of openwork inlays forming the backs of seven large pieces of furniture (Chairs 1–5, Chair 55 and Sofa 34), a collection of plaster moulds (Fig. 9) and numerous crushed Chinese lacquer bowls (Hackin *et al*. 1954). A further 638 bone and ivory pieces were individually catalogued, giving a total of 1108 individually catalogued pieces from both rooms (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 157–253). The published plans, photographs and descriptions show that the objects were deposited in groups, either directly on top of the benches or on the floors, and some may have been deposited in boxes or sacks judging by their disposition (Fig. 10).

The full plan of the building to which these two rooms belonged is unclear as it has still not been fully excavated. However, in the excavator's opinion, it appears to have consisted of 'a large rectangular wall with a succession of small chambers and corridors [which] surrounded the main building situated in the middle; this was designed as an L-shaped building oriented to the north-west; we believe that an upper floor was built on this main building ... At the back of the inner court there was a door, which gave access to corridor E, which led to Room 13 via a detour, and then to Room 10 ... The double walls have been interpreted as serving to hide the walled-up doors, but we believe they were used as a support for the upper floor' (Hamelin, quoted by Cambon 2011: 156).

Fig. 7 Ivory figure of a yakshi (photograph: Dr Volkmar Thewalt).

Fig. 8. Detail of an ivory yakshi (photograph: Dr Volkmar Thewalt).

Fig. 9 Plaster emblem representing the helmeted god Mars (photograph: National Museum of Afghanistan).

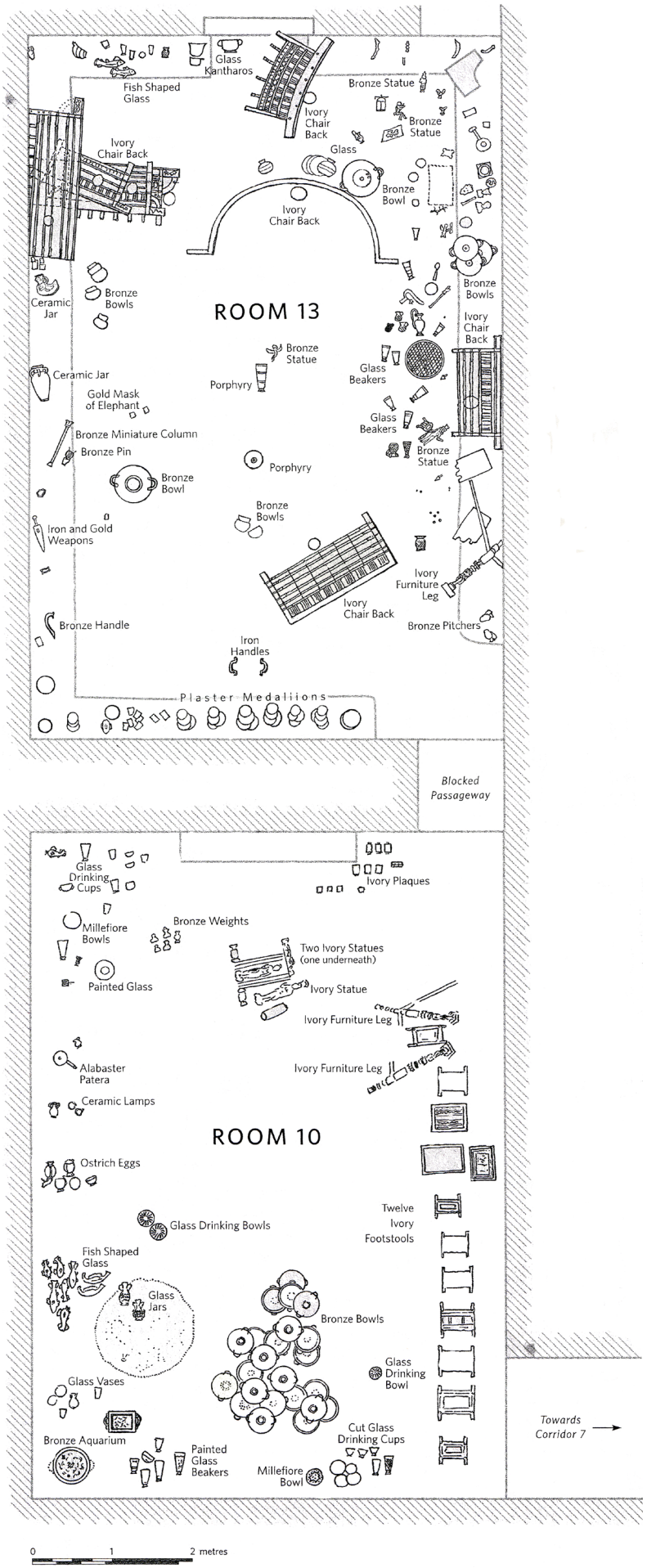

Fig. 10 Plan of Rooms 10 and 13 showing the excavated finds *in situ* (After Simpson 2011a: 12–13).

There was a low bench at the northern end of Room 10, while the equivalent area in Room 13 was taken by a niche in the wall; the remainder of the walls in Room 13 were lined with solid brick benches and the lower parts of the walls painted with representations of 'wainscoting decorated with drapery suspended from small columns ... in terracotta-brown, gray, white, and back' (Hamelin, quoted by Cambon 2011: 157). Bench-lined rooms such as these are characteristic of reception rooms or storerooms in a Central Asian or Middle Eastern context although the décor suggests a non-utilitarian purpose. Their original purpose therefore may have been as private reception or banqueting rooms. In any case, they were clearly not designed to be the storerooms they finally became, which must therefore represent a secondary use of the space; moreover, the portable furniture which dominates the contents and forms the focus of this study must have been designed for a completely different type of architectural environment and one which was more compatible with the Indian style of the pieces themselves. Hamelin suggested that the double walls framing these two rooms 'were used as a support for the upper floor'. This would

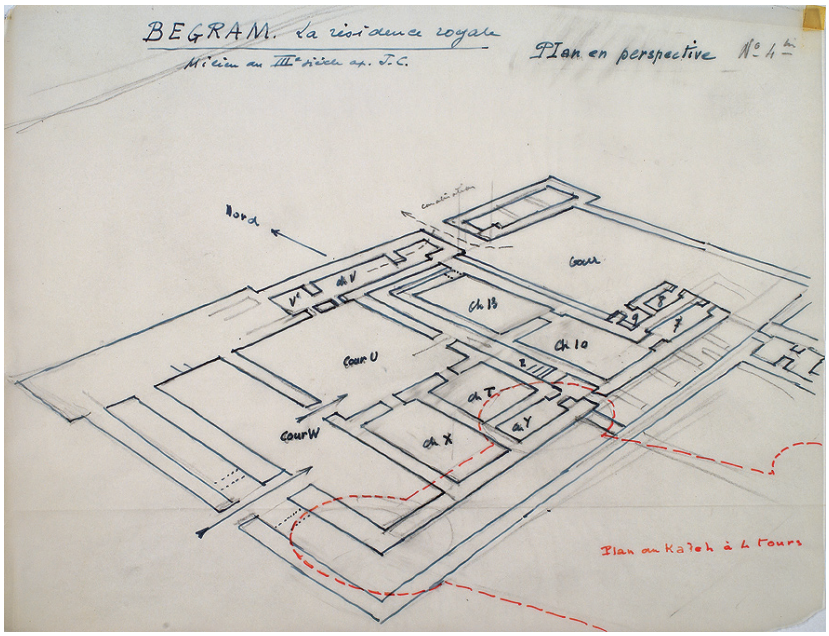

FIG. 11 RECONSTRUCTED ARCHITECTURAL VIEW OF THE BUILDING AND POSITION OF ROOMS 10 AND 13 (DRAWING BY PIERRE HAMELIN).

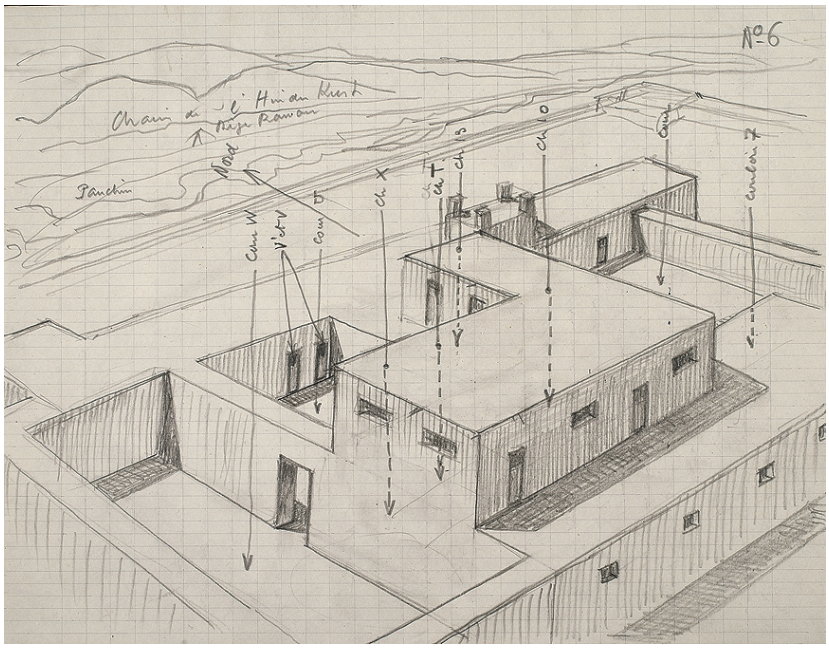

FIG. 12 PLAN SHOWING THE RELATIVE POSITIONS OF ROOMS 10 AND 13 (DRAWING BY PIERRE HAMELIN).

explain the source of the infilling of these rooms once the superstructure collapsed (Figs 11–12).

Following their collapse and natural infilling, the ruins were later partially capped by a fortified structure with distinctive semi-circular corner towers. This was contemporary with a level of re-occupation in the western part of the site and they belong to Ghirshman's so-called Begram Period III. He dated this between the mid-third and late fourth centuries on the basis of two assumptions, namely that the site was re-occupied by Kidara Kushans after its alleged destruction in 241 by the Sasanian ruler Shapur I but was finally abandoned in the face of a Hephthalite invasion (Ghirshman 1946). However, neither assumption is correct, this type of architecture is derived from Kushano-Sasanian and later forts, and the associated stamped pottery dates to the sixth or seventh centuries (Kuwayama 1974; 2010). There was therefore a lengthy period of abandonment between the collapse of the rooms containing the ivories and other objects, and the construction of the building above.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War the Hackins returned to France: both were killed when their ship was torpedoed by a German submarine in the Atlantic on 20th February 1941. Their architect Jean Carl was also killed during the war. Their deaths were a great loss for the final interpretation and publication of their excavations, and their last season had to be prepared from their notes and published posthumously in 1954. In the meantime, excavations had already been resumed at Begram in 1941 by Roman Ghirshman. He had previously excavated extensively in Iran and his main aim was to establish an archaeological sequence which would enable the finds from those excavations to be placed in a better historical context. He excavated in both the 'New Royal City' and the 'Old Royal City' at nearby Burj-i Abdullah (Ghirshman 1946). The last excavations at Begram were carried out by Meunié in autumn 1946, and these showed that occupation extended far south of the fortifications of the 'New Royal City' during Begram Period III and a second square towered fort was constructed about four hundred metres south of the south gate (Meunié 1959; Hackin, Carl & Meunié 1959).

The 'New Royal City' was re-used subsequently for a military encampment; trenches and fox-holes are still clearly visible dug along the crest of the ancient fortifications (Fig. 5). The site has the reputation of being heavily mined and has mercifully escaped the heavy looting which has destroyed many hundreds of sites and monuments in Afghanistan. It remains an outstanding candidate for renewed archaeological excavation when future conditions permit.

The 'Begram Ivories'

The excavations in Rooms 10 and 13 revealed over a thousand ivory and bone decorative plaques which had originally been used as decorative overlays on items of wooden furniture (Hackin 1937; Hackin *et al*. 1954). Since their discovery these have been collectively and for

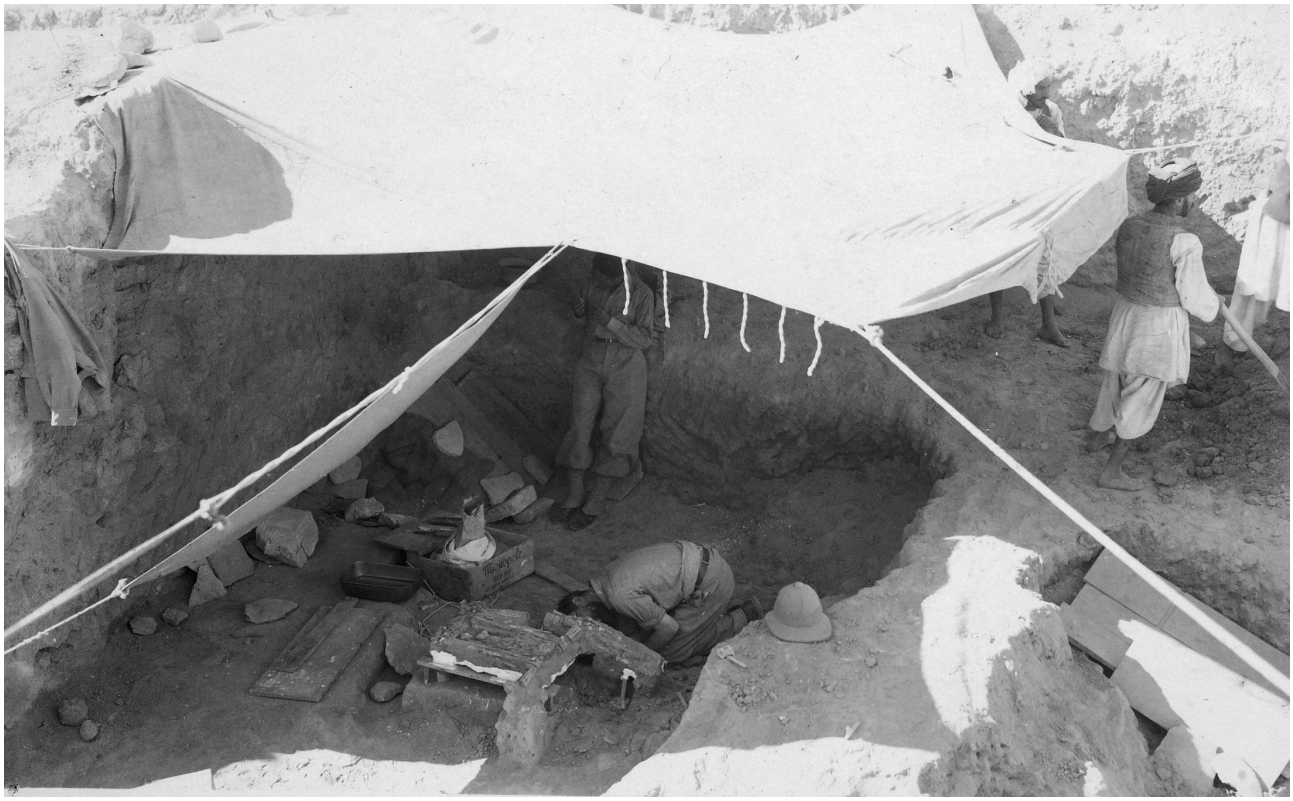

Fig. 13 Jean Carl consolidating ivories *in situ*.

convenience's sake referred to as the 'Begram ivories' and a sample of these forms the focus of this book. Many of these objects were found in their original positions, allowing physical and/or drawn reconstruction to be made of the chairs and footstools to which they were once attached, despite the almost total loss of the wooden components; however, in other cases the disintegration of stacked furniture makes it very difficult to determine the order or association of individual fragments. Moreover, with the exception of several pieces from the south-east corner of Room 10 (Hackin 1939: 11, 52–53, nos 250–53, pls XXIX–XXX, figs 65–67), the condition of the ivory and bone pieces was extremely poor as they had become highly desiccated and fragmented, and during the second season the temperature reached as high as 45 degrees Centigrade under the temporary awning stretched over the top of the excavation (Hackin *et al*. 1954: 12). The finds were initially treated by the conservator Pierre André but it was the architect, Jean Carl, who devised a new technique by which these delicate and fragmented pieces could be lifted. This involved reconstituting their structure by pouring up to five layers of warm gelatine on to the individual pieces, attaching tissue paper to one side, allowing them to solidify, repeating the treatment on the back and then lifting them after the gelatine had set (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 7–8, 12, 15–16) (Fig. 13). This process was continued during the second season when the team included the specialist restorer Pierre Hamelin, who was posted to Afghanistan to work on the collections of the museum in Kabul, and continued to work on the conservation of these objects after they had been taken there. The careful consolidation in the field allowed the objects to be lifted and lightly cleaned, although the use of gelatine (an organic substance) has prevented any

Fig. 14 Hunting scene from a panel belonging to Sofa 34 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.86) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 15 Carved strip from a panel belonging to Sofa 34 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.95) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 16 Carved strip from a panel belonging to Sofa 34 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.121) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 17 Detail of the face of a female figure depicted on Footstool IX from Room 10: note the original design on her face (after Hackin 1939: pl. LX, fig. 182, no. 329).

application of radiocarbon dating to the pieces, a fact pertinent to their dating (see below), and their fragility has remained a challenge for conservators ever since.

The range of motifs on the bone and ivory plaques is extensive and varied. They include female and male figures, children, spirits, mythical beasts, hunting scenes (either on foot or on horseback) (Fig. 14), wildlife (especially birds but also tigers, elephants and lions) (Figs 15–16), geometric and vegetal designs (quatrefoils, palmettes, lotus flowers, *aśoka* trees). Voluptuous female figures are the most popular subjects and are shown either singly or with attendants. They are depicted in loving detail with different elaborate hairstyles, items of personal adornment and sometimes even painted representations of hennaed or tattooed designs on their cheeks and around their nipples (Fig. 17). Multiple bangles and heavy anklets are frequently shown and were presumably worn for their jingling effect, particularly as some of the figures are shown dancing. Others are shown playing musical instruments (flutes, harps, cymbals, drums), carrying parasols, talking, applying make-up and/or admiring their reflections in mirrors, combing or wringing out their wet hair, or adjusting their personal ornaments. A few carry spears whereas male hunters also carry bows, shields and short swords. The partial state of undress, as well as the distinctive earrings, decorated bows and head ornaments, beaded necklaces and hip girdles accentuating the female bodies, create a feeling of sensual luxury and gentle eroticism (Fig. 18). Many of these figures are shown seated, either on cushioned woven wickerwork or on more substantial furniture with

Fig. 18 Detail of a panel showing a seated female figure with two others in front. Note the extensive use of coloured pigments to highlight different details of their personal adornments and other items. This photograph was taken when the object was on display in Kabul in 1974 but its present whereabouts is uncertain (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.177) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 19 Drawing by Pierre Hamelin of female figures seated on furniture depicted on an incised ivory panel from Room 13 (after Hackin *et al.* 1954: vol. II, fig. 668).

Fig. 20 Depiction of a couch on an ivory from the inner face of Sofa 34 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.88) (photograph: Thierry Olivier / RMN).

Fig. 21 Part of a panel belonging to Chair 1 or 4 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.154) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 22 Representation of a building on an ivory plaque from Chair 3 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.122) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 23 Representation of two different forms of arch on an openwork ivory originally belonging to Sofa 34 and previously on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.20) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

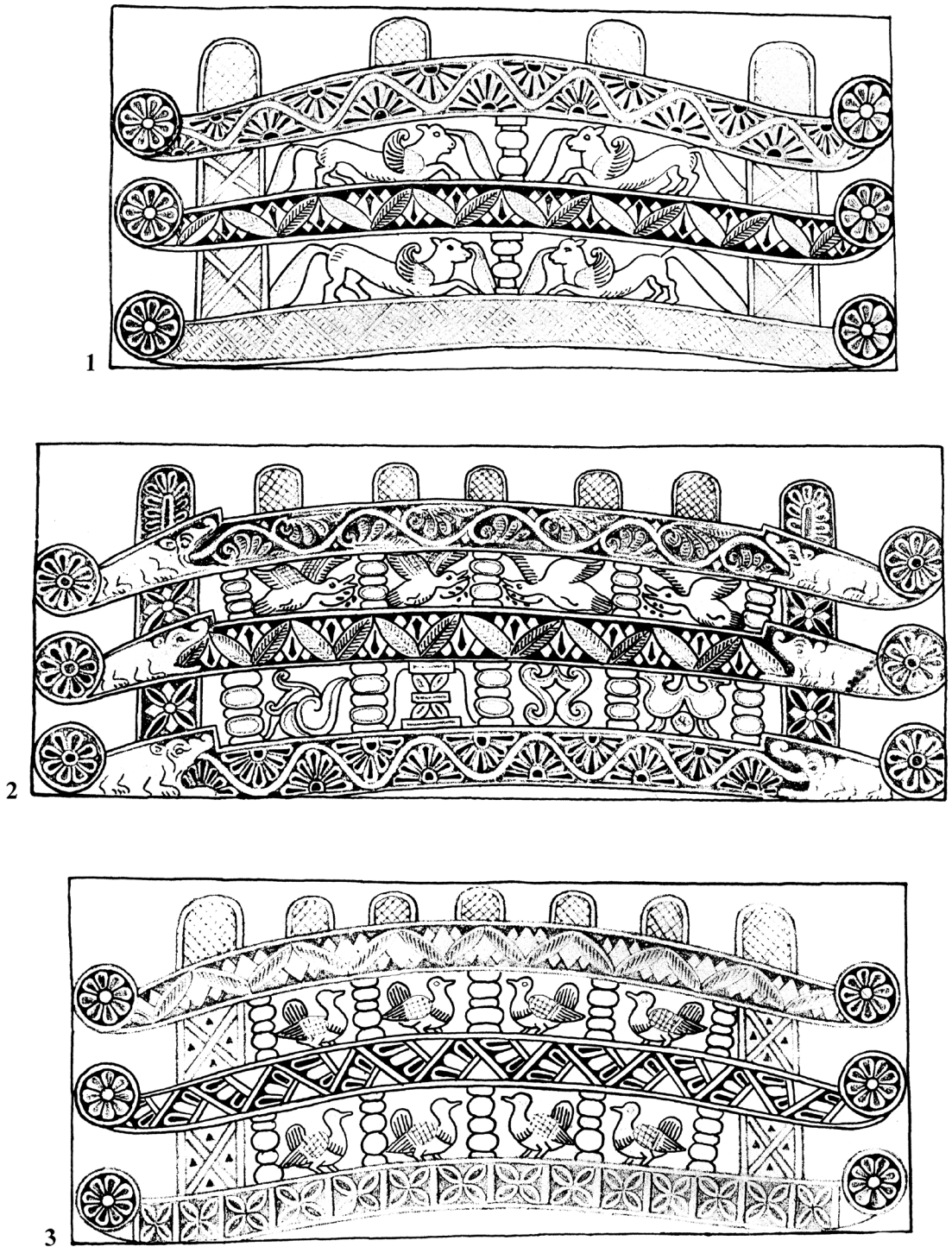

Fig. 24 Representations of torana gateways on Begram carvings (after Hackin *et al.* 1954: vol. II, figs 647–48, original drawings by P. Hamelin).

elaborate lathe-turned legs, sometimes with high backs, tasselled coverlets and a footstool (Fig. 19); other figures are shown reclining on longer couches (Fig. 20). Furniture is a feature of the built environment and this context is underlined on the representations as the figures are often framed within an architectural setting, sometimes with the doors ajar (Fig. 21), or in one exceptional case with an entire building seen in a three-quarters view (Fig. 22). The entrances are very distinctive and consist of different Indian architectural forms which are represented interchangeably and even on the same pieces of furniture. These consist of *caitya* entrances, a form of bentwood arch with or without a horizontal tie-rod locked into the bottom of the arch in order to counter-act the tendency of the arch to spring apart, and *torana* gateways with two or three superimposed decorated architraves supported

Fig. 25 Representation of a torana gateway on a Begram carving (Photograph: Thierry Olivier / RMN).

Fig. 26 Carved ivory bracket in the form of a yakshi riding a leogryph belonging to Chair 1 or 4 and excavated in Room 13 (photograph: Thierry Olivier / RMN).

by carved uprights (Figs 23–25). These forms are known in stone in India but were inspired by carved wooden gateways which do not survive. This interplay between real architecture, its representation on the furniture and the use of stylistically identical carved supports is illustrated by the leogryph brackets on Chair 3 found in Room 13 (Fig. 26), as similar examples are shown in miniature on furniture panels from Room 13 (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 25–30, 173–74, 232–33, vol. II, figs 8–9, 152–55, 639–40, nos 34 *b*5, 201; cf. Hiebert & Cambon eds 2013: 195–96, cats 96–97; Rowland 1984: 95–99). In any case, the depictions belong to an Indian architectural tradition rather than the low-level flat-roofed mudbrick architectural environment in which they were found.

Interpretations of the scenes on these plaques vary. Some scholars see them as voyeuristic illustrations of life in a royal harem (Dwivedi 1976: 89), perhaps based on royal courtesans whose quarters were more accessible than those of the court (Moti Chandra 1959: 36). The female forms conform to the ideals of female beauty repeated in Indian art and encapsulated in a later, sixth century, Indian description:

> 'Broad, plump and heavy hips to support the girdle, and navel deep, large and turned to the right, a middle with three folds and not hairy; breasts round, close to each other, equal and hard … and neck marked with three lines, bring wealth and joy' (*Brihatsamhitā* by Varāhamihira).

Moreover, there are strong resemblances between the female figures and the heavenly female deities or *yakshīs* recorded in Indian literature and shown on Indian religious monuments, and a Jain chronicle called the *Rāyapaseniyasutta* describes a special category of *yakshī* known as śālabhañjikās which evoke some of the Begram pieces:

> 'the śālabhañjikā women carved on the vedikā pillars were standing in various graceful poses, well supported [on crouching figures], beautifully ornamented,, wearing garments painted in various colours, and necklaces of various designs, curly hair, standing under Aśoka trees and holding their distended boughs, stealing the hearts of the gods as it were with their rolling glances and teasing as it were with the play of their eyes'.

Fig. 27 Inked mark on the reverse of Cat. 12.

The plaques are carved in different styles which are often combined on a single piece of furniture. A small number had fitters' marks added to the back in the form of either geometric incised symbols or black ink letters in Kharoṣṭhi and Brahmi script (Hackin 1939: 23–24). Not all marks appear to have been noted in the excavation reports but these do record marks and letters on 22 of the individually catalogued pieces from Room 10 (Hackin 1939: 52–54, 69, 74–75, 86–87, 95–96, 101, 105–106, 110), plus one additional piece from Room 13 (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 209).[3] Two such marks were present on the backs of two separate pieces in the present group, a fugitive black ink letter on the lower left of Cat. **12** (Fig. 27) and an incised cross on the upper centre of Cat. **4** (Fig. 28). All of these marks, whether incised or inked, were presumably designed to aid the assembly of complex furniture but further study is required in order to understand the full significance of the different types and placements (Table 1). The quality of workmanship of the carving, incision and assembly is high and wherever they were made implies a confident artistic tradition which combines two-dimensional drawing, three-dimensional carving and acute awareness of how to match resources to the requirements. They also imply a highly developed furniture-making tradition.

[3] In one case, the early restoration led to the recorded mark being covered and it is possible that others were likewise accidentally concealed in this manner (cf. Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 209, cat. 191 *i bis*).

Fig. 28 Incised mark on the reverse of Cat. 4.

Table 1 Fitters' marks noted on bone and ivory plaques from Begram (after Hackin 1939: 24*).*

Type	Letter	Medium	Position	Object	Cat. no	Group	Findspot	Reference	Collection
Kharoṣthi	tra (?)	ink	back edge	Bone overlay representing incised lotus designs highlighted in red	321	175 d1	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 69	Paris
Kharoṣthi	ksa		Back	Bone overlay representing winged mythical beasts	325	179 a	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 74	Paris
Kharoṣthi	Ja		[back]	Bone overlay representing winged mythical beasts	325	179 e	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 75	Paris
Kharoṣthi	da		Back	Bone overlay representing a duck	328	182 g	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 87	Paris
Kharoṣthi	ma		Back	Bone overlay representing a duck	328	182 g	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 87	Paris
Kharoṣthi	sa		Back	Ivory overlay representing a standing female figure	329	183 J	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 93	Kabul
Brahmi	da		Back	Bone overlays representing a duck	328	182 c, f	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 86–87	Paris, Kabul
Brahmi	ya		Back	Ivory (?) overlay decorated with an *aśoka*	331	185 n	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 101	Kabul
Fitters' mark			back edge	Bone overlay representing incised lotus designs highlighted in red	321	175 d1	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 69	Paris
Fitters' mark	cross		Back	Bone overlay representing winged mythical beasts	325	179 a	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 74	Paris
Fitters' mark			Back	Bone overlay representing winged mythical beasts	325	179 b	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 75	Kabul
Fitters' mark	crescent		Back	Bone overlay representing a *makara*	328	182 d	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 86	Kabul
Fitters' mark			Back	Bone overlay representing a mythical winged beast	328	182 e	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 86–87	Kabul
Fitters' mark			Back	Ivory overlay representing a lion	329	183 y	Room 10	Hackin 1939: 24, 95	Kabul

Fig. 29 Ivory carvers at work in Brahmapur
(*The Illustrated London News*, 26th April 1851, p.335 = British Museum, EPH-ME 700).

Two more recent case studies from India, one from the mid-nineteenth century and the other from a hundred years later, evoke the sort of workshops which might have been involved, although not all details may apply in antiquity. The first workshop illustrates local ivory workers fulfilling an order for Assyrianising chess pieces and small decorative items inspired by a topical publication of Layard's archaeological discoveries in northern Mesopotamia and made for the Great Exhibition in London in 1851 (Fig. 29).

The second was in Jaipur. It was described by the British archaeologist Sir Max Mallowan following his visit there:

> 'I was told that the tusk was only considered mature at 50 years – that is the half-life of the male elephant. The craftsmen, incidentally, were all of humble origin; they were poorly paid and their workshop was equipped only with a bare minimum of furniture; a single patron employed about twenty of them; some carvings could be achieved in a day, others required months of work according to their elaboration … the craftsman was only using chisel, file, fine saw and a nail with a sharp point, and a small tool with a flat paddle-shaped blade at each end … His practice was to saw a section longitudinally, cutting the tusk in two halves and then to make two similar figures after having sketched the object intended on the convex side … At Jaipur the craftsman said that the most delicate and tricky part of the operation was cutting out the open or *ajouré* parts of the figures … Such carvings were always more expensive owing to the risk of fracture. But if an accident happened, then the free-standing parts were altogether cut away, and only the solid figure was produced' (Mallowan 1966: vol. II, 483–84).

In his first excavation report on the finds from Begram, Hackin (1939: 13–14) distinguished three techniques – also sometimes but misleadingly referred to as styles – of carving on the bone and ivory pieces. Technique A used an engraving tool to create simple linear incised decoration and in some cases a second line was added (Fig. 30). Technique B was characterised by a flat relief effect created by hollowing out areas and using heavy criss-cross incision on others, often highlighted with red pigment (Fig. 31). Sub-categories were also added: thus Technique A *ter* was characterised by greater hollowing out of the undecorated portions and therefore intermediate between Techniques A and B; A *bis* was defined as having more heavily incised contours and gouging of the undecorated areas, creating a relief in reverse. The most accomplished examples of this were termed Technique C and exemplified by the large panels which decorated Footstool IX (Fig. 32) (Hackin 1939: 87–97, pls LIV–LXII, figs 153–87). These somewhat subjective and partly overlapping terms were also adopted in the second report (Hackin *et al*. 1954) and the emphasis in both reports was the presentation of a full descriptive catalogue accompanied by photographs of the most important pieces. Duplicate scenes were not illustrated, nor were many of the smaller fragments. The standard of reproduction was outstanding for the time, but nevertheless the illustrations do not give full justice to the very high level of detail on many of the carvings, nor is there a detailed analysis of how they were made.

Fig. 30 Incised line work on a decorative panel from the upper band of Chair 2 on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974
(Kabul inv. nrs 58.1.128, 133) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

Fig. 31 Detail of Cat. 13 showing the use of scoring to key the added pigment.

A detailed analysis of the stages of working, or *châine d'operatoire*, of the Begram pieces remains undone and, judging by some recent studies of ancient Near Eastern and Late Antique ivories, would undoubtedly offer important insights into how they were carved and assembled (Caubet & Poplin 1987; Affanni 2012; Cutler 1985). A re-evaluation of the different techniques of carving was made by Mehendale in her PhD thesis (Mehendale 1997), where she distinguishes between incised and engraved, flat relief, high relief, openwork, double faced and pieces carved in the round. The incised type corresponds to Hackin's Technique A whereas the engraved version has deeper contour lines and more gouging out of the undecorated areas. The decoration on those defined as flat relief stands out against a sunken ground. The plaques with high relief also stand out against a sunken ground, but the decorative parts have been moulded. The openwork plaques are carved with a mixture of high and light relief but the undecorated areas have been completely cut away. This technique was often used for plaques carved on both sides.

Some additional comments may be added here in the light of observations on the small sample discussed in this volume as well as close examination in 2011 of pieces exhibited in the British Museum exhibition *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World*. Only ivory was suitable for openwork carving and some ivory panels have a slightly convex profile which reflects the natural curvature of the tusk (Fig. 33). Observation of the backs of some of the pieces suggests that the initial stage involved carefully

Fig. 32 Flat relief decoration on Footstool IX (after Hackin et al. 1954: vol. II, fig. 233).

Fig. 33 Section of Cat. 19 showing how it follows the natural curvature of the ivory tusk.

cutting the ivories into small sections along the direction of the grain. Diagonal rasping marks along the back edges of several seem to represent secondary filing (Fig. 34), whereas the backs of others appear to have been carefully scraped flat. Both ivory and bone were carved into flat relief panels, often with multiple strips making up a single composite plaque (cf. Hackin 1939: 67, no. 321, cat. 175 *a*, pl. XXXIX: fig. 83; Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 187, cats 80–81). Examination of the backs also shows that the grain on these runs in different directions, suggesting judicious matching of available length to the final required size of plaque. In some cases the decorative borders were incised prior to executing the figures, and there is evidence that at an early stage of manufacture the outermost incised lines were deepened until they formed a shallow groove which allowed the excess area to be easily cut or splintered away. The outlines of the human and bird figures were probably drawn on to the surface before carving so that the design could be followed without risk of distortion or spoiling. The line-work of these also appears to be cleaner than the borders, perhaps indicating that the latter were not pre-drawn and/or were carved by a different and less

Fig. 34 Diagonal rasping marks on the reverse of Cat. 13.

Fig. 35 Incised decoration on Footstool IX on display in the Kabul Museum in 1974 (Kabul inv. nr. 58.1.61) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

skilled hand. This raises the possibility of a production line where the same piece may have been worked on by different individuals and similar to the approach employed in carving stone reliefs (cf. Roaf 1983). Moreover, one scholar has remarked on how 'the high degree of linear perfection achieved in the best of the engravings ... may mirror a school of painting' (Davidson 1972: 10). In other cases the backgrounds were cut away to leave the figures or motifs in very low relief; these areas were infilled with pigment which adhered to the heavily scored background (Fig. 31), whereas in others a simple outline was considered sufficient to demarcate the design (Fig. 35). After the carving was complete, holes were drilled through the pieces for subsequent attachment to their backs. These holes cut through the incision, proving that they were done subsequently, but this raises the question as to how the composite plaques were held in place while they were being carved, and suggests that they may have been pressed down on to a firm but yielding surface or perhaps were lightly glued onto a temporary working surface. The final stage of decoration involved adding colour to many pieces and lightly polishing the unpainted surfaces.

The traces of red and black colouring on many of the incised and engraved pieces have been noted in the literature since their discovery, although none of the pigments were analysed before the present study (Hackin 1939: 14). The full extent of the use of pigments on these objects remains to be mapped but tabulation of the descriptions in the published excavation reports indicates that at least 10% of the pieces had visible remains of colour, although the actual proportion was higher judging by published and unpublished photographs (e.g., Hackin *et al.* 1954: vol. II, fig. 21) (Fig. 36). Moreover, pigments were also used on the carved borders of openwork carvings, although this was rarely noted in the published reports, and it therefore extended to all three of the main techniques described by Hackin.

Red pigment seems to have been used primarily on the slightly recessed backgrounds of many of the pieces carved in flat relief (Fig. 37) (cf. also Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 187, cats 80–81). It was also used to highlight details, such as the petals and roundels on *torana* gateways (cf. Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 195, cat. 96), jewellery and contents of vessels, or the scales and eyes of snakes on another panel, the incised bodies of which were highlighted in black (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 210, vol. II, fig. 91, cat. 191 *k*).

Black was used extensively on the Begram pieces to emphasise the incised outlines of female figures, birds and mythical creatures or as colouring on the hair. Closer examination indicates that this colouring carefully avoided the hair bands and bows, raising the possibility that these items were themselves also coloured. Although this could not be confirmed on the examples examined in the British Museum, traces of hematite were scientifically

Fig. 36 Engraved design of a 'Vase of Plenty' (purnaghata) from the lowest part of one of the uprights of Chair 1 or 4: note the extensive traces of red and a possibly second darker pigment, none of which was noted in the published report. This view was taken by Mrs Stephens when the piece was on display in Kabul Museum in 1974 but the present whereabouts of this piece is unknown.

Fig. 37 Carved bone plaque originally belonging to Sofa 34, as displayed in Kabul Museum in 1974: note the extensive remains of red pigment on the lightly recessed backgrounds (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens; Kabul inv. nr 58.1.83).

confirmed in this area on one example (Cat. **5**), supporting the hypothesis that the hair ornaments were originally highlighted with additional colours. Black pigment was also carefully applied to the pupils of the eyes, accentuating the direction of gaze of the figure (Fig. 38).

As noted earlier, coloured pigments were also extensively used to highlight details on the quatrefoil borders used to frame many of the openwork friezes. For instance, on one openwork ivory from Room 13, all of the petals on at least eight consecutive quatrefoils along the lower border were coloured red (cf. Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 190, cat. 87). A panel fragment belonging to Group 34 and showing a group of seated and dancing female figures, published by Hackin *et al*. (1954: vol. I, 181, vol. II, fig. 147, cat. 34 *a*.9), assigned to Kabul but acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1985, is decorated along the bottom with a row of rosettes which have traces of colouring: Hackin describes them as black and red whereas in his publication of the piece, Czuma (1985: 119) simply refers to the latter and describes it as 'red lacquer', probably influenced by the fact that red lacquer bowls have been excavated at Begram.[4]

The extensive use of coloured pigments was normal in antiquity, whether on architecture, furniture or small portable objects but the selection and use of colour on the Begram ivories has not attracted detailed discussion, perhaps partly because they were published as monochrome photographs and line drawings and the art-historical discussions have

[4] The bowls are Chinese (Elisseeff 1954; Pirazzoli-t'serstevens 2001). The use of the term lacquer on the ivories is ambiguous and should not be continued in the light of the scientific analyses of the ancient pigments and past conservation treatments detailed below.

Fig. 38 Black pigment was extensively used on the ivories (detail of Cat. 5).

centred on their style and date. In his catalogue description of hunting scenes on an ivory plaque belonging to Chair 2 from Room 13 (cf. Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 233–35, vol. II, figs 104–107, cat. 202), Rowland (1966: 64) remarked that the reinforcement of the double contours with red and black pigment is 'an indication of what was perhaps a general practice of the Begrām ivory-workers'. No other colours were noted in the field (Hackin 1939: 14), and it was therefore concluded by another scholar that 'no other colour seems to have been employed' (Dwivedi 1976: 88). However, when this piece was exhibited in Turin in 1961, the authors of the exhibition catalogue noted a distinction between red, black and brown pigments in the incision, although without stating exactly which areas were treated with the different colours (Gullini *et al*. 1961: 112–13, cats 44–45, pl. XVIII). In addition, a decorative strip from Group 325 with an incised design of two winged creatures separated by circular medallions was described as having traces of red on the wings, black in the eyes and green on the medallions (Hackin 1939: 75, [fig. 115], cat. 179b); a second piece depicting a leogryph was reported to be decorated with green and red pigment (Hackin 1939: 104, cat. 186q). Elsewhere, however, traces of green were simply the accidental traces of contact with corroding copper elements, as was noted in the report on the first season (Hackin 1939: 14). In one exceptional instance belonging to Group 337 from Room 10, a piece depicting a tiger was described as having a white body with black stripes (Hackin 1939: 113, cat. 191b), and the border of another piece was said to have traces of gilding (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 245, vol. II, fig. 224, cat. 221 *g*). Moreover, in other cases observed by the present author, red and dark blue, which was not previously recorded, were used alternately to colour the quatrefoils decorating the borders of openwork carvings: although no scientific analyses were conducted, the recessed backgrounds appeared to be coloured with a dark pigment (cf. Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 191, 193–94, cats 88–89, 92, 94–95). On yet other ivories it was noted that the red appeared to survive better than the blue, perhaps either because it adhered better or because the latter had been mistaken for dirt and removed during previous conservation cycles.

A growing suspicion that other pigments had been used on these and other pieces were confirmed when the present group of twenty objects was scientifically analysed in the British Museum, and it was demonstrated that at least four pigments had been employed (Passmore *et al*. 2012). These consisted of amorphous carbon (Cats **1**–**6**, **8**–**9**, **12**), vermilion (Cats **11**, **13**, **17**), indigo (Cats **9**, **13**, **17**) and hematite (Cat. **5**). Moreover, one or more other organic pigments had also probably been used, including a lake possibly coloured with madder (Cat. **13**), and a possible inorganic substrate of an applied lake pigment was identified on a second piece (Cat. **8**). Finally, black pigments were also noted on three other pieces which were not scientifically analysed (Cats **7**, **10**–**11**) and the same applies to traces of red pigment observed on another piece (Cat. **7**). These analyses suggest that the incised designs were probably always highlighted, both through the addition of common black or occasionally red pigments for the outlines and other pigments for the details, whereas openwork carvings only employed pigment for the decorative borders. The discovery that some pigments are only visible with imaging suggests that some pigments may have been lost through previous conservation attempts and/or prolonged contact with light. However, it is clear that the palette was not only more varied and sophisticated than previously suspected, but the visual impact of colour on the furniture of which they were an integral part has been under-estimated.

The bone and ivory decoration was originally either attached as overlays on, or set as plaques into, wooden furniture. Some were carved with integral tenons, either running the full length along the top and bottom or projecting upwards and downwards from each corner (Figs 39–40), but most were originally fixed with rivets, nails and long clamps which are variously described in the excavation reports as being made of bronze, copper or red copper (e.g., Hamelin 1954: 327). In the case of Group 326, three of the rivet heads were described as being in the form of a fish or the head of a lizard or monster (Hackin 1939: 82, cats 180 *e*1–*g*1, not illustrated); another still attached to the lower border of an openwork frieze from Group 327 was in the form of a six-petalled rosette (Fig. 41). Evidence for the rivets, either

Fig. 39 Ivory plaque from Room 10 with integral tenons (after Hackin 1939: no. 250, cat. 104, pl. XXIX: fig. 65).

Fig. 40 Ivory plaque from Room 10 with integral tenons at the corners (after Hackin 1939: no. 232, cat. 186 l, pl. LXVIII: fig. 212).

Fig. 41 Detail of an openwork ivory plaque from Group 327 showing the decorative copper alloy rivet (after Hackin 1939: cat. 181 j, pl LI: fig. 138).

Fig. 42 Detail of corroded copper alloy rivet from Cat. 14.

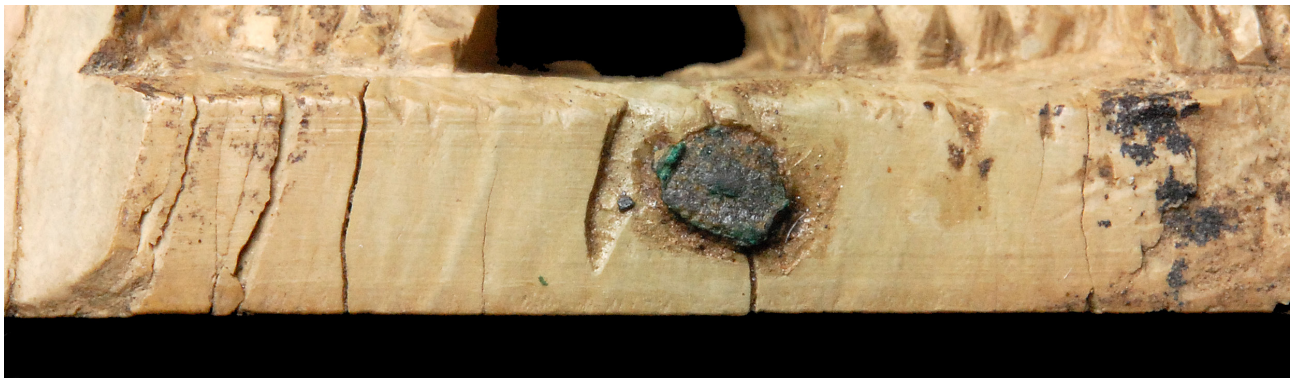

Fig. 43 Detail of corroded copper alloy rivet from Cat. 19.

in situ or as rivet holes, was present on all of the pieces examined here. The rivets varied in size slightly and were passed through pre-drilled holes. In all but one case where the rivets survive, these had rounded circular heads (Fig. 42); the exception had a flat rectangular head, and the pre-carved rectangular recess around the drill hole implies that this different type of rivet was intended for this piece (Fig. 43). The composition of twenty-four of the rivets on eight of the plaques was analysed and shown to be impure copper (see below: Table 5). This use of bright yellow shiny metal would have added another dimension to their appearance, although they are now corroded to green and pose long-term conservation challenges, as they are subject to further deterioration and exacerbate the splitting of the ivory. In addition, openwork pieces were originally backed on to shiny sheets of mica (e.g., Hamelin 1954: 327); this would have provided a dramatic colour contrast and a reflective background, and added depth to the relief carving (no traces of this mica were present on the pieces examined here).

Unfortunately, by the time of excavation the woodwork itself had totally disintegrated to a brown powder (cf. Hackin 1954: 165), and the source, species and colour are therefore unknown. It is also possible that some of the decoration was carved entirely from wood, such as Chair 55, which had fewer carved ivory plaques and lacks the brackets which originally supported the end consoles.[5] The loss of the wooden components has posed challenges in reconstructing the original appearance of many items. Some belonged to large chairs with high curving decorated backs which when originally covered with cushions must have resembled sofas, and these are represented on some of the ivories (Fig. 44). However, many of the pieces found in Room 10 and which were initially thought to be chests

[5] The strong inter-relationship of the carved ivory elements to their architectural counterparts in stone and wood has been noted above. Moreover, the ivory *yakshi* figures carved in the round have a strong resemblance to wooden sculptures, particularly when viewed in reduced light.

Fig. 44 Ensemble 161 *in situ* (after Hackin et al. 1954: vol. II, fig. 1).

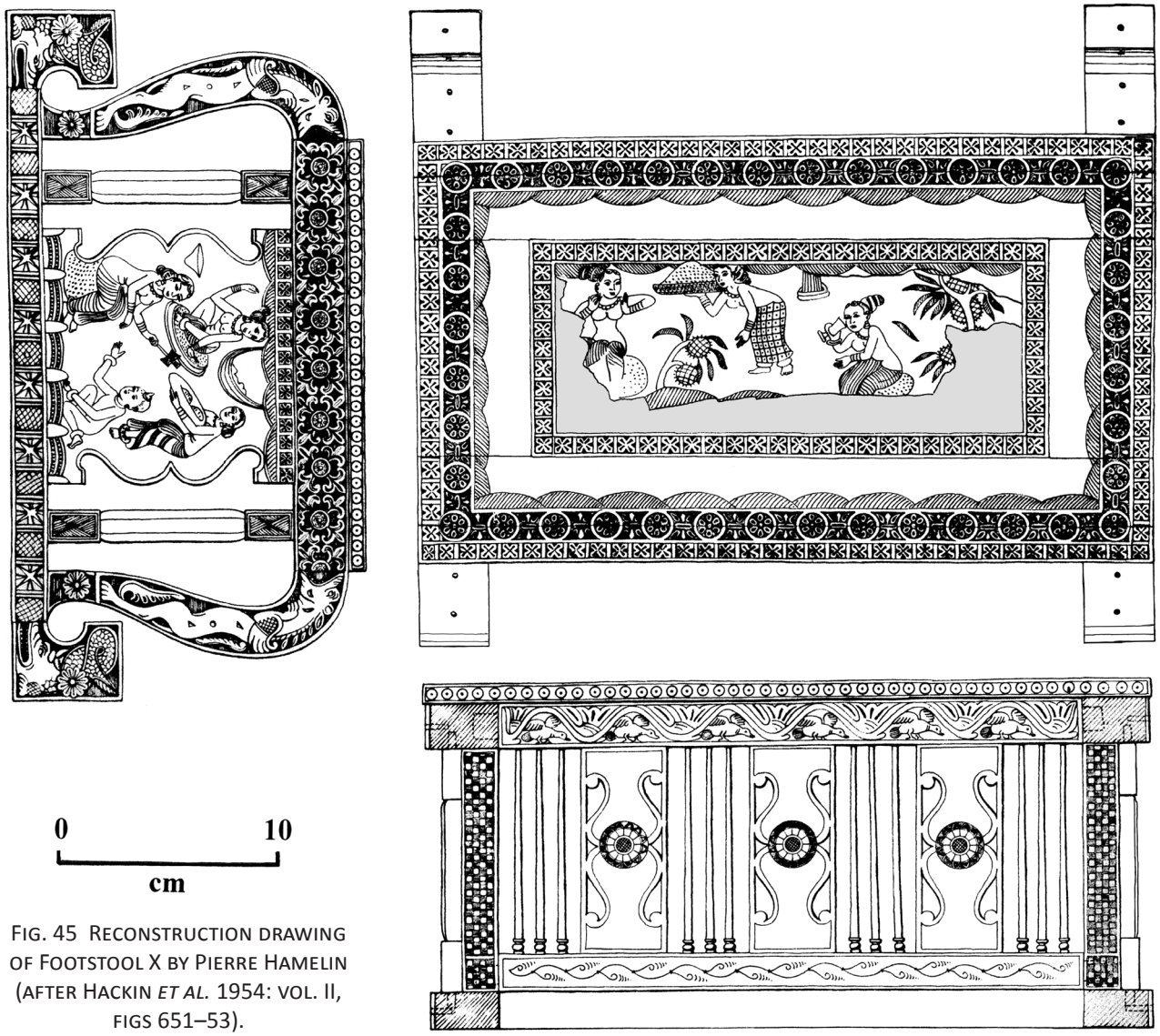

Fig. 45 Reconstruction drawing of Footstool X by Pierre Hamelin (after Hackin *et al.* 1954: vol. II, figs 651–53).

or cosmetic boxes (*coffrets*) have since been re-interpreted as footstools (*tabourets*) as there are no hinges or closing devices and the sides were not solid (Fig. 45).

The origin of these different forms and styles of decorative furniture has caused considerable disagreement since their discovery. They are stylistically Indian, and in the final report on the 1939 season, Philippe Stern published a detailed comparative analysis of the decorated pieces in the context of Indian art (Stern 1954*a*). However since then there has been much controversy over their exact place of manufacture as well as their date. One reason is that there are relatively few early pieces of decorative carved ivory or bone surviving from India itself. The exceptions include two isolated ivory female statuettes (perhaps caryatids) found at Bhokardan and Ter (Dwivedi 1976: 81–82, pls 43–44, 54–55), an ivory plaque from Kondapur (Dwivedi 1976: 82), a spacer bead found at Śiśupalgarh which is decorated with ducks and quatrefoils (Dwivedi 1976: 83, pl. 56), and several combs excavated at Taxila (Marshall 1951: vol. II, 655–56, vol. III, pl. 199, nos 20–23; Dwivedi 1976: 75, pls 47–48). The usual explanation given is that the climate is too hot and humid for survival of archaeological ivory but other factors should also be considered: carved ivories are fragile and normally only found archaeologically in sealed storerooms, wells or destruction horizons at high-status sites where there has been extensive excavation, and there have been few excavations of this type in India.

The relatively small number of early surviving Indian ivories outside Begram is deceptive. Indian literature contains frequent references to ivory in association with architectural decoration, furniture of different types (including thrones, chairs, couches and beds), chariots, litters and small portable objects (Dwivedi 1976: 18–26), an inscription on the walls of a temple in Orissa records the gift of ivory [inlaid] couches, and the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a first century Romano-Egyptian account of Red Sea and western Indian Ocean trade, not only refers to the north-west Indian coastal port of Barygaza as exporting ivory but also to the region of Dosarene

(Orissa) as a land of elephants (*Periplus* 49, 62, transl. Casson ed. 1989: 81, 89). The occasional export of carved Indian ivories is archaeologically confirmed by a caryatid figure with a Kharoṣthi fitter's mark which was found in the Via dell'Abbondanza in Pompeii (During Caspers 1981). Indian epics and Buddhist literature refer to the organisation of ivory carvers (*dantakārah*) and ivory dealers (*dantopajīvinah*) into separate guilds, an ivory carvers' bazaar at Benares, and says that some ivory carvers also worked in other materials, including shell and stone (Dwivedi 1976: 12, 18–26). The latter also helps explain the close similarity in style across media and the many similarities in detail between the scenes on the Begram carvings and Indian carved stone monuments, particularly the Kushan centre of Mathura on the river Jumna and the Great Stupa at Sanchi in Bhopal, both in north central India (Stern 1954*a*). The latter was significantly enlarged in the first century, and its massive carved stone gateways (*toranas*) resemble in outline, visual language and some details the miniature versions represented on some of the Begram pieces (Fig. 57). Moreover, the dedicatory inscription inscribed on the southern gateway refers tantalisingly to ivory carvers being involved in the construction: 'the workers in ivory [*dañta-kārehi*] of Vidiśā have done the carving' (Buhler 1894*a*: 92; 1894*b*: 378 = C.189). A North Indian school of carving would be consistent with manufacture within Kushan territories and does not exclude the possibility of some pieces being carved by itinerant workers, and the variety of styles of carving, fitters' marks, methods of attachment and styles of rivet are consistent with more than one workshop tradition.

Dating the finds

The date of the objects and the deposits in which they were found has been a subject of contention since their excavation. In his first report, the excavator Joseph Hackin (1939) proposed that the objects from Room 10 covered a wide date range between the first and fourth centuries, drawing parallels between some of the ivories (especially Footstool IX) and Gupta period art from Ajanta and Sanchi. A late dating was followed in 1974 by Elizabeth Rosen Stone who proposed that they were strongly influenced by the late Andhra tradition and she drew parallels with Buddhist sculptures at the now flooded site of Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh (southern India), produced between about AD 225 and 325 (Rosen [Stone] 1974; 1994: 91–97). She has since cited further parallels with sculptures on the stupa at Kanganhalli in Karnataka, excavated from 1994 onwards and dated between the first and early third centuries: particularly relevant to her argument are the depictions of similar hip girdles and vine scroll borders inhabited with small figures (Rosen Stone 2008).

However, following excavations of the second strongroom in 1939, Hackin revised his opinion to propose that the finds belonged to the rise of the Kushan empire in the first or second century (Hackin *et al*. 1954). After a detailed comparative analysis of motifs, personal ornaments and forms of hairstyle, Philippe Stern (1954*a*) placed most of the finds in the same period, and intermediate between the 'old style' of Sanchi and the beginning of Mathura style. He retained a later date for Footstool IX on the grounds that the creeping vine or acanthus scroll motif was not known any earlier but, soon afterwards, Otto Kurz (1954*a*) observed that there were examples of this motif at Pompeii and thus it was known in the Roman empire by AD 79. A more extreme standpoint was taken by LeRoy Davidson (1971) who argued that the origins of this motif were Indian rather than Roman and that Footstool IX might be the earliest, rather than the latest, piece in the group.

A catalogue of contents known to have been in the National Museum in Kabul prior to 1985 was published in 2006 by Francine Tissot; in that publication, she reiterated a first to second century date for the Begram ivories and not only provided new reconstructions of the furniture but also drew more detailed parallels with luxury furniture (including thrones and footstools) depicted on carvings from Mathura and Amaravati. Other research by Sanjyot Mehendale offers a detailed classification of subject matter and techniques, proposes a north-west Indian origin and suggests that itinerant craftsmen trained in or influenced by Indian styles might even have made some of the pieces at Begram itself (Mehendale 2001; 2012). Mehendale also preferred a narrower first century date for all of the pieces on the assumption that the objects are contemporary with each other regardless of provenance. This research provoked a lively riposte by Lolita Nehru (2004) who returned to Hackin's initial opinion of an early first to early third century date-range and cited evidence from excavations at Sonkh in Mathura to argue for a northern Indian origin for some pieces, while proposing a Bactrian origin for others. The archaeological discovery in 1985 at the site of Sanghol, in Punjab, of a cache of 117 carved sandstone sculptures which originally belonged to a railing running around a Kushan-period Buddhist stupa reinforces the northern Indian parallels and earlier date as the pillars are carved with almost identical subjects to the Begram furniture carvings (Gupta ed. 1985).

In short, it has been argued that some pieces may date as early as the first century BC and others as late as the third or even early fourth century AD, and this debate is continuing (e.g. Hackin 1939; Coarelli 1961; Davidson 1971; 1972; Menninger 1996; Rosen Stone 2008; 2010). Many of these arguments are based on selective art historical parallels for single objects or motifs, the date of the coins reportedly found in this area of the site, and one excavator's proposal that the period of occupation marked by this building (Begram Period II) ended when the city was sacked in 241 by the Sasanian ruler Shapur I (240–272) (Ghirshman 1946). Unfortunately, the few coins found in this area of the excavation are not well stratified, most could not be identified and many come from layers of occupation or collapse above these storerooms (Whitehouse 2001: 445–46). Moreover, the

alleged Sasanian sack is hypothetical. Rowland (1966: 28) argued that as none of the finds, in his view, dated as late as the third century then it was unlikely that a hidden store of old objects would be created and he suggested instead that it was due to internal political problems within the Kushan kingdom after the reign of Kanishka. This finds additional support as most scholars now agree that Kanishka ruled from *c*. 127–151 (Cribb 2008), which immediately post-dates the date of around AD 100–125 for the sealing of the storerooms agreed by most scholars on the basis of the most closely datable other objects found in association. These include the Chinese lacquer bowls (Elisseeff 1954; Pirazzoli-t'serstevens 2001), most of the glassware (Whitehouse 1989; 2001; 2012), the bronzes (Kunckel 1984), silversmiths' plaster casts of metalwares and many of the other three-dimensional objects (Kurz 1954*b*: 145). With the exception of the lacquerwares, ivory and bone pieces and some of the trailed glassware, most of these objects have close Roman parallels dating to the Augustan period and were imported from the Mediterranean world. The absence of any characteristically Parthian (let alone Sasanian) products of Iran or Mesopotamia is culturally and chronologically significant and implies that the route of import for the Roman goods was via the Red Sea and western Indian Ocean trade.[6] It also implies that these items were therefore exported to India and brought up to Begram from a port such as Barbarikon, at the mouth of the Indus, rather than being transported overland along the so-called 'Silk Road' (Seland 2010).

Interpreting the context

Major questions remain over the interpretation of the finds from Begram, not least why these two rooms were filled with such exotica and why they were so carefully hidden by bricking up their outer and connecting doorways. They were initially regarded as the treasury of Kushan rulers who had selected Begram as their summer capital, and that it was concealed because of an imminent Sasanian invasion. The latter idea can now be dispelled (see below) but the questions of to whom these objects belonged and why they were hidden become more acute. One alternative idea is that they belong to royal craftsmen but this is only relevant to the plaster models, and hardly applies to furniture or imported tablewares. Could they be booty? The lack of almost any intrinsically valuable objects argues otherwise. Another popular idea is that they represent the warehoused goods of 'Silk Road' merchants (Mehendale 1996; 2011). However, the 'Silk Road' is a questionable construct of nineteenth century and later thinking and is a gross simplification of the complexity of how routes change according to political events and economic opportunities. With the exception of the Chinese lacquer bowls, most objects either come from the Roman Mediterranean via maritime trade and one of the North Indian ports, or reflect Indian styles of craftsmanship and production. There is nothing that can certainly be attributed to Parthia or south-west Central Asia, and the direction of commercial contact is therefore mainly to the east and south, via passes into modern Pakistan and along the Indus, rather than directly west or north. Moreover, although parallels do exist between both technique and subject on some of the Begram ivories and a small number of ivory and bone objects excavated in Bactria, the similarities may be deceptive as the latter are relatively few and are small portable items of personal property: a fragmentary hair comb from grave 3 at Tillya Tepe (Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011: 263, cat. 180), another from a sanctuary at Dal'verzin (Pugachenkova 1978: 88–90, figs 65–67), and a third found at Kampyrtepa which was painted with a female portrait on one side and a bird on the reverse (Kalter & Pavaloi eds 1995: fig. 64). The more recent publication of a double-sided ivory plaque excavated at the small Sasanian site of Mele Heiram, near Serrakhs in southern Turkmenistan, adds another findspot for a piece of Indian ivory carving with some close similarities to the Begram pieces but unfortunately does not help in either the dating or interpretation of how these pieces circulated (Kornacka 2007). Their findspots are neither evidence for local Bactrian production as suggested by Nehru (2004), nor bulk trade as implied by Mehendale (2001: 493–96). Instead, it is more likely that these are the ancient equivalent of the small-scale trade in petty trinkets which characterised local markets and peddlars' goods in Afghanistan until recent decades and encapsulated by a description given by one late nineteenth century observer:

> 'They bring all manner of trashy goods into the country – sham jewellery, imitation *kinkob*, common *kullahs* [a local form of pointed hat], cotton velvet, cheap silks, glass beads, brass thimbles, sometimes with English inscriptions on them, and all manner of worthless-looking small articles for personal adornment. They get enormous prices for such small wares, if the intrinsic value of the articles be alone considered' (Robertson 1896: 542).

A stronger clue to the mix of cultures and media at Begram is offered by the mid-first century maritime trade manual known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (Casson ed. 1989). This details imports and exports fron ports along the Red Sea and around the western Indian Ocean and describes the north-west Indian ports of Barbarikon and Barygaza in some detail:

> 'Vessels moor at Barbarikon, but all the cargoes are taken up the river [Indus] to the king at the metropolis. In this port of trade there is a market for: clothing, with no adornment in good quantity, of printed fabric in limited quantity; multicoloured textiles; peridot (?); coral; storax; frankincense; glassware; silverware; money; wine, limited quantity. As return cargo it offers: costus; bdellium; *lykion*; nard; turquoise; lapis lazuli;

[6] In a general paper discussing trade between China and the Near East during the Sasanian and early medieval periods, A.D.H. Bivar (1970: 4–5) suggested a link between some of the cut glass found at Begram and Sasanian vessels. However, the shapes, fabrics and cutting styles are sufficiently different to exclude this possibility.

> Chinese pelts, cloth, and yarn; indigo. Those who sail with the Indian [winds] leave around July … (*Periplus* 39, transl. Casson ed. 1989: 75).
>
> 'There is in this region [of Barygaza] towards the east a city called Ozênê, the former seat of the royal court, from which everything that contributes to the region's prosperity, including what contributes to trade with us, is brought down to Barygaza: onyx, agate (?); Indian garments of cotton; garments of *molochinon*; and a considerable amount of cloth of ordinary quality. Through this region there is also brought down from the upper areas the nard that comes by way of Proklais (the Kattyburinê, Patropapigê, and Kabalitê), the nard that comes through the adjacent part of Skythia, and costus and bdellium. In this port of trade there is a market for: wine, principally Italian but also Laodicean and Arabian; copper, tin, and lead; coral and peridot (?); all kinds of clothing with no adornment or of printed fabric; multicoloured girdles, eighteen inches wide; storax; yellow sweet clover (?); raw glass; realgar; sulphide of antimony; Roman money, gold and silver, which commands an exchange at some profit against the local currency; unguent, inexpensive and in limited quantity. For the king there was imported in those times precious silverware, slave musicians, beautiful girls for concubinage, fine wine, expensive clothing with no adornment, and choice unguent. This area exports: nard; costus; bdellium; ivory; onyx; agate (?); *lykion*; cotton cloth of all kinds; Chinese [silk] cloth; *molochinon* cloth; [silk] yarn; long pepper; and items brought here from the [nearby] ports of trade' (*Periplus* 39, 47–49, transl. Casson ed. 1989: 81).

The development of Indo-Roman trade is the subject of considerable study and there is growing archaeological evidence from western India, as well as Roman ports along the Red Sea, supporting the chronology, scale and commodities involved in this trade (Tomber 2008; Seland 2010). The local taste for Italian wine is confirmed by huge quantities of Campanian amphorae from recent excavations at the site of Pattanam in Kerala which is identified as the *Periplus* port of Muziris and which was famous for its pepper (*Periplus* 54, 56, transl. Casson ed. 1989: 83, 85). The high value of the pepper traded in return is illustrated by the discovery of an Indian storage pot found *in situ* in a first century context in a temple at the Roman Red Sea port of Berenike and which proved to contain 7.5 kg of Indian peppercorns (Cappers 2006: 114). A Tamil poem refers to foreign ships 'arriving with gold and leaving with pepper' (Meile 1940), and the discovery in southern India of several hoards of silver *denarii*, mostly of Augustan and Tiberian issues, support critical statements by Tacitus (*Annales* III.53) and Pliny (*Natural History* VI.26) of the drain of Roman coin to India, even if the impact on the Roman economy has been over-stated (Turner 1989; Raschke 1978: 632). The distribution of archaeological finds in India and Pakistan is uneven and not always either quantified or closely dated. However, Roman glassware has been found at a number of sites in India, including Paithan, Nevasa, Ter and Taxila (Meyer 1992: 63–74; Stern 1991; 1992: 115–17; Marshall 1951: vol. II, 685–89, vol. III, pls 209–10), and blue glass beads and bangles found at Brahmapuri, Nevasa and Bhokardan are thought to be Roman imports (Gupta 1998: 95). The working of local semi-precious stones at Ozene (modern Ujjain) is confirmed by the excavations there which produced evidence for a flourishing agate/carnelian bead industry; the source of the raw material was probably the nearby Ratanpur area where there is a long tradition of mining the Tertiary conglomerate which contains agates in the form of amygdaloid pebbles. Evidence for the working of marine shells has been recovered at Nevasa, Nagara and Bhokardan, the waste products of conch-shell bangle working were found at Nagara and Bhokardan, and the discarded products of carving ivory bangles and rings were found in Period V at Nevasa (Gupta 1998: 95, 97–99).

From archaeological site to museum display

Following the excavations at Begram, the finds were divided between the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul and the Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet in Paris. A selection of the finds from the first season was put on display in the museum in Kabul in August 1937, only a month after the end of the season (Hackin 1939: 1). During the closing months of 1946, the finds from the second season were studied and further conserved in Kabul by Pierre Hamelin, and his observations enabled several important new reconstructions to be drawn of the large pieces of furniture (Hamelin 1954; Stern 1954*b*). The exported portion arrived in Paris in January 1947 (Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 8), and in the final excavation reports the allocation of individual pieces was indicated by the letters P and K, standing for Paris and Kabul respectively.[7] In 1957/58, the contents of the Begram and Islamic rooms in the museum in Kabul were re-designed: these marked the first substantial effort to change the displays since the museum opened in 1931 (Dupree 1987: 27; Musée National d'Afghanistan 1964: 1). The Begram room included a large selection of the ivories, including the most important pieces allocated to Kabul. Published plans and descriptions of these displays indicate that these filled as many as seven of the fifteen showcases and several of the objects published here were among those displayed here (Dupree, Dupree & Motamedi 1974: 37–50) (Fig. 46). In 1969, Dr Volker Thewalt took an extensive series of photographs inside the museum's galleries with the permission of the Director-General of Archaeology, Professor Dr Sh. Moustamindy, and posted a virtual gallery of these in 2001 in memory of his late teacher Professor Klaus Fischer, whom he accompanied on fieldwork in Sistan between 1969 and

[7] These are not always accurate however: Cats **7** and **8** are indicated in the reports as being allocated to Paris but were actually registered in the museum in Kabul, and other uncertainties were occasionally highlighted in the excavation reports (e.g., Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 187, 215, 229). Tissot (2006) has provided a full record of which pieces were registered in Kabul, although most of these were stolen during the civil war and are currently unaccounted for.

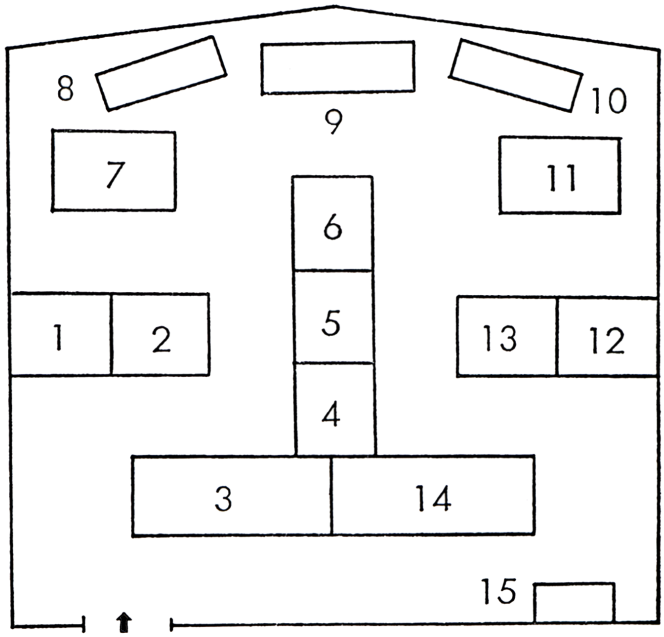

Fig. 46 Plan of the Begram Room as displayed in 1974 (after Dupree, Dupree & Motamedi 1974: 37). Ivories were displayed in Cases 1, 3–6, 9, 11 and 14.

Fig. 47 Begram ivories on display in 1974: note how they were supported by metal pins on wooden panels and missing portions were filled with white plaster. These two pieces belonged to Chair 2 (Kabul Museum inv. nrs 58.1.129–130) (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens).

1974 (http://bamiyan.de/index_e.html). These include a number of important views of pieces from Begram and are reproduced here with his kind permission. Moreover, a second series of colour slides taken in the museum in 1974 by the late Mrs J. Stephens shows how these pieces were mounted on wooden panels, and partially restored with plain white plaster (Fig. 47).[8] These are particularly important as they not only show how these

[8] I am indebted to her daughter, Cathy Stephens, and her former colleague, Andrea Rose of the British Council, for bringing these to my attention. These slides have been scanned and are now part of the archives in the British Museum with digital copies presented to the National Museum of Afghanistan.

Fig. 48 A group of four incised bone plaques with inhabited foliage designs which belonged to Footstool I (Kabul inv. nrs 59.1.8–11). This photograph was taken when they were on display in Kabul in 1974 and shows their inventory and exhibition numbers clearly marked on the wooden panel on which they were pinned (photograph: Mrs J. Stephens). This is the first recorded photograph of three of these pieces but their present whereabouts is uncertain (cf. Hackin 1939: 68, cat. nos 175 j–k; Tissot 2006: 145).

pieces were physically mounted, but they also give their (unpublished) Kabul exhibition numbers and in some cases provide the first recorded illustrations of pieces which were not photographed after excavation (Fig. 48).

During the 1960s, a series of travelling exhibitions focused on antiquities – both pre-Islamic and Islamic – from the Museum in Kabul were held in Europe, Japan and America. The first of these was held in the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin from July–August 1961 and included a small number of the Begram ivories (Gullini *et al*. 1961: 111–20, cats 44–65, pls XVIII–XXVI). Two years later, this was followed by a second exhibition in Japan which was held at the Nihonbashi Takashimaya in Tokyo (3rd–15th September), the Nanba Takashimaya in Osaka (24th September–6th October) and the Sakae-chō Maruei in Nagoya (19th–30th October 1963) (Mizuno 1963; Mizuni *et al*. 1964). Sixteen ivories were later loaned to America for a third exhibition on Afghanistan which opened at the Asia House Gallery in New York in 1966 (13th January–6th March) and continued later that year to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (25th March–16th May) and the National Collection of Fine Arts at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. (29th June–23rd August) (Rowland 1966). Most of these were soon afterwards exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in London from 6th December 1967–28th January 1968 (Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967) (Table 2). The fragility of these objects was highlighted as the original conservation treatments were found to be unsatisfactory and emergency conservation was undertaken on one piece at the Freer Gallery in Washington in 1966. The initial treatments relied on supporting backing of gauze impregnated with consolidant, often supplemented by additional coats of consolidant, but as these are superficial the underlying material remains brittle and prone to further splitting and fragmentation. The openwork ivories and composite low relief plaques remain particularly problematic.

Following their return to Kabul the ivories were brought back to the National Museum where they remained on display until the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.

Table 2 List of Begram ivories on international tour in 1966–1968 with a concordance of numbers.

Description	Kabul Museum number	Excavation reports	Exhibition (Turin)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (America)	Exhibition (London)
Two female figures standing under an arched gate and a female figure with a parrot standing under a *torana*	58.1.26	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 230, no. 200 *o.*, vol. II, figs 71, 80, 487	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 115, cat. 49, pl. XXIII	Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 56	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 54, 62, cat. 33	
Two female figures standing under a *torana*	58.1.65	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 173–74, no. 34 *b.* 5, vol. II, figs 8, 495		Mizuno 1963: 13, 21, cat. 54	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 62, cat. 31	Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967: 17, cat. 25
Female figures standing under an arched gate	58.1.68	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 175, no. 34 *d.* 5, vol. II, fig. 10	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 114, cat. 47, pls XXI–XXII				
Female figures standing under an arched gate	58.1.81	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 211, no. 191 *m.*, vol. II, fig. 94		Mizuno 1963: 13, 21–22, cat. 55	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 53, 62, cat. 32	
Feline stalking a bird	58.1.121	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 235, no. 203 *a.*, vol. II, fig. 202		Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 69			
Hunting scenes	58.1.124–25 58.1.126–27	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 233–34, nos 201 *a*.–*d*., vol. II, figs 104–107	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 111–13, cats 44–45, pl. XVIII	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cats 76–77	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 60–61, 64, cats 45–46	
Bracket with *yakshini* riding a leogryph	58.1.152	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 232, no. 201 *a*, vol. II, figs 2, 152–53, 156		Mizuno 1963: 13, 21, cat. 53	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 56, 63, cat. 40	
Female figure playing with a parrot	58.1.157	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 236, no. 205 *a.*, vol. II, fig. 139	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 115, cat. 50	Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 57			
Two female figures standing under an arched gate and a female figure standing under a *torana*	58.1.181			Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 58			
Caparisoned elephant and warrior	58.1.201	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 196, no. 150 *r*. 4 bis., vol. II, fig. 101		Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 78	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 58, 63, cat. 39	
Two birds	58.1.204	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 198, no. 150 *z*. 4, vol. II, fig. 200	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 116, cat. 53, pl. XXVI	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 70	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 60, 63–64, cat. 44	

Description	Kabul Museum number	Excavation reports	Exhibition (Turin)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (America)	Exhibition (London)
Two felines hunting birds	58.1.219	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 236, no. 203 *e*.	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 116, cat. 52, pl. XXVI	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 68	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 61, 63, cat. 43	
Frieze with seated female figures in floral scroll	58.1.256; 58.1.258	Hackin *et al*. 1954: no. 211 [part]		Mizuno 1963: 13, 24, cats 83–84		Rowland 1966: 63, cats 41–42	
Peacock and an aśoka tree	59.1.7	Hackin 1939: 69, no. 321, cat. 175 z, pl. XLII, fig. 94	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 117, cat. 55	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 74			
Seated female figure holding a cup (**Cat. 2**)	59.1.12	Hackin 1939: 68, no. 321 cat. 175 w, pl. XL, fig. 84		Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 72			
Seated female figure talking (**Cat. 1**)	59.1.16	Hackin 1939: 68–69, no. 321, cat. 175 *x*, pl. XL, fig. 85	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 117, cat. 54, pl. XXV	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 73	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 59, 62, cat.35	Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967: 17, cat. 23
Tree in bloom	59.1.17	Hackin 1939: 68, no. 321, cat. 175 *v*, pl. XLII, fig. 97	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 117, cat. 56	Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 75[9]			
Vine-scroll	59.1.19			Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 80			
Scroll of *aśoka* flowers and leaves	59.1.24			Mizuno 1963: 13, 24, cat. 81			
Bull	59.1.55		Gullini *et al*. 1961: 118, cat. 59				
Crouching lion	59.1.57	Hackin 1939: 117, no. 343, cat. 199 *b*, pl. LXXVII, fig. 235 [bottom]	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 117, cat. 58	Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 63	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 55, 62, cat. 36	
Squatting *yaksha*	59.1.67	Hackin 1939: 54, no. 256 cat. 110, pl. XXXII, fig. 71		Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 61			
Row of mythical winged animals and lotus medallions	59.1.76			Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 79			
Crouching bull	59.1.99	Hackin 1939: 117, no. 344, cat. 200 *b*, pl. LXXVI, fig. 232		Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 59			
Four birds with flowering sprigs	59.1.129			Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 71			
Standing female figure	59.1.135			Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 60	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 55, 62, cat. 34	Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967: 17, cat. 22

[9] This publication gives the Kabul number as 59.1.717 but this appears to be a typographic error.

Description	Kabul Museum number	Excavation reports	Exhibition (Turin)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (Tokyo)	Exhibition (America)	Exhibition (London)
Triton between two *makaras*	59.1.181	Hackin 1939: 102, no. 332 cat. 186 *a*, pl. LXV, fig. 199; Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. II, fig. 522		Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 64	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 57, 62–63, cat. 37	
Cross-legged boy holding a pair of cymbals [double-sided]	59.1.182	Hackin 1939: 55, no. 265 cat. 119, pl. XXXII, fig. 72;		Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 62 [illustrates reverse side]			
Three female figures playing with balls	59.1.219	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 213, no. 191 *t*., vol. II, figs 26, 662	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 113, cat. 46, pl. XX				
Female figure holding a lotus flower	59.1.238	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 224, no. 197 *a*., vol. II, figs 43, 467	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 116, cat. 51, pl. XXIV	Mizuno 1963: 13, 22–23, cat. 66			
Bird and a female figure combing her hair [double-sided]	59.1.250	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 218, no. 192 *j*., vol. II, fig. 49		Mizuno 1963: 13, 23, cat. 67			
Birds holding entwined snakes in their beaks	59.1.258						Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967: 18, cat. 28
Miniature railing with lotus medallions	59.1.259	Hackin *et al*. 1954: vol. I, 169, no. 34 *e*. 3	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 115, cat. 48	Mizuno 1963: 13, 24, cat. 82			Barrett & Pinder-Wilson 1967: 18, cat. 27
Squatting *yaksha* supporting a jar of abundance on his head	59.1.274	Hackin 1939: vol. I, 191, no. 150 *e*. 3, vol. II, figs 178, 533	Gullini *et al*. 1961: 117, cat. 57	Mizuno 1963: 13, 22, cat. 65	Mizuno *et al*. 1964	Rowland 1966: 57, 63, cat. 38	

War, destruction and theft

In April 1979 the contents of the National Museum in Kabul were packed and moved for temporary storage in the large deserted house of minister Sardar Mohammed Naim Khan in the Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul. The museum building in Darulaman was then turned into an annexe to the Ministry of Defence in the Darulaman Palace as the surrounding area became a military zone. However, in the following year the museum collections were taken back to Darulaman, the museum re-opened and it continued to operate throughout the period of Soviet occupation of the country.

In 1989 the museum was officially closed and the collections divided between the Ministry of Information and Culture, Central Bank vaults under the Presidential Palace, underground stores below the museum and a fourth location (Grissmann 2014). Those items which were hidden off-site included items of precious metal and a small selection of objects formerly on display. They include the Tillya Tepe grave-goods, gold vessels from Tepe Fullol, and selected items from Ai Khanum and Begram, including the ivory furniture elements recently exhibited at different world venues as part of the latest travelling exhibition (Hiebert & Cambon eds 2011). Between 1992 and 1994, Kabul became the epicentre of a violent civil war and the museum building was badly destroyed by rockets and artillery as it lay near the front-line and was occupied by government forces (Fig. 49). Moreover, while it was off-limits to museum staff, the museum was ransacked by the occupying forces and an estimated three quarters of the collection was either stolen or destroyed. Several attempts have been made to create an

Fig. 49 The scale of destruction is evident even today from the ruins of the former Darulaman palace and later Defence Ministry which is situated next to the (now restored) Kabul Museum (photograph: St J. Simpson).

inventory of what remains but until this task is completed the full extent of the loss is difficult to comprehend.[10] A catalogue of the highlights of the collection was published by UNESCO but unfortunately without any indication as to which pieces were accounted for and which were missing (Tissot 2006).

However, it is clear that a very large proportion of the Begram ivory collection was stolen from the National Museum during this turbulent period of the civil war. An illustration of the scale of loss is offered by the fact that one individual saw as many as 107 of the Begram ivories in a private collection in Peshawar in February 1996. At least some of these had already appeared in that city by the autumn of 1994 when nine of them were seen wrapped in pink toilet-paper in a re-used shoe-box, 'held together by strips of Sellotape', openly stated as originating from the Kabul museum and in one case dropped, resulting in it splitting into two (Eskenazi 2002). Another press story is quite explicit on how they were stolen:

> 'during the fighting, they were stolen by the Hizbe Wahadat and the Hizbe Islami parties guided by expert Pakistani and Afghan dealers. These two opposition parties held the area around the museum after Kabul fell to the mujahideen. The ivories were flown to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, into the hands of their ally, Uzbek warlord Gen. Rashid Dostum. From there they reached Peshawar and later Islamabad and Europe. Twelve statues were sold to a London dealer for $300,000. The dealer in turn sold the statues to a Japanese collector for $600,000. Several dozen ivories are still available in Islamabad. A Pakistani art historian who has seen and authenticated some of the statues says the asking price is $35,000 each' (Rashid 1995: 61).

Dupree (1996: 47) cites a report in the Karachi-based *Herald Magazine* in September 1995 which quoted the late General Nasirullah Babar, then the Federal Interior Minister in Pakistan, who boasted that he had purchased one piece for $100,000 'which he would return when the political situation in Afghanistan had stabilized' and that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto intended to purchase others so that they could be 'returned to the Afghans as a gift as soon as peace is established'. The pledges have yet to be made good despite an official request by Dr Sayed Makhdum Rahin, Minister of Information and Culture, which was reported in the Afghan state-run

[10] A small number of objects were mislaid or stolen on at least two other occasions. As early as autumn 1946, when the finds from the second season were being conserved and studied in Kabul, a small part of a high relief border belonging to Chair 34 and representing the lower portion of a bird is recorded as going missing (Hackin et al. 1954: vol. I, 183, vol. II, fig. 176, cat. 34 a.11a). During the 1960s, two small ivory plaques belonging to Group 334 in Room 10 and representing individual female figures were stolen (Tissot 2006: 264: cf. Hackin 1939: 112, fig. 221). Moreover, in 1985, The Cleveland Museum of Art purchased four Begram ivories, including one which had previously been published by Hackin (1954: vol. I, 181, vol. II, fig. 147, cat. 34 a.9) which had been allocated to Kabul after excavation (Czuma 1985: 118–20, cats 47A–D = inv. nrs 85.103–85.106). They are said to have previously been part of a collection formed by the late Frederick Mayer but no further details are given as to how or when they entered this collection.

newspaper, *Hewad*, 1st January 2006, and followed by a counter-report in the newspaper *Payam-e Mojahed* on 4th January that General Babar regarded his collection as legally acquired and belonging to Pakistan.[11] More details about these and other stolen or illicitly exported antiquities are reported in an interview with the late Professor A.H. Dani who, in response to a question as to how many ivory pieces from the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul were smuggled into Pakistan via Mazar-i Sharif and the tribal areas, replied:

> 'In the first instance, I counted eight ivories. Naseerullah Babar, the ex-interior minister, called me up and brought the ivories to me. I showed him Dupree's book [*Guide to the Kabul Museum*] and identified some of the pieces reproduced in it. More material kept flowing in, in bits and pieces: a big ivory lid was brought to my house by Naseerullah Babar. He managed to get approval from the Government of Pakistan (GOP) that such material should not leave the region and that funds for its purchase should be made available. Asa result the Government of Pakistan earmarked a sum of three crore rupees, an equivalent to nearly 30 million rupees. A meeting was held at the Ministry of Culture to fix the price of this lid. I also informed SPACH and asked its chairman, Pierre Lafrance, to contact UNESCO in Paris. SPACH agreed to contribute a nominal amount. The GOP approved the purchase, but unfortunately the price offered was Rs 500,000, whereas the price demanded was Rs 3,000,000. For a long time after that, the ivory lid remained in the tribal area. As for the other ivory pieces, they were sent across to London, and according to my information, about five or six of them were purchased by an Arab businessman. They should be in the safe custody of a bank in London now. Apart from the ivories, I also saw several other objects from Afghanistan: a Shiva figure in marble, inscriptions and sculptures. In fact, I saw many sculptures in Quetta at the house of a well-known Afghan leader who invited me to identify them. Some of these sculptures bore serial numbers from the Kabul Museum, while many others did not. According to him, he had more material in houses in Karachi and London. When the police raid due to charges of drug-peddling harboured against him was conducted, sculptures not drugs were found in abundance' (quoted by Akhtar & Neubacher 1998: 3).

[11] British Museum/Department of the Middle East archive/Grissmann papers.

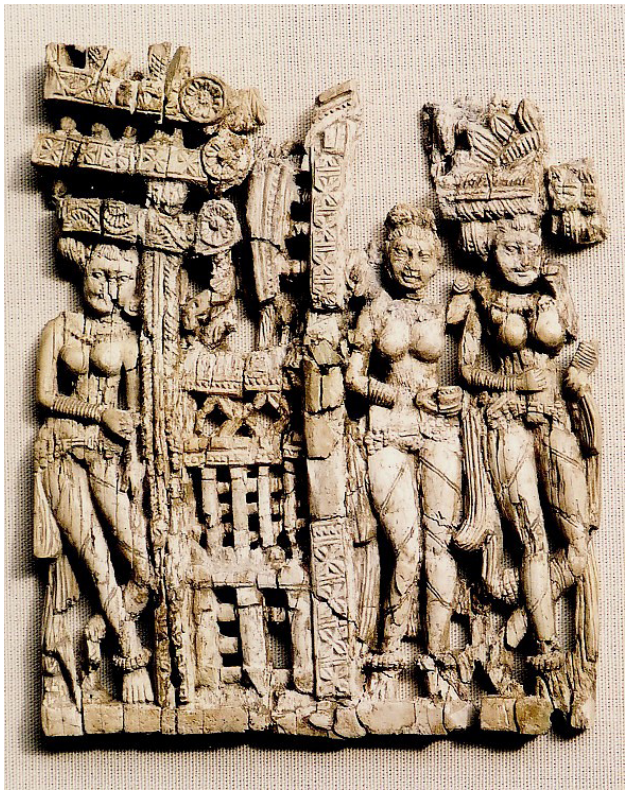

Fig. 50 Ivory belonging to the inside face of the back of Sofa 34, identified on the market in Peshawar and returned by SPACH to Kabul (Kabul Museum, inv. nr. 58.1.20 = K.P. Beg. 415.155) (photograph: Paul Bucherer-Dietschi).

Fig. 51 Ivory belonging to an isolated panel showing a female figure playing with a parrot, identified on the market in Peshawar and returned by SPACH to Kabul (Kabul Museum inv. nr. 58.1.15, K.P. Beg. 579.319) (photograph: Paul Bucherer-Dietschi).

Figs 52–53 The newly conserved objects arrive in the display space and are inspected by members of the Afghan courier delegation prior to condition reporting and placing on display in March 2011.

In an interview for a programme entitled *Kieta Kokuho – Senka no naka no Afghanistan* ['Missing National Treasures in Afghanistan'], which was made by the Tokyo Video Center and aired by NHK on 20th May 2001, General Babar went so far as to claim that all of his collection comes 'from Pakistan in 1960'. The same programme went on to interview the formerly London-based dealer in Asian art, Alexander Götz, who admitted that he once saw ivories from the Kabul museum but

> 'there were not any museums that wanted to purchase the ivory works even if it meant saving it. It was clear that those came from Kabul Museum. Currently, in England, it is very difficult to purchase such thing. Therefore these ivory works went to Japan. Japanese have different prospects toward such things'.

Recovery and return

In April 1997, two of the stolen Begram ivories were identified on the market in Peshawar and were acquired on behalf of the Kabul Museum by the newly formed Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Heritage [SPACH], temporarily held in the self-styled Afghan-Museum-in-Exile in Bubendorf, Switzerland, and returned to the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul ten years later (Figs 50–51) (Grissmann 2006: 73). A second group of pieces, including several originally belonging to Footstool IX, was acquired in London and deposited in the Musée Guimet where they were temporarily exhibited in 2006 prior to conservation and future return to Kabul (Jarrige & Cambon *et al*. 2006: 220–21, cats 153–55; Cambon & Jarrige *et al*. 2007: 234–35, cats 153–55).

Fig. 54 Temporary display in the British Museum exhibition Afghanistan: *Crossroads of the Ancient World* (2011).

Fig. 55 Back in Kabul: the objects are carefully unpacked as their safe return is announced (photograph: Andy Miller).

The most recent opportunity for recovering more of these stolen objects was afforded during the planning and negotiation stages for the British Museum exhibition of those objects from the collection of the National Museum of Afghanistan which had gone on tour abroad in 2006. With the full support of Dr Masoudi, the Director of the National Museum in Afghanistan, the objects discussed here were very generously acquired and presented by a private individual living in London on the understanding that they would be displayed first in the British Museum prior to return to Kabul at a time of Dr Masoudi's choice. They were accordingly transferred to the British Museum in late 2010 for safe-keeping, scientific analysis, conservation and then temporary display from 3rd March–17th July 2011 as part of the special exhibition *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* which was generously supported by Bank of America Merrill Lynch (Figs 52–54). This addition to the exhibition generated considerable additional media and public interest (Battersby 2011; Beaumont 2011; Jury 2011; Simpson 2011*a*; 2011*b*) and the story was subsequently summarised in *The Art Newspaper* (Bailey 2011).

While in the British Museum but, prior to display, and again with the permission of the Afghan authorities in Kabul, the pieces were subject to non-destructive scientific examination prior to a further campaign of conservation made possible by funding from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Programme. The primary aim of the scientific examination was to assist

this conservation process by establishing the composition of the often thick layers of restoration and conservation materials which had been built up on the objects over time, some of which had aged and altered and were causing damage. Whilst in the laboratories the pieces were also imaged, the base materials identified and remnant pigment layers investigated, allowing partial reconstruction of the original polychromy.

The results are of major importance. They not only allow a much deeper appreciation of the quality of the finds from Begram and the holdings of the National Museum of Afghanistan, but also provide the first scientific identifications of the pigments used and throw important new light on the extent of polychromy on Indian ivory and bone carving at this period. Some of the initial observations were incorporated into a small illustrated publication published to accompany their display and illustrated with new photographs taken immediately prior to the new conservation (Simpson 2011*a*). A more detailed scientific publication followed soon after their safe return to Kabul (Passmore *et al*. 2012).

The present publication sets out all of the analyses and conservation treatments, adds new observations on the manufacture of some of the pieces and provides new photographs of all of the objects after conservation, including numerous details and views of the backs. This is intended as the final report for public record, and a concordance of numbers allows cross-reference to previous publications (Table 3). However, this is more than an analysis of these ancient pieces as it is also a case-study of their complex conservation history: the evidence for multiple treatments and layers of consolidation and moments of repair offer a timeline of different types of and approaches to treatment, from the field to the museum via Kabul and the art market. They are connected by a common concern that the objects themselves are of the utmost fragility as well as the most exquisite beauty.

When they were exhibited at the British Museum in 2011, many speculated what their future would hold. Some suggested that they join their surviving counterparts and tour the world, but in discussions with Kabul we agreed that the most appropriate gesture would be to restore them to public display in their own museum. The moment arrived in the summer of 2012 when they were carefully condition photographed and packed by colleagues in the Department of the Middle East and flown to Kabul via Camp Bastion on military flights organised by the British Armed Forces. These objects, together with other antiquities and publications, were immediately collected in person by Dr Masoudi and some of his staff, unpacked and displayed at a press preview on 5th August 2012 (Simpson 2012; 2014) (Fig. 55).

Their safe return to their legal owners now highlights the question as to if and when other missing pieces will re-emerge from other collections and be similarly returned to the National Museum of Afghanistan. When they do, as some surely will, they should be re-examined and conserved in the light of the discoveries and treatments published here for public record.