Book Reviews

Regional History and the Coin Finds from Assur From the Achaemenids to the Nineteenth Century, by S. Heidemann and K. Butcher. Harrassowitz Verlag 2017. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 148. 174pp., 2 diagrams, 15 ill., 2 maps, incl. 31 plates, 5 tables. Hardback 82.00 €. ISBN-13: 9783447107617.

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As the title indicates, the book delivers an inventory of numismatic finds from this site dating from its years as a capital of the Achaemenid Empire up to its days in an Ottoman-era province. The coins discussed within are accurately identified using the latest references and the plates illustrate more than 500 of them. The title and contents give no hint as to the fascinating story behind this material, however. As Stefan Heidemann details in the front matter, the German archaeological expedition at Assur came to an end on April 1, 1914. The expedition's split of the finds was then sent to Berlin, where the material was divided between two institutions. The excavation records were archived in the Museum für Ur- und Frühgeschichte and the finds themselves stored at the Vorderasiatisches Museum. Both sets of evidence survived the Great War which began weeks later. Following World War II, however, these materials were separated by the split into East and West Berlin. Only after reunification was an integrated study of these materials made possible by the efforts of many individuals and institutions. In short, one could say this book was over one-hundred years in the making. It is not only a product of large-scale, multi-person collaborative efforts, however. It is also an example of what could be called forensic numismatics, by which I mean that Butcher and Heidemann had to recover information from some of the original evidence which was no longer available for direct examination. In this case, more than one hundred of the excavated coins had gone missing, and the identification and information of many of them could only be gleaned by careful examination of the photographic plates dating from the early twentieth century. Only then could this decades-old archaeological evidence be incorporated into modern scholarship and made available to wider audiences.

As interesting as that story is, a review must concentrate on the book and its contents. In short, this is a useful resource produced by two excellent numismatic scholars. Following the preface and overview, the rest of the book is divided into the following major subsections:

Keywords: numismatics, Assur, Achaemenids, Sasanids

Butcher's discussion and catalog of the coins from the Achaemenid through the Arsacid periods; Heidemann's discussion and catalog of coins from the Sasanid era up through the nineteenth century CE; a bibliography; three concordances (the Assur find numbers, the Assur coin numbers, and the grid squares from the excavation); and finally, 31 plates.

Butcher provides a thorough contextualization of the Achaemenid-Arsacid coins, and his catalog discusses and identifies where possible 526 single find coins, 126 of which are known only from the earlier photographs. He also provides a description of nine hoards, two of which were previously published, ranging in size from two to 154 coins. Images of these coins are found on plates 1–27.

In what is likely the most important section of this book for readers of this journal, Heidemann's discussion of the material from the Sasanids through the nineteenth century expands upon two of his studies from an earlier phase of this long-term collaborative effort: Heidemann 1996, *al-ʿAqr, Assur in islamischer Zeit*, in Karin Bartl, Stefan R. Hauser (eds.), *Continuity and Change in Northern Mesopotamia from the Hellenistic to the Early Islamic Period* (Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient 17), Berlin, 259–286; and Heidemann and Peter A. Miglus 1996, *Fundmünzen aus Assur und Lokalgeschichte in islamischer Zeit*, in Peter A. Miglus (ed.), *Das Wohngebiet von Assur, Stratigraphie und Architektur* (WVDOG 93), Berlin, 353–376. A total of 148 single find coins are catalogued, as well as a hoard of twenty-four gold dinars from the middle Islamic period. These coins are illustrated in plates 27–30. Finally, as Heidemann mentions in an “exkurs” (pp. 57–59), the ancient site of Assur was known as al-ʿAqr during the Middle Islamic period, and occasionally minted coins for the state which ruled it. As examples of these coins are rare, Heidemann has provided information about sixteen additional examples of these coins derived from other sources (plate 31).