

The little brother mentality that dominated the course of the GDR's political life saw the eventual liberalization of the film industry after the Soviet Union initiated many reforms under the leadership Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985. As Berghahn points out, "Everywhere filmmakers demanded that films which had been banned, often decades ago, be taken off the shelves and shown at last." State censorship failed to create the utopian vision as prescribed through Socialist Realism.

Berghahn attempts a comprehensive overview of the DEFA's cinematic works, as they were produced in the communist state. The use of comparative figures by Berghahn suggests, however, that the industry was relatively weak next to the West and other eastern satellites. Nevertheless, that fact does not detract from the richness of the DEFA's productions; these films were representative of a unique culture. That culture, on the other hand, essentially outgrew the structure provided in the DEFA, and the GDR, as a whole, crumbled soon.

—Nick Szamet

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Frank L. Holt. *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Pp. 260. Paper \$14.95.

Frank L. Holt, an ancient history scholar renowned for his expertise on Alexander the Great, uses the Afghan exploits of the world's greatest general to paint a sobering picture of what today's troops can expect as they traverse the same hostile landscape. Written just after the U.S. had invaded Afghanistan as a result of the 9-11 attacks, this work aims to place the present in a broader historic perspective, arguing that our recent invasion is not actually a new war but simply a continuation of the same war Alexander started in 329 BCE. He begins by quoting Alexander's call to arms against Bactria (the ancient name for Afghanistan), which imbues a strange sense of déjà vu in the reader; perhaps President Bush's speechwriters used Alexander's rhetoric for inspiration. Our army is similar to Alexander's in terms of superior sophistication and logistics, yet neither army has found those to be victorious traits. Part of the difficulty in conquering Afghanistan is the land itself; an

inhospitable terrain with arid summers and cruel winters, it has the added problems of mutable borders and no clear center or heartland where a central power reigns. With little arable land, and near constant instability, the people are perpetually impoverished, and declare more loyalty to a local tribe than any official government. In Afghanistan, just one remaining warlord will perpetuate and expand the guerilla warfare, described by the author as “The Hydra Heads of Bactria.” These are all problems that no invading force has been able to solve.

The reader learns about these timeless issues not from a Coalition status report, but from the meticulously researched adventures of Alexander the Great. Rather than taking a continual comparative approach, Holt only references the modern experience when the similarities are particularly intriguing, such as comparing Bactrian warlords to modern Afghan mujahideens, and today’s terrorists to Alexander himself, as seen from the Bactrian point of view. In other places, he simply tells Alexander’s story, leaving the reader to draw comparisons. Both approaches, along with witty and colorful prose, work well in keeping the reader’s interest throughout.

From Plutarch’s anecdotal biography of Alexander, to obscure kings captured eternally on ancient Greek coins, to tree-ring dating, Holt’s ancient sources cover both the familiar, and the unexpected. He also makes a formidable effort to stay as current as possible, using the most recent sources available, including first-hand accounts of the war in Afghanistan. The wide range of sources used adds detail yet accessibility to antiquity, achieving his goal to write both for scholars and the general public alike.

Lacking a crystal ball to accurately predict the future, Holt instead grounds his argument in the past. At its heart, this book is another chance for the author to retell Alexander’s tale, and as such can be added to the long list of works on a similar subject, both by him and others. Yet, by looking at Alexander through the eyes of unfolding history, Holt has found a new way to inject life into an old subject.

—*Dana Blenkin*