

СОБЫТИЯ

Under the spell of Mount Ararat – Treasures from ancient Armenia *Exhibition at the Drents Museum (Assen, Netherlands)*

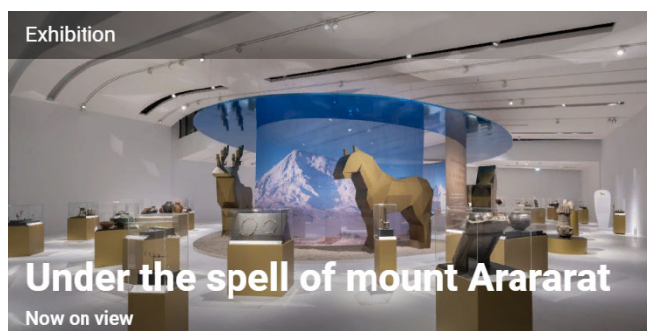
The Drents Museum has a tradition of organising major international archaeological exhibitions. Our aim is to give our visitors an impression of other, often non-Western cultures, while providing a context for our own collection of archaeological finds (mostly from the province of Drenthe), which ranks among the most important in the Netherlands. By presenting stories and objects in an unexpected spatial setting we try to stir our visitors' minds and hearts. Over the years we have exhibited archaeological finds from, among other areas, China (Terracotta army), Israel (Dead Sea scrolls), Guatemala (Mayas), Georgia (Legend of the Golden Fleece), Iran (Cradle of civilisation) and Sudan (Black pharaohs).



Two years ago I saw an exhibition featuring solely archaeological highlights in the Iranian capital Tehran. As I don't speak Farsi, my colleague at the National Museum explained to me that it was a selection from the collection of the History Museum of Armenia in Yerevan. Back in the Netherlands I immediately contacted that museum's director, Grigor Grigoryan. And shortly after, I travelled to Yerevan together with Wijnand van der Sanden, curator of our archaeological collection, to explore the possibilities of organising an exhibition. The entire collection proved to be even more impressive than what I'd already seen in Tehran. Together with the Armenian museum's archaeologists we put together the exhibition 'Under the spell of Mount Ararat – Treasures from ancient Armenia'. Although it does not lie in Armenia, Mount Ararat is a sacred mountain that is inextricably linked with the smallest republic of the South Caucasus.

On the basis of around 160 valuable archaeological objects, the exhibition (and also this book) takes visitors on a journey through Armenia's rich history – from the Stone Age, in which Homo erectus travelled from Africa to Eurasia and settled in what is now Armenia, via the first important leaders who were buried in monumental barrows in the 2nd millennium BC and the kingdom of Urartu, to the vast realm of king Tiridates III (AD 287-330), who made Christianity Armenia's state religion. Gold and silver ornaments, weapons, pottery and bronze figurines in the shape of animals and warriors provide an impression of the archaeological wealth of Armenia. Almost all the objects are on display for the first time in the Netherlands. Among the exhibits is also a relic of Noah's Ark from Etchmiadzin Cathedral, the oldest cathedral in the world. Saint Jacob of Nisibis is said to have obtained this piece of wood at the foot of Mount Ararat in the 4th century AD. An extraordinary exhibit!

This exhibition was originally scheduled to take place in the spring and summer of 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to postpone it. I'm delighted that we are able to show it this year instead. I would like to thank former director Grigor Grigoryan for his confidence and cooperation in this project, and his successor Davit Poghosyan for the way in which he has facilitated the implementation of the postponed exhibition. I owe a special word of thanks to the archaeologist Wijnand van der Sanden, who composed the exhibition and the book, and for whom this project coincided with the start of his retirement.



Harry Tupan
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