

This book is the result of the work of many people

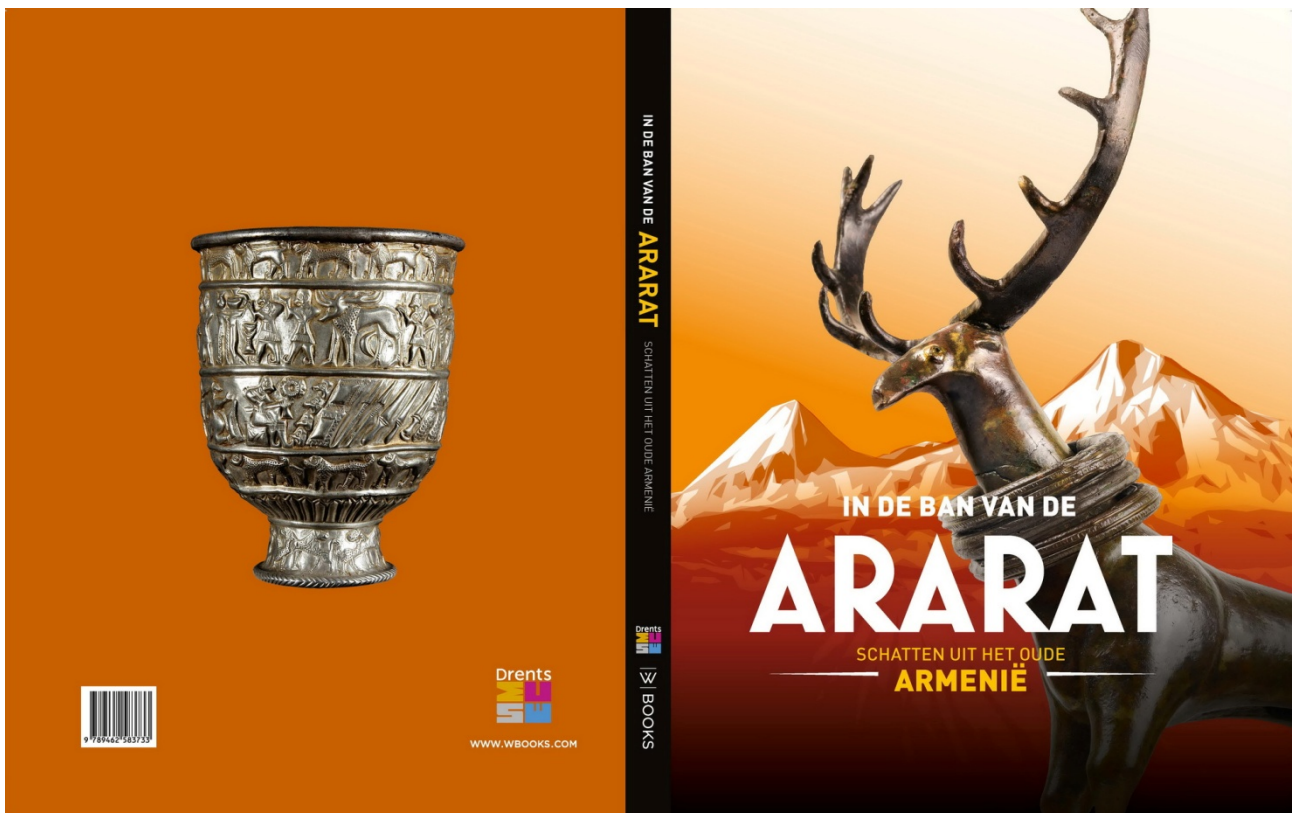
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During my study of art history and classical archaeology at the University of Nijmegen I became impressed by the early Christian church architecture of Armenia. The churches in the black and white photographs in the manuals of those days radiated a power and beauty that evoked in me a desire to visit them. But I didn't get round to it at the time. The following years, all my time and attention were taken up by the pre- and protohistory of Western Europe. But in 2018, while preparing an exhibition of the archaeology of pre-Christian Armenia, I got the opportunity to see the early churches of Vagharshapat (Saint Hripsime), Yereruyk and Zvartnots with my own eyes - an unforgettable experience bringing things full circle after almost forty years.

At the same time, a tour of the archaeological department of the History Museum of Armenia (HMA) that was established in Yerevan in 1919 opened up an entirely new world to me. The museum provides an impressive survey of the archaeological heritage of Armenia. That heritage is

largely unknown in the West. The exhibition 'Under the spell of Mount Ararat – Treasures from ancient Armenia' presents an imposing selection of the objects that have come to light by chance or in excavations in the course of the last century. The emphasis is on the period ranging from the Middle Bronze Age until the reign of Tiridates III, the king who introduced Christianity in his realm in the early 4th century. In this timespan of just under three thousand years the seemingly egalitarian Early Bronze Age Kura-Araxes culture gave way to a world of chiefdoms whose leaders were buried in barrows accompanied by valuable objects. In the 8th century BC these communities were incorporated in a kingdom that evolved and expanded from the shore of Lake Van in what is now eastern Turkey. This kingdom, which the Assyrians called 'Urartu', covered a vast area comprising what are now Armenia, eastern Turkey and northwestern Iran. It is even mentioned in the Old Testament, where it is referred to as the 'kingdom of Ararat' ('Urartu' and 'Ararat' are closely related words).



After the fall of this militaristic state, the kingdom of Armenia evolved in more or less the same area, in an extremely complex play of political powers. This kingdom enjoyed its heyday during the

reign of king Tigranes the Great. The majestic twin-peaked, more than 5000 metres high Mount Ararat will have had a special spiritual meaning for the

ancient Armenians, and without doubt also for the Urartians and their prehistoric predecessors.

Many of the objects we have on loan from the HMA are illustrated in this book. Various colleagues, archaeologists and an ancient historian have been invited to provide surveys of the periods from which the many finds date, in order to place the objects in a cultural context and offer museum visitors an impression of the societies in which they originated.

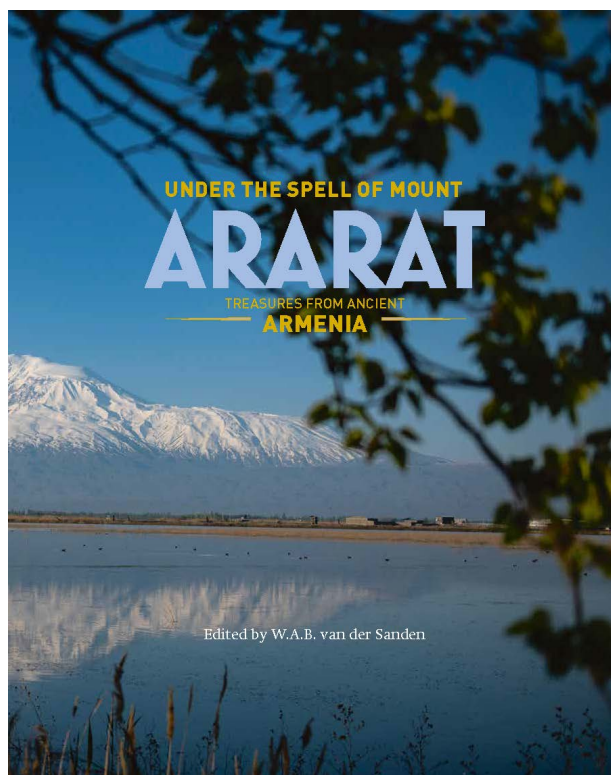
Yet other colleagues have been approached to discuss remarkable groups of finds or specific monuments in specialist features.

My aim in composing this book was to make connections between the Netherlands and Armenia where possible (the presumed Armenian origins of Saint Servatius, the Dutch archaeologist Yannick Raczynski-Henk's annual Armenian expeditions, Hans Piena's prestigious restoration assignment, etcetera). One aspect in which 'Armenia' and 'the Netherlands' differ markedly is the role of animals in the material culture. We have only a handful of representations of animals from Dutch prehistory, whereas we know of thousands of such representations from Armenian prehistory – on rock faces and boulders, on pottery and made of pottery, and in metal, stone and bone. We see goats, snakes, fish, red deer, cattle, lions, (water) birds, horses, bears and even a tapir.

Relatively little is known with certainty about any deeper meanings of the representations.

This book is the result of the work of many people. Above all, I am most grateful to the HMA. This exhibition could never have been organised without the generous attitude of our colleagues there. I would like to thank Grigor Grigoryan for the very warm welcome with which he received me, and the good cooperation we enjoyed. I also thank Father Asoghik Karapetyan, director of the museums of the Holy See of Etchmiadzin, for his hospitality during my visit.

I owe many thanks to my co-authors: Paul Beliën, Bleda Düring, Wouter Henkelman, Leendert Louwe Kooijmans, Jona Lendering, Diederik Meijer, Hans Piena, Yannick Raczynski-Henk and Wil Roebroeks. Yannick's extensive 'Armenian network' was of great benefit to me.



And then there are the colleagues who provided valuable advice or made representations of their excavations and/or finds available: Dan Adler, Ruben Badalyan, Miqayel Badalyan, Christine Chataigner, Carol van Driel, Ellery Frahm, Boris Gasparyan, Phil Glauberman, Armine Harutyunyan, Pavol Hnila, Bram Jansen, Andrew Kandell, Dickran Kouymjian, Ariel Malinsky-Buller, Kristine Martirosyan-Olshansky, Reinder Neef, Mitchell Rothman, Hakob Simonyan, Adam Smith, Bettina Stoll-Tucker, Frans Theuws, Elske de Zeeuw-van Dalfsen and Paul Zimansky.

I am extraordinarily grateful to my co-readers Boris Gasparyan, Nzhdeh Yeranyan and Theo van Lint. The last-mentioned co-reader, Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies at Oxford University, supported me in every way possible and most kindly saved me from mistakes. Any errors that this book may nevertheless contain are entirely my own.

To all the aforementioned colleagues I'd like to say:

thank you very much / Shat shnorhakal em