

24 July 2008

From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia 2 October 2008 – 4 January 2009

Fitzwilliam Museum hosts only UK showing of a spectacular exhibition of two thousand year-old tomb and temple treasures in gold, silver and bronze, revealed through archaeological excavations in the land sought out by the Argonauts of Greek mythology

The first ever UK exhibition of a spectacular array of treasures from ancient Georgia is to open at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge in early October. Unparalleled in its scope and beauty, **From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia** brings together more than a hundred and forty objects excavated from two sanctuaries and four tombs at Vani, a rich city of the ancient kingdom of Colchis, now part of the Republic of Georgia. Most famous as the home of the Golden Fleece in Greek mythology, Colchis is the land to which Jason led the Argonauts, and where he was helped in his quest by the local princess and sorceress, Medea.



The remarkable finds on display date from the early 5th to the 1st centuries BC and include jewellery, sculpture, pottery and other funerary items. This strikingly beautiful collection offers a unique insight into a fascinating but long-forgotten culture on the eastern shores of the Black Sea. East of the Greek world and north of the Persian empire, Vani was both a crossroads for ideas, art and cultures and a city with a strong, independent identity. The exceptional importance of the site was heralded as early as 1876, when a newspaper report claimed that 'every time it rains the water brings into the yards...so many pieces of jewellery, so many gold chains, so many coins and all sorts of other objects...who knows what the entrails of this extraordinary hill still guard?'



Excavations over the last sixty years have answered that question, revealing a number of rich burials and precious objects - highly-prized in life and too precious to part with in death. In the four major tombs which have been found on the site, the Vani nobility were laid to rest wearing an array of gold and silver jewellery, and shrouds sewn with innumerable small appliquéés, roundels and

beads of gold. Household slaves or servants and horses were often buried with them. The jewellery and other objects reflect the local rituals and exquisite craftsmanship of the people of ancient Colchis, and show the extent to which the wealthy were able to collect the art of distant lands and incorporate it into their own iconography.

The many **highlights** of **From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia** include:

- An array of gold jewellery of exquisite design, including a magnificent gold necklace with 31 pendant tortoises, earrings, temple rings and brooches
- A spectacular silver belt showing scenes of banqueting and animal processions, reflecting Persian and Scythian influences
- An exceptional bronze sculpture of a youth, and delicately rendered bronze and gold statuettes, revealing the immense skill of the Vani craftsmen
- Silver and pottery libation bowls of Persian style
- Drinking vessels and decorated cauldrons reflecting the central importance of wine-making in the culture of ancient Georgia



Dr Timothy Potts, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, said: "The spectacular finds from Vani are of great importance both as works of art and as reflections of the interaction between the ancient Greeks and the cultures of the Black Sea. This exhibition offers a unique insight into one of the least known but most intriguing aspects of classical civilization."

The exhibition comes to Cambridge as part of a tour that includes the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and other major museums in the United States and Europe. The only UK showing has been organized in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University; the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection, and Sport of Georgia; the Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi; and the Vani Archaeological Museum. The Cambridge showing is

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Press Release | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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In Cambridge **From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia** will be enhanced by a special display of ancient coins from the Black Sea drawn largely from the Fitzwilliam's own world-class numismatic collection: **Bordering the Black Sea: Greeks, 'Barbarians' and their Coins** (2 October 2008 – 4 January 2009; Octagon Gallery). The first UK exhibition on this theme, it will explore the history of the Greek colonies on the shores of the Black Sea, their interaction with indigenous peoples, including Scythians and Thracians, and their artistic traditions through the remarkable imagery on coinage from the 6th century BC to the

Roman period. It will showcase gold and silver coins from these Greek colonies - some of which are, exceptionally, made in the shape of dolphins and arrowheads - and include regional coinages imitating types of the Macedonian kings Philip II, Alexander the Great and later Hellenistic rulers.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Princeton University Press and a programme of special events for all ages; further details at www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

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Further information and images from:

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Press View: Wednesday 1 October 2008. Email fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk for further details

Exhibition details for publication:

From the Land of the Golden Fleece: Tomb Treasures of Ancient Georgia

2 October 2008 – 4 January 2009

Adeane and 20th Century Galleries (Galleries 11 & 12)

Bordering the Black Sea: Greeks, 'Barbarians' and their Coins

2 October 2008 – 4 January 2009

Octagon Gallery (Gallery 10)

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
Tel: +44 (0)1223 332900 www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00

Sunday: 12.00 - 17.00

CLOSED: Mondays; 24, 25, 26 & 31 December and 1 January

Notes for Editors: The Fitzwilliam Museum

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's collection of art and antiquities and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints. The Fitzwilliam's treasures span centuries and civilizations, ranging from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st century. The Museum welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year, offers a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events, and has an award-winning Education Service. Open Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 -17.00. Free admission Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

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