

EVERHART MUSEUM

NATURAL HISTORY, SCIENCE & ART

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Press Photographs are Available Upon Request

Exhibit Highlighting Ancient Eurasian Nomadic Culture Opens at the Everhart Museum on May 21, 2010

Scranton – April 13, 2010: The Everhart Museum will open the exhibit, *Ancient Bronzes of the Asian Grasslands from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation* on May 21, 2010. This traveling exhibition will be on display at the Everhart through September 6, 2010. Financial assistance for bringing this exhibit to the Museum is provided by Gertrude Hawk Chocolates, Inc.

Ancient Bronzes of the Asian Grasslands reveals how the ancient, horse-riding cultures of Mongolia and Central Asia, a region known as the steppes, used the animal world as a source of symbols to indicate tribe, social rank and connection to the spirit world. This exhibition brings to life the complex nomadic cultures that flourished during the late second and first millennia BCE. On loan from the Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, the exhibition features more than 80 exquisite masterpieces of Eurasian steppe art, including bronze belt buckles, plaques, pendants, ornaments and weapons. Animal motifs such as antlered stags, wild boars and birds of prey are a primary theme and visitors will be enchanted by the artistic expression found in a functional form.

These nomadic people of the steppes decorated their clothing with applied fabric, fur and metal ornaments, usually made of bronze. The degree of decoration varied according to the rank, status and wealth of the wearer. High-ranking men and women were buried in clothing covered with small gold plaques. Belt buckles, which varied in size and intricacy of design, were also important in conveying status. Their art and decorative elements would often include depictions of: the domestic animals they herded – horses, sheep, goats and camels; the wild animals they hunted, especially deer, giant argali sheep, mountain goats and ibex; and the powerful predators of the nearby mountains – leopards, Siberian tigers, bears and birds of prey. Some of these animals were probably tribal or clan totems, others such as fantastic animals like wolves with stag antlers and dragon-like creatures may refer to myths, epics and legends, aspects of religious beliefs now forgotten. Bronze was the material of choice, often fashioned into tools, weapons, vessels, ornaments for clothing, and decorations for horses, due to its strength, light weight and resilience. These objects were made to be practical and conform to a nomadic lifestyle, yet they were created with an artistic sensibility that transcends centuries of time.

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The mobile steppe dwellers made their living herding sheep, goats, cattle and horses, the latter of which allowed them to range farther and keep larger flocks. Trade was an important aspect of the steppe life, bartering meat, wool and leather for agricultural produce and manufactured goods in return. Furs, prestigious stones like jade and turquoise, fine wool and especially horses went from the steppes to China along the Silk Road. The horse was a valuable, exotic creature to the dynastic Chinese who associated it with nobility of character, intelligence and freedom. The steppe horsemen controlled the supply of horses to the Chinese rulers. In turn, the culture and art of the dynastic Chinese to the south influenced the art of the steppe peoples. Chinese princesses were married to nomadic chieftains to secure alliances, and Chinese goods like silks and lacquerware moved northward into the grasslands. Some steppe dwellers used Chinese items like the elongated hook buckle, perhaps as a symbol of their connection with the powerful Chinese rulers. Weaponry reflecting Chinese style appeared in the steppes, both as presents from Chinese rulers to local chiefs, and as local copies of these imperial gifts. Decorative Chinese motifs like the imperial dragon were adapted to steppe taste and appeared on buckles and bronze ornaments. ***Ancient Bronzes*** illuminates the steppe peoples influence both on and by the culture of dynastic China, as well as how they facilitated trade and travel along the Silk Road across Asia.

Ancient Bronzes of the Asian Grasslands provides a glimpse into a world without a written history. Upon viewing these artifacts, visitors are provided a context through which they can begin to understand the cultural values of the ancient world. While on view, ***Ancient Bronzes*** will be thematically complemented by a variety of programming for all ages as well as the Gallery One exhibition, ***Migration: A Journey from Bhutan to Scranton*** which illustrates the profound journey of several families from the mountainous Asian nation of Bhutan to a refugee camp in Nepal, and eventually to homes in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

The Everhart Museum is open: Thursday, Friday and Monday, Noon-4:00 pm; Saturday, 10:00 am-5:00 pm; and Sunday, Noon-5:00 pm. Admission is \$5/adults, \$3/students & seniors, \$2/children 6-12, and free to Everhart Museum members. For more information, contact the Museum at 570-346-7186 or email general.information@everhart-museum.org.

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About the Everhart Museum: Founded in 1908, the Everhart Museum of Natural History, Science & Art is the largest general museum in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Everhart Museum, located in Nay Aug Park in Scranton, is a not-for-profit institution dedicated to the collection, care and display of a diverse array of artifacts, including natural history, science and fine arts. Through our exhibits and programs, the Everhart Museum has become an invaluable regional resource for educational and cultural opportunities. General support for the museum is received from the Lackawanna County Office of Education & Culture, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the City of Scranton. For more information on the museum visit our website at www.everhart-museum.org or contact us at 570-346-7186.

About the The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation: Arthur M. Sackler, a research psychiatrist and publisher, was also an avid student of art history. "One wonderful day in 1950," he said, "I came across some Chinese ceramics and Ming furniture. My life has not been the same since." Asian art, especially bronzes and jade, came to form the core of the Arthur M. Sackler Collections. The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation was created in 1965 to make his extensive art collection available to the public. Since 1973, the Foundation has organized numerous exhibitions and traveled them extensively throughout the United States and abroad.