



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE 'ANCIENT MACEDONIA' EXHIBITION
MELBOURNE - 24 NOVEMBER 1988**

Your Excellency,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to welcome to Australia during our Bicentennial year the exhibition 'Ancient Macedonia'.

The ancient civilisation of Macedonia has bequeathed to the world a magnificent store of artifacts - some of them royal works of art; some of them humble objects of daily life; all of them items of ancient and enduring beauty.

It is a remarkable fact that those skilled artisans of Macedonia, who expressed their view of the world through their art, did so with such eloquence that we can admire and appreciate their work today more than twenty centuries later.

This exhibition provides a clear window into the Macedonian civilisation - a civilisation which, as this exhibition makes clear, valued the freedom of the human spirit and emphasised the qualities of restraint, balance and serenity.

These truly are the qualities which describe a civilisation as classical. Classicism is important not only for the values and ideas it then espoused, but also for the spirit which it bequeathed to us and which it continues to evoke in us today.

The exhibition includes objects from the royal tombs of Vergina, among them the priceless golden myrtle wreath from the tomb of King Philip II. This is one of the finest treasures from that high point of Macedonian culture.

The discoveries at Vergina and Derveni in 1977 created world wide attention, but this exhibition includes objects from some forty sites - evidence of the richness of the culture which flourished in ancient Macedonia. I am proud to recall that Australian archaeologists assisted with excavations at a number of these sites.

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There are nearly 500 objects on display, and they include a huge variety of objects. It is one of the charms of this exhibition that domestic objects such as bone pins and clay spindles sit beside royal treasures such as silver vessels and golden wreaths of the finest and most sophisticated craftsmanship.

Some of these items have been discovered only in the past year. It is an honour that Australia is the first country outside Greece to have the opportunity to see them. Others, like the myrtle wreath, are so prized that they will never leave Greece again.

I thank you, Mr President, on behalf of all Australians, for the privilege of seeing this magnificent exhibition in Australia. Your generosity in sending us the largest exhibition of Macedonian antiquities ever to leave Greece truly reflects the warmth of the friendship between our peoples.

Australia's cultural heritage is rich and diverse. Australia is a proudly multicultural nation, enriched by the work of people who have come from more than 130 countries to make Australia their new home. Among them, Greek-Australians have made an outstanding contribution to Australian society in many fields.

Through the Greek-Australian community, Australia is linked to the great classical civilisations represented by 'Ancient Macedonia'.

And through the sister city relationship between Melbourne and Thessaloniki our people continue to value this historic and continuing cultural link.

The spirit of ancient Macedonia is rekindled by this exhibition for it reminds us of the great heritage we share; a heritage which now belongs to the world.

I would like to think that those great Kings, Philip and his son Alexander the Great, would approve of this exhibition because it celebrates their culture in yet another nation. The exhibition will provide many thousands of Australians with a chance to experience that culture and will, I have no doubt, leave them greatly enriched.

I thank all who have helped to bring this exhibition to fruition - the Government of Greece, especially the Directorate of Antiquities in the Ministry of Culture; the Australian Bicentennial Authority which has helped to fund the exhibition; sponsors OTC, Olympic Airways and Australian Airlines; the International Cultural Corporation of Australia; and not least the Director of this Museum, Mr Bob Edwards, and his staff who have put this very large and complex exhibition together in just a few short weeks - surely something of a record.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now my pleasure to invite President Sartzetakis to declare open this exhibition.

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