



By Tamara Borisova

The unique collection is seen at the National Library and has almost broken records for attendance: around 1,500 people visit the Book Museum which houses the exhibition daily. The secret of the rush is in the status of the project: it is humanitarian and non-commercial, while entrance to the event is free of charge. However, the major intrigue around the *Belarus and the Bible* exhibition is its content.

**Almost a detective story**

Different times and countries have met in one hall. Original rarities from the epoch of clay tablets to the Bible in the form of micro-chips and nano-technology. The history of religion and of the whole human civilization is interesting not only to clergymen, but also to civilians of various ages, professions and status.

Private collectors from Asia, Europe and America helped Belarusians open the world history of the *Bible* project. The exhibition is the idea of ten owners of ancient relics from South Korea, the United States of America, the UK and Israel. Keepers of these priceless rarities have entrusted their collections to the

famous researcher of manuscripts who has read more than ten thousand scrolls — Director of the US Manuscript Research Group (MRG), Scott Carroll. The collection is priceless, and its money equivalent can't be voiced.

Display cases of German production have been made to order, with their glass reflecting ultraviolet light which is harmful for the books. The temperature and humidity are no more than 20 degrees Celsius and no more than 55 per cent humidity.

“Our exhibition aims to show that the Bible is really an important book for Christian, as well as Hebrew and even Muslim culture,” notes Scott Carroll. “We show lots of Bibles written in Hebrew and in the Aramaic language. My favourite exhibit is the Holy Bible written in Chinese hieroglyphs. It seems that it wouldn't be of any material value, as this Bible is written on... toilet paper, by an ordinary pastor from memory. This happened in the time of Mao — an era of atheism in China. Many exhibits have similar, almost detective stories. For example, the most fragile and rarely shown exhibit is a Bible written in the 17th century in Italy. The item miraculously found itself in Eastern China. In the 13th century, it was donated to the British Ambassador

# The must-see book of books

## After Hong Kong and the Vatican, Minsk is the third place in the world to welcome the collection of more than two hundred Bibles from around the world



the appearance of the Biblical text in their time.

There's also a range of papyruses of Greek origin found in the region of the Dead Sea. The manuscripts of the first and second century AD at the exhibition are priceless Biblical manuscripts from the time of the life of Jesus Christ. There are also gospels written by his pupils — the Apostles John and Paul.

“The exhibition is arranged geographically and chronologically. We show the expansion of the influence of the Bible on all nations. One of the masterpieces is the ancient text of the Armenians who are known to be ones of the first to adopt Christianity as a state religion. The most ancient manuscripts in Armenia date back to the 8th-9th centuries. These are very beautiful and aesthetic books,” notes Ales Sussha, Deputy Director General of the National Library of Belarus. “This is a volume of the Principality of Cilicia. The book is more than 600 years old, but it looks as if it was published yesterday. It also boasts bright colours. Moreover, they are of unique origin. Special worms come up out of the ground in Armenia just once a year for around ten days. Locals collect them, dry, grind and make paints which are very stable.”

The *Belarus and the Bible* exposition also has Belarusian rarities, as the National Library added ten exhibits: books from the Mamonichi brothers printing house and from the Kuteinsky Monastery.

“It's pleasing to see exhibits which are directly connected with our country. A copy of the Turov Gospel is also on show. Researchers from Vilno have found the New Testament from Turov and now the exhibit is preserved in the state library of the Academy of Sciences of Lithuania. However, the re-edition is so accurately and precisely made that it is a work of art in itself,” says Sergiy Gordyn, an archpriest and churchman of Minsk Holy Cathedral. “There's also a Slutsk Gospel here. All these are hand-written Bibles. It's known about the Slutsk New Testament that it was written by Yuri Olelkovich — a descendant of the Great Duke of Lithuania, Gediminas, and father of Sofia Slutskaya. So, we can be proud that we have such important artefacts.”

Exhibits from Belarus will probably go on show in the Pacific region. Organisers of the exhibition project plan a trip to Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and India. After Minsk, the exhibition will travel to the Hermitage.

**Priceless manuscripts**

to China who brought the rarity to Europe. At present, the miniature Bible in the Chinese language is kept in a private collection in the USA. I personally accompany the exhibition to Minsk, conduct tours and always try to tell spectators about the essence and origin of the exhibits, as well as the history of their existence in the modern world, their travels and their owners.”

The exhibition begins with displays of Sumerian manuscripts, written more than four thousand years ago and connected with the ancient city of Ur, the home of Abraham. On show are also texts from Homer's *Iliad*, which contemporaries called the ‘Bible of antiquity’. Fragments from Aesop's fables are also present, which significantly influenced