



**THE GREAT WAVE OF HOKUSAI OR
ARARAT IN THE GREAT WAVE? ***

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This article aims to present one of the most famous paintings of the world-renowned Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, "The Great Wave off Kanagawa", in a new light and to reveal the hidden messages in the artwork.

To achieve the aforementioned goal, the following tasks were set: to research multilingual sources on the life and artworks of Katsushika Hokusai, to study the history of the spread of Christianity in Japan during that period and its influence on Hokusai's art, to combine the points of view of different authors on this matter.

The methodological basis of the article is the methods of analysis, comparison, and combination of various materials.

The research is based on multilingual literature studies, as a result of which the author advances her arguments that despite the fact that more than two centuries ago Christianity was banned in Japan Hokusai was well aware of biblical stories and through his paintings conveyed episodes related to Christianity, in particular, the Great Flood and the existence of angels. The article presents points of view not only of the author but also of other specialists.

Keywords: *Katsushika Hokusai, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, Japan, Armenia, Mount Fuji, Mount Ararat, Christianity, The Great Flood.*

*Fuji standing in front of me,
Ararat stuck in my soul.
Breeze, dear mountains, breeze!*

INTRODUCTION

Katsushika Hokusai's "36 Scenes of Fuji" (Солодовникова 99) painting holds a special place in the treasury of Japanese painting art, and the painting "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" has evolved into the international visit card for Japanese painting art. The first time, when I got the chance to see the famous picture, I noticed the outline of Mount

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Ararat in the waves. I told my artist and non-artist friends what I saw, however, after not receiving a lot of enthusiastic feedback, I set the topic aside for the time being.

During a visit to Japan in 2017, my curiosity to see "The Great Painting" sparked once again. It turned out that the author created a series of paintings called "36 Scenes of Fuji", that was initially exhibited in 1832, and my fictitious image of Ararat is the first one of them (Воронова 74).

Every time I looked at the picture, I could clearly identify Mount Ararat's outline in the waves. Being an Armenian and an admirer of Japanese culture both led me to see the unseen (Վարդանյան, Արարատը ճապոնական գեղանկարող). Artists usually hide some secrets in their paintings, leaving the audience to come up with their own interpretations.

REVEALING THE HIDDEN SECRET OF THE GREAT WAVE

I was curious to find out if anyone else had noticed Mount Ararat's outline in Hokusai's well-known artwork. As a result of extensive study, I learned that the American poet Donald Finkel had also drawn attention to and noted the similarity between the biblical Mount Ararat and the painting "The Great Wave off Kanagawa". The poet wrote a prose poem about the above-mentioned picture in 1959, where in the last line he makes a reference to Mount Ararat as if to reveal what Hokusai actually depicted (Finkel). I also found an essay based on already completed Finkel's poem in which the author, Steven Martin, analyses the above-mentioned poem and touches upon my already non-imaginary Ararat, making the following observation:

"However, for a work of art, an artist whose work comprises thirty-six views of the same mountain would seem to have included one more scene, even if it was from the outside world and from the top of Mount Ararat" (Vardanyan, *Katsushika Hokusai*).

It is interesting that I noticed the outline of Mount Ararat, researched it, and then discovered Finkel's poem, rather than the other way around.

Later, it was discovered that artist Grigor Khachatryan, in the "National Center of Contingency Planning" project, which was initiated in 2010, had included the "Katsushika Hokusai" photo collage, which combines images of "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" and Mount Ararat (Բախչիլյան 41-43).

In the book "Katsushika Hokusai" by Olga Solodovnikova, I came across a new perspective for me, where the author specifically states: "If we visually continue the outline of the Great Wave to the right, it will look very much like Mount Fuji. In the foreground of the picture, another smaller wave can be seen, which also has the outline of a mountain" (17). The author compared the silhouette seen in the foreground to another mountain and it is confusing to me why there should be the silhouette of Mount Fuji in the waves since Fuji is actually present in the background of the picture anyway. One thing is evident: Solodovnikova observed the mountain's outline in the waves independently of others.

The artwork "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" is perhaps the most famous and recognizable painting of Katsushika Hokusai not only in Japan but also in the whole world. It can be found in Japan in the most unexpected places, from building walls to phone cases and rice fields ("Ukiyo-e art appears in rice paddies in Saitama"; "Walls of water"). It is noteworthy that it remains one of the most repainted and recreated paintings in the last two centuries ("The Great Hokusai").

Hokusai created "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" supposedly in 1831-1833 (Солодовникова 14). While studying Hokusai's art, it becomes evident that he shows the relationship between humans and nature, frequently uses a far-close combination optical game, and emphasizes the creations of humans and nature, the emotional state and

everyday life of the Japanese, therefore, presenting all these in the silent presence of the sacred mountain.

In the painting "36 Scenes of Fuji", Hokusai presents Mount Fuji from different places: from the forest, the pond, the riverside, and the seashore.

It is fascinating that Japanese tourists to Armenia compare Mount Fuji to the smaller Ararat (Sis). The Armenian and Japanese people share a special affection for sacred mountains, which is one of their many similarities.

Since 2016, August 11 has been celebrated as Mountain Day in Japan with the goal of fostering the human-nature connection. No special ceremonies are associated with the day: The Japanese simply climb mountains or organize parties at the foot of any mountain.

According to mythology, in the past, mountains in Japan were considered female. There lived not gods, but goddesses, such as the princess of flowers, Konohana Sakuyahime, the goddess of mountains in Shintoism. Later, Japan and the Japanese people were considered to be as powerful as Fuji, after which the sacred mountain became masculine (Солодовникова 15).

Having been spiritually and mentally close to Japanese people, their culture, and customs for over a quarter of a century, I have frequently been convinced that there are numerous similarities in the spiritual state of Armenians and Japanese. Perhaps, the most notable of them is the outlook of the people on the two mountains, which is expressed in various spheres.

When making reference to the biblical Ararat, which is a sacred mountain for us, Armenians, it is worth noting, that it is considered a symbol of eternal Armenia, a desire, transmitted through DNA, to return the lost homeland, the mountain.

The name "Ararat" was first mentioned in the Bible in the 7th century BC, where it is referred to as the mountain where Noah's Ark came to rest after the Great Flood (Genesis 6:9-9:17).

In Armenian culture, there are so many works devoted to Mount Ararat worthy of high praise. Well-known painters, composers, poets, and silversmith masters have made the biblical Ararat a special object of worship in their art.

Returning to Hokusai, let me state, that during the creation of the painting manuscript, Armenian artist Gayane Khachaturyan was deeply inspired by the Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro, who was a student of Katsushika Hokusai. In honour of Utamaro, who became a guiding source of inspiration for the artist, Khachaturyan painted the canvas "Dedicated to Great Kitagawa Utamaro" (1976) (Олюнина, *Бусидо и Кодекс фидаина*). Gayane Khachaturyan's paintings are widely known among art lovers. Her works are included in the private collections of notable people: Merab Mamardashvili, Tonino Guerra, Yves Saint-Laurent, Andrew Lloyd Webber, Giya Kancheli, Yevgeny Primakov, Yoko Ono, and others (Մկրտչյան).

It is also notable, that Armenian and Japanese painters frequently tend to depict the two sacred mountains in red. Katsushika Hokusai in his series "36 Scenes of Fuji" has "Wind of Victory: A clear day (Red Fuji)" artwork which has become symbolic for the Japanese people. Both Hokusai's contemporaries, as well as a number of other Japanese painters, began to depict Fuji in red, as a result of being inspired by that artwork. By drawing parallels, I should mention that in 1957, a biochemist, Yuri Dyomin created the painting "Red Ararat", which deeply impressed Ervand Kochar and Henrik Igityan. When Minas Avetisyan entered Dyomin's studio and saw that canvas, he exclaimed with admiration: "All my life I dreamed of painting it red!" (Олюнина, *Фудзияма и Арарат*)

Famous Armenian poet Nairi Zaryan referred to Hokusai's art in his travelogue "The Sakura was blooming there...", where he summarized his impressions after his trip to the Land of the Rising Sun in 1961. He specifically writes:

"The Ukiyo-e school reached its peak in the first half of the 19th century in the artwork of Katsushika Hokusai. Hokusai is among the number of artists who are constantly improving from the very first steps of their work to deep old age.

*Hokusai's artworks are divided into series. This is how Japanese artists worked in general. The most commonly recognized of these series are "36 Scenes of Fuji" and "100 Scenes of Fuji". Fuji-Yama, Mount Fuji, is the same for the Japanese as Masis (Mount Ararat) is for the Armenians. "Masis" means a big mountain. Fuji-Yama is the Masis of Japan in more than just a metaphorical sense. Hokusai painted Fuji-Yama 136 times" (Չարյան 473; Vardanyan, *Armenian-Japanese Sketches* 52).*

The famous Armenian poetess Silva Kaputikyan also visited Japan and in 1979 wrote a memoir entitled "Fuji: Ararat in Armenian", which is included in the collection "Back in My Days". Poetess of All Armenians also draws parallels between the characteristics shared by the Armenian and Japanese peoples, once again referring to the sacred mountains.

*"... I said that our people, though far apart, have common features. The country of Armenia is hilly and rocky just like Japan; the soil is scarce, requiring effort and sweat from a person. I said that like the Japanese, we also have a cult of the script and a mountain; we have our Fuji - Ararat... Only our cult is much more painful and dramatic because while you have the opportunity to climb up to the top of your Fuji with a cane at any time, we do not..." (Չապուտիկյան 291-292; Vardanyan, *Armenian-Japanese Sketches* 128)*

Hokusai, the founder of a new direction in painting, who was creating more than 200 years ago in self-isolated, closed with iron curtains Japan, conveyed religious messages through his paintings. During this period, the spread of Christianity was prohibited in Japan, for which Hokusai and his relatives faced difficulties many times during their lives, this is what the Japanese columnists note.

The penetration of Christianity into Japan was considered by the local authorities as an external influence and a threat to stability in the country. There are various materials about this in Japanese literature. And where could Hokusai have seen and learned about angels and the biblical Mount Ararat? These questions got their logical answers to a certain extent during this research. According to some sources, the Bible was translated into Japanese in 1500-1600 ("The first Japanese translation of the Bible was produced around 1549"). It is possible that Hokusai could see the outline of the biblical Mount Ararat in the Bible. Although Japan was closed to foreigners, Dutch merchant ships were allowed to cross the border once or twice a year as long as they did not preach Christianity ("The Great Wave by Hokusai"). This was perhaps the only possibility of direct communication between Europe and Japan. Other reports claim, that the artist had interacted with foreigners, and through them, he got acquainted with Western culture and art, which had an impact on his own art. Dutch merchants knew about the famous Hokusai and ordered paintings from him. He received the biggest order in 1822 for paintings depicting scenes typical of Japanese everyday life (Солодовникова 13).

Returning to my argument regarding the depiction of Ararat in the painting "The Great Wave off Kanagawa", I should note that the more I examined the nuances of the famous Japanese artist's painting, the more I became convinced that my suspicions were justified.

SUMMARY

Hokusai's paintings are full of secrets: they constantly give the viewer a reason to think. In one of his famous paintings (怒涛図 - Angry Waves), on the edge, he depicted an angel with flowers in hands and wings on back ("Hokusai. Angel in Hokusai's own hand-painted border"). We return again to the viewpoint we put forward that Hokusai had information about Christianity.

It is also known that Hokusai secretly studied Western painting from his teacher, after which he was expelled as "an artist imitating other painting styles" (「葛飾北斎の天使の絵?」).

While conducting this research, I came across a book written in 1989 by Tsutomu Arai entitled "Hokusai's Secret Paintings" (「北斎の隠し絵」). The front page of the book is quite intriguing. Below the artist's name, on the right, is visible the above-mentioned angel depicted by the artist.

In September 2018, I had the chance to personally see the original painting "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" in Moscow («Դոնալդ Ֆինկել: Մեծ Ալիքը. Յոկոհամա»). In the same year, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan was celebrated, on the occasion of which a number of renowned Moscow Kremlin museums organized exclusive exhibitions representing Japanese culture. Many paintings by Hokusai and his students were included in these exhibitions for the first time. («Шедевры живописи и гравюры эпохи Эдо»)

As a result of research, it became known that Solodovnikova also saw an outline of the mountain, Donald Finkel mentioned the name of biblical Mount Ararat in his poem about this artwork, and Tsutomu Arai referred to the connection between Hokusai and Christianity, pointing to the presence of a small angel in Hokusai's painting.

Thus, putting together the facts provided by me and other researchers, I put forward my thesis that Hokusai supposedly depicted the outline of biblical Ararat in "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" artwork, and also depicted not only the Tsunami with Mount Fuji in the background but also made an allusion about the Great Flood.

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ՀՈԿՈՒՄԱՅԻ ՄԵԾ ԱԼԻ՞ՔԸ, ԹԵ՞ ԱՐԱՐԱՏԸ ՄԵԾ ԱԼԻՔՈՒՄ

ԱՆՆԱ ՎԱՐԴԱՆՅԱՆ

Հայաստանի պետական տնտեսագիտական համալսարանի ֆինանսական ֆակուլտետի և Տնտեսության կարգավորման և միջազգային տնտեսական հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս, տնտեսագիտական գիտությունների թեկնածու, ք. Երևան, Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն

Սույն հոդվածը նպատակ է հետապնդում նոր լույսի ներքո ներկայացնելու աշխարհահռչակ ճապոնացի նկարիչ Կացուշիկա Հոկուսայի ամենահայտնի նկարներից մեկը՝ «Կանազավայի մեծ ալիքը» և բացահայտելու նկարում առկա թաքնված հաղորդագրությունները:

Վերոշարադրյալ նպատակին հասնելու համար մեր առջև դրել ենք հետևյալ խնդիրները՝ հետազոտել բազմալեզու աղբյուրներ Կացուշիկա Հոկուսայի անձնական և ստեղծագործական կյանքի վերաբերյալ, ուսումնասիրել ճապոնիայի տվյալ ժամանակաշրջանի քրիստոնեության տարածման պատմությունը և դրա ազդեցությունը Հոկուսայի արվեստի վրա, համադրել տարբեր հեղինակների տեսակետներ այս առնչությամբ:

Հոդվածի մեթոդաբանական հիմքը կազմում են վերլուծության, համեմատության, տարբեր կյուլթերի համադրման մեթոդները:

Հետազոտությունը հիմնված է բազմալեզու գրականության ուսումնասիրությունների վրա, որի արդյունքում հեղինակը առաջ է տանում սեփական հիմնավորումները, առ այն, որ չնայած այն հանգամանքին, որ ավելի քան երկու դար առաջ քրիստոնեության տարածումը արգելված էր ճապոնիայում, այնուամենայնիվ, Հոկուսայը քաջատեղյակ է եղել աստվածաշնչյան պատմությունների մասին և իր նկարների միջոցով փոխանցել է քրիստոնեությանն առնչվող դրվագներ, մասնավորապես, Համաշխարհային մեծ ջրհեղեղի և հրեշտակների գոյության մասին: Հոդվածում ներկայացվել են ոչ միայն հոդվածագրի, այլև այլ մասնագետների դիտարկումները:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ *Կացուշիկա Հոկուսայ, Կանազավայի Մեծ Ալիք, Ճապոնիա, Հայաստան, Ֆուլջի լեռ, Արարատ լեռ, քրիստոնեություն, Համաշխարհային մեծ ջրհեղեղ:*

БОЛЬШАЯ ВОЛНА ХОКУСАЯ ИЛИ АРАРАТ В БОЛЬШОЙ ВОЛНЕ?

АННА ВАРДАНЯН

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В данной статье поставлена цель представить в новом свете одну из самых известных картин всемирно известного японского художника Кацусика Хокусая «Большая волна в Канагаве» и выявить скрытые послания в картине.

Для достижения указанной цели поставлены следующие задачи: исследовать разноязычные источники о жизни и творчестве Кацусика Хокусая, изучить историю

распространения христианства в Японии в тот период и его влияние на искусство Хокусая, объединить точки зрения разных авторов по этому вопросу.

Методологическую основу статьи составляют методы анализа, сравнения и объединения различных материалов.

Исследование основано на изучении многоязычной литературы, в результате чего автор выдвигает собственные аргументы о том, что хотя проповедование христианства в Японии было запрещено более двух столетий назад, однако Хокусай был хорошо знаком с библейскими историями и через свои картины передал эпизоды, связанные с христианством, в частности, Всемирный потоп и существование ангелов. В статье представлены точки зрения не только автора, но и других деятелей культуры.

Ключевые слова: *Кацусика Хокусай, Большая волна в Канагаве, Япония, Армения, гора Фудзи, гора Арарат, христианство, Всемирный потоп.*