



## **The Cathedral of Mren**

*Digor, Kars, Turkey*

Standing on a high plateau, the Cathedral of Mren rises out of the landscape surrounded by the ruined foundations of an ancient settlement. The cathedral was built during the reign of Heraclius in 638 and is associated with the Prince of Armenia and Syria, Dawit' Saharuni. Constructed during the Byzantine-Persian wars and at the beginning of the Arab conquests, the cathedral represents a moment of creation and collaboration during a time of major destruction. Mren is representative of the churches built in medieval Armenia and Georgia. It is thought to be the largest preserved domed basilica from seventh-century Armenia, built with rubble masonry and decorated with interior frescoes and a ceramic tile roof. Over the centuries the cathedral changed hands, and additions and inscriptions were added to the structure. The settlement ceased to exist after the Turkmen invasions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the cathedral has been abandoned and exposed to the elements for hundreds of years.

Mren is in desperate need of documentation and conservation, as its condition has deteriorated dramatically in recent years. The church is in an isolated location in the Kars region of Turkey, and access to the site requires permission from government authorities as it is located within a militarized zone. The south façade has recently collapsed, threatening the structural integrity of the cathedral. Measures need to be taken to stabilize the entire structure if it is to be saved. It is hoped that the Watch will elicit a universal call to action to increase awareness about the site's regional and global significance, as well as enhance the protection of the site and ensure that the monument will survive for future generations.