FAH 120
Armenian Art, Architecture, and Politics

This class will explore the visual traditions of historical Armenia from the ancient period to the seventeenth century. The architecture, sculpture, and painting surviving from this region represent, as a whole, a distinctive and complex tradition which can be approached from many directions. We will study the role of images in the cult, the technology of the dome, Zoroastrianism, iconoclasm, and the sundial. We will also study the reception of and interaction with a great diversity of traditions, including classical antiquity, the ancient, Sasanian, and Islamic Near East, and the empire of Byzantium. We will investigate the transfer of motifs from East Asia and Europe, and also the relations between Armenia and its neighboring Caucasian cultures. The course offers an opportunity to encounter striking and understudied material, and also historical and theoretical issues of central importance to the study of art.

Course Objectives:

1. To become familiar with the key monuments and problems of the visual culture of the Armenian plateau and the diaspora.

2. To investigate a single topic within this tradition by mastering the available secondary literature and generating an original thesis from this body of work. (See “paper”, below).

Readings:
Readings are available in pdf on Trunk under our course site.

Exams:
Undergraduates will take two exams. Both will consist of slide identifications and short comparisons; the second will include an essay. Reviews for these exams will be conducted in the lecture, and powerpoint review files will be posted on Blackboard.

Paper: Due November 29. 8-10 pages on specific problem relating to the course subject. Include bibliography and images. Possible thesis topics are:

1. Armenian art is often described as a product of outside “influence,” a passive receptor of the traditions of powerful neighboring cultures. But is this assessment adequate? Using a single image or monument, describe how the work appropriates, alters, or challenges the “borrowed” tradition and consider why.
2. Can art illustrate belief? Armenian religion maintained a distinct view of the nature of Christ, one that was considered heretical by the Byzantine empire. Many scholars have interpreted Armenian manuscript illumination as visual expressions of the Armenian position. Taking a single image from Armenian art, consider if and how the visual evidence supports these claims.

3. The tenth and eleventh centuries are generally considered as periods of architectural “revival” in which patrons and builders looked back to seventh-century forms. Drawing a comparison between monuments from both of these periods, address the question yourself, considering similarities/differences in scale, plan, elevation, fenestration, supports, and decoration.

Grade percentages:
Mid-Term: 25%
Paper: 30%
Final: 35%
Class Participation 10%

Graduate Students:
In lieu of the mid-term and final, you will be asked to write a 15-20 page research paper due December 10. You will also be asked to give a short presentation about your topic on November 29. You will be judged on the substance, organization, and clarity of the presentation.

Lecture Schedule

September 4: An Introduction to the Course

September 6: CLASS CANCELLED (COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS)

September 11: Pre-Christian Archaeology on the Armenian Plateau (I)

September 13: Pre-Christian Archaeology (II)
Reading: Same as above.

September 18: Early Christian Architecture

September 20: Early Christian Sculpture

**September 25: The Ėjmiacin Gospels**


**Visit to Special Collections; Meet at the Circulation Desk at Tisch**

**September 27: The Jerusalem Mosaics**


**October 2: Introduction to the Seventh-Century Churches**


**October 4: Mren**


**October 9: Monday schedule—no classes**

**October 11: Zuart’noc‘**


**October 16: Georgia**


**October 18: Review for Middle of Term Examination**

**October 23: Mid-Term**

**October 25: The City of Ani**

October 30: Between Byzantium and Islam: the Church of Aghtamar  

November 1: Manuscript Art of Armenia, 11-14th centuries  

November 6: Manuscript Illumination in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia  

November 8: The Khachk’ar (Cross Stone)  

November 13: Iconoclasm  
**Reading:** Sirarpie Der Nersessian, “Image Worship in Armenia and its Opponents,” in *Études byzantines et arméniennes*, 405-415.

November 15: The Armenian Monastic Complex  

November 20: Armenia and Islam  

November 22: no classes

November 27: Late Medieval Art of the Diaspora  

November 29: Undergraduate Papers Due/ Graduate Student Presentations

December 4: Review for Final Exam

December 6: Final Exam