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Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30-2:45
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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 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 Trunk.

Paper: Due November 28. 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, if any:
In lieu of the mid-term and final, you will be asked to write a 15-20 page research paper. You will also be asked to give a 20-minute presentation about your topic. You will be judged on the substance, organization, and clarity of the presentation.

Lecture Schedule

September 19: An Introduction to the Course

September 26: Pre-Christian Archaeology on the Armenian Plateau (1)

September 28: Pre-Christian Archaeology (II)
Reading: Same as above.

October 3: Early Christian Architecture

October 5: Early Christian Sculpture

October 12: The Echmiatsin Gospels
Reading: Thomas Mathews, “The Early Armenian Iconographic Program of the Ejmiacin Gospel,” in East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period,

October 17: The Jerusalem Mosaics

October 19: Introduction to the Seventh-Century Churches

October 24: Mren

October 26: Zuart’noc’

October 31: Review for Mid-term

November 2: Mid-Term

November 7: The City of Ani

November 9: Between Byzantium and Islam: the Church of Aghtamar

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

November 16: Manuscript Illumination in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia

**November 21:** The Khachk’ar (Cross Stone) and Iconoclasm  

**November 28:** The Armenian Monastic Complex (Paper Due)  

**November 30:** Armenia and Islam  

**December 5:** Late Medieval Art of the Diaspora  

**December 7:** Review for Final

**December 12:** Final Exam!