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 that 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 should be done for discussion on the day they are listed. They are all 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 April 1. 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 April 27. You will also be asked to give a 20-minute presentation about your topic on April 15. You will be judged on the substance, organization, and clarity of the presentation.

Lecture Schedule

January 14: An Introduction to the Course
January 19: MLK Day, No Class.
January 21: Pre-Christian Archaeology on the Armenian Plateau (I)

January 26: Pre-Christian Archaeology (II)
Reading: Same as above.

January 28: Early Christian Architecture

February 2: Early Christian Sculpture
February 4: The Ēǰmiacin Gospels
Visit to Special Collections; Meet at the Circulation Desk at Tisch

February 9: The Jerusalem Mosaics

February 11: Introduction to the Seventh-Century Churches

February 16: Presidents’ Day, No Classes.

February 18: Mren

February 23: Zuart’noc‘

February 25: Georgia

March 2: Review for Mid-Term Examination

March 4: Mid-Term

March 9: The City of Ani

March 11: Between Byzantium and Islam: the Church of Aghtamar

March 16, 19: Spring Break

March 23: Manuscript Art of Armenia, 11-14th centuries

March 25: Manuscript Illumination in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia

March 30: The Khachk’ar (Cross Stone)

April 1: Iconoclasm

April 6: The Armenian Monastic Complex

April 8: Armenia and Islam

April 13: Late Medieval Art of the Diaspora

April 15: Undergraduate Papers Due/ Graduate Student Presentations

April 20: Patriots’ Day, No Class

April 22: Review for Final Exam

April 27: Final Exam