In memoriam

Lucy Der Manuelian: Arthur H. Dadian and Ara T. Oztemel Professor of Armenian Art
Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Tufts

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One day a woman came into my office at full speed mid-sentence telling about her ambition and her somewhat breathless and almost incredible adventures in the tenth century and with the KGB. In a time when Tufts did not yet have many endowed chairs, she directly said she wanted one. She handed me assigned reading: her latest paper and a copy of Forty Days of Musa Dagh.

This recollection from David Welbourn, longtime Director of Development for Arts and Sciences at Tufts University, perfectly captures the indomitable spirit
of Professor Lucy Der Manuelian, who passed away at her home in Belmont, Massachusetts on September 20, 2021. A historian of medieval Armenian art, Professor Der Manuelian was the founder and first occupant of the Arthur H. Dadian and Ara T. Oztemel Chair of Armenian Art in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Tufts.

Prof. Der Manuelian was educated at Harvard (Radcliffe), and, after a twenty-year hiatus from academia in which she raised two children, received her Ph.D. at Boston University in 1980. Her dissertation was supported by a fellowship at the Bunting (now the Harvard-Radcliffe) Institute (1971–1973), and an IREX (International Research and Exchange Board) grant in 1977 for travel to the Soviet Union. The project, supervised by noted scholar of Islamic art, Oleg Grabar, concerned the medieval sculptural program of Geghard, and was the first serious English-language monograph on that site. Prof. Der Manuelian’s project was innovative in its comparative approach to the monument, considering the sculptural program of Geghard in relation not only to Armenian iconography, but also to the artistic traditions of Byzantium and Islam. Her dissertation is also widely considered to be the first American dissertation dedicated to Armenian art.

Just four years after receiving her Ph.D., Prof. Der Manuelian established the forerunner of her endowed chair in 1984 as a rotating lectureship at Tufts in conjunction with Harvard, McGill, Boston, and Northeastern, so that courses in Armenian art could be taught at each institution in succession. In 1989, the lectureship became an endowed position with a permanent home at Tufts, thanks entirely to Professor Der Manuelian’s energies, and the financial support of New Deal attorney Arthur H. Dadian and import/export magnate Ara T. Oztemel, the latter known for bringing Coca-Cola to the Soviet Union. Her achievement was historic: the Tufts chair is the first and only endowed professorship of Armenian art outside the Republic of Armenia.

At least that is the official story. Again, from Mr Welbourn:

Lucy and I spent years together teaching anyone who would listen about the glories of Armenian Art and Architecture and raising the first few gifts for her lectureship. One day she [told me to go to] Washington to meet a certain friend of hers. At one of the little café tables in the grand hall of Union Station I had lunch with Mrs. Dadian [and] a wonderful chat about her late husband, her family and heritage, and her hopes for Lucy. As we prepared to part she opened her purse, pulled out the same little checkbook anybody would have, wrote out a personal check “to say thanks,” and asked me to see if it was ok.
The check was for two million dollars. Thus Arthur’s name is first on the chair in which you now sit. In my forty year career in institutional advancement, Lucy is the best faculty fundraiser I have had the pleasure to know.

Professor Der Manuelian was not only a teacher and fundraiser; she was a scholar of Armenian art in her own right. Her dissertation on Geghard remains one of the few monographs on that extraordinary site, and also one of the few English-language books on Armenian bas-relief sculpture. Indeed, relief sculpture was an abiding interest of Prof. Der Manuelian’s. She devoted a series of essays to this subject, considering Armenian sculpted images from the across the medieval period, from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries, and connections between medieval Armenian architectural sculpture and manuscript illumination. The 1980s and 1990s saw the publication of important works on Armenian rugs; these remain today crucial scholarly tools. She was an author and researcher for the massive microfiche work known as Armenian Architecture (Zug: Inter Documentation, c.1980–c.1990), and texts of tremendous scholarly value, as they record many monuments in the present-day Turkish Republic. Professor Der Manuelian’s fascination with the city of Ani informed a 2001 essay as well as many of her lectures. She was also deeply interested in diasporan Armenians, most of all, perhaps, the Armenian-American Moses H. Gulesian, known for his campaign to save the USS Constitution,

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considered to be the oldest ship afloat, and now docked at the Charlestown Navy Yard in Massachusetts.\(^6\)

Professor Der Manuelian was committed to raising awareness about Armenian art, not only about its beauty and importance, but also its fragility and vulnerability. She was an early advocate for the monuments of Julfa, serving on the Djulfa Virtual Memorial and Museum Advisory Board.\(^7\) She wrote and lectured on Julfa's vast and important cemetery, which was deliberately destroyed by Azerbaijan, a crime now considered a ghoulish prelude to the destruction taking place in the aftermath of the 2020 war in Arts'akh. Prof. Der Manuelian also lent her expertise in Armenian art and architecture to a range of scholarly projects, authoring articles on major Armenian monuments and artistic themes for *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (1982–1989) and *Grove Dictionary of Art* (now *Oxford Art Online*). In addition to contributing to conventional academic projects, she was remarkably prescient about technology, making use of film and the internet as early as the 1990s in her pedagogy and research. For all this work and dedication, she received not only accolades in the academy (including memberships in the Accademia Tiberina and Phi Beta Kappa), but also the love and admiration of the Armenian community.

Professor Der Manuelian was also my mentor and friend. When I moved back to Boston to finish my dissertation, she hired me as an assistant for her research projects – she would drive me from the Alewife subway station to her Belmont house, where I would work upstairs in the “boys' rooms,” on an ancient Macintosh computer, putting together a database on the monuments of Ani (she was scooped by the wonderful virtualani.org). I can still hear her “Listen, kid!” which was always the preface to advice – on how to give a presentation, how to talk about Armenian art, but also on cooking or entertaining - she particularly liked anything brought flambé to the table. My favorite memories of Prof. Der Manuelian are talking with her in her blue-painted living room, with the piano by the windows and the long run of *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* on the back shelves; talking with her in her kitchen, surrounded by clippings from the *Armenian Mirror Spectator*, and, of course, talking with her in her car.

Funny, kind, smart, and deeply passionate about Armenian art, Professor Der Manuelian will be greatly missed by all who knew her. Her passing is a great loss for Armenian studies.

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7 https://www.djulfa.com/about/ (accessed 20 February 2022).