

# From Idea to Reality: The Development of Armenian Studies in the U.S. from the 1890s to 1969<sup>1</sup>

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Armenian Studies has existed in the United States on a permanent basis since the 1950s and on a more ephemeral basis for at least a half century before that. But, to date, the history of the development of the field has not been written in any detail, and finding details about the field in the U.S. prior to the advent of the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) in the 1950s and the subsequent establishment of permanent programs has been especially challenging.

For many years, Nina Garsoian's "Armenology in the USA" ("Armenovedeniye v SCHA," *Lraber Hasarakakan Gitutiunneri* 10 (346) 1971, pp. 23-34, in Russian with Armenian abstract) and Dickran Kouymjian's "The Status of Armenian Studies in the Diaspora" (Hayagitutean nerkan artasahmani mej," *Shirak* 15:10 [1972], pp. 29-58, in Armenian) were among the few serious attempts to document the history of Armenian Studies in the U.S. More recently, the publication of Vartan Matiossian's "The Beginnings of Armenian Studies in the United States: The Armenian Quarterly"<sup>2</sup> provided valuable information on Kostan Zarian's involvement in the late 1940s efforts which Matiossian calls "the first phase in the history of Armenian Studies in this country." However, I believe it is necessary to revise that date backwards.

What we would call Armenian Studies has been established in Europe since the time of Napoleon. But it came much later to the U.S. It appears that the earliest university courses on Armenian (language) occurred at Columbia

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<sup>2</sup> In *Between Paris and Fresno: Armenian Studies in Honor of Dickran Kouymjian*, Barlow Der Mugrdechian, ed. (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), pp. 617-42.

University in 1894.<sup>3</sup> The instructor was most likely the great Indo-Iranist A.V. Williams Jackson.<sup>4</sup>

Another noteworthy but isolated early episode was a series of lectures delivered by Rev. A. A. Bedikian at the University of Chicago in August 1919, including talks entitled “The New Problem of Missions in the Near East,” “The Plymouth Rock of Asia Minor,” and “The Destruction and the Reconstruction of a Nation.” Bedikian later recalled that he “taught and lectured for seven years during the Summer Quarters at the University of Chicago (my Alma Mater) even before there was any talk of Armenian Studies anywhere except in Europe.”<sup>5</sup> Bedikian would go on to teach Armenian classes at Columbia in the 1930s in its school of general studies and at the Asiatic Institute in New York.<sup>6</sup> As will be seen, Bedikian would also be involved in several later efforts to establish Armenian Studies in the U.S.

Unquestionably a pioneer of Armenology in the U.S., Robert P. Blake’s interest in and involvement with Armenian subjects dated back to 1910-11 when he studied under Nikolai Marr in St. Petersburg and also ventured to Eastern Armenia and Mt. Ararat.<sup>7</sup> Blake was at Harvard from the 1920s until his death in 1950, and, as early as the 1928-29 academic year, he offered a class called “Armenian Historical Documents.” He also taught Byzantine History, and would later give courses in the History of the Ottoman Empire and classes in Armenian and Georgian languages in the department of Comparative Philology.

Blake remained active until his death and in many ways paved the way for the permanent program in Armenian Studies at Harvard established in the 1950s, especially through the efforts of one of his later students, Richard N. Frye. Together, they translated Grigor of Akanc’s *The History of the Nation of*

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<sup>3</sup> “Armenian Studies and Research at Columbia,” in *Treasures of Armenia: Review for the Advancement of Armenian Studies and Research*, No. 3, New York, 1957. The date remains to be verified.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Dr. Eden Naby Frye for the suggestion. On Williams’ see entry in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, and Edward Delavan Perry, “Abraham Valentine Williams Jackson,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Jun., 1938), pp. 221-224. See also Jackson, “Voices that called Eastward ho!”, *Columbia University Quarterly*, 23 (June 1931) pp. 151-158.

<sup>5</sup> Bedikian, letter to NAASR Chairman Manoog S. Young, April 1, 1955 (NAASR archives).

<sup>6</sup> For example, see “Columbia Offers Armenian Courses for Winter Session,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, September 6, 1939, p. 1, which reports that Rev. A. A. Bedikian will offer three courses: “Elementary Modern Armenian,” “Advanced Modern Armenian,” “Classical Armenian.” Part of the Dept. of Indo-Iranian and Comparative Linguistics. See also Ara Timurian, “Armenian Classes at Columbia,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, September 20, 1939, p. 2. My thanks to Vartan Matiossian for calling these articles to my attention.

<sup>7</sup> See Igor Blake, ed., *In Search of Byzantium: A Biography: The Life of Robert Pierpont Blake*, 1996.

*the Archers*.<sup>8</sup> Frye took over the teaching of Armenian language at Harvard after Blake's death, in addition to teaching Persian, Turkish, and other classes.

Cyril Toumanoff studied with Blake as an undergraduate at Harvard and under Nicholas Adontz in Brussels. He began teaching on Russian and Caucasian subjects at Georgetown University in the 1940s and one of his major works, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Georgetown University Press, 1963), still stands as a definitive work.<sup>9</sup>

Prof. Archibald Cary Coolidge (1866-1928) taught a class in the 1920s entitled "The History of the Eastern Question," which, after his death, evolved into "The History of the Near East in Modern Times" under his former student, Prof. William L. Langer (1896-1977). I have no specifics about Langer's course, but in light of the extensive if, at times, problematic treatment Langer gives to the Armenian Question in his 1935 magnum opus *The Diplomacy of Imperialism* (A.A. Knopf, 1935) one assumes he must have covered it in his course as well.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1950s, Langer was a strong advocate of establishing a chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard and a founding member of NAASR. He describes his involvement with the organization at some length in his autobiography *In and Out of the Ivory Tower*.<sup>11</sup>

Sirarpie Der Nersessian came to the U.S. in 1930 and began as a part-time lecturer at Wellesley and eventually became a full professor and chair of the Department of Art History. She gave a notable series of lectures at Dumbarton Oaks in 1939 on Byzantine sculpture and from the mid-1940s until her death was affiliated with Dumbarton Oaks. Her *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire: A Brief Study of Armenian Art and Civilization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945) is a groundbreaking work and only one of many important studies, and there is no question that she is a pioneering figure and still stands as a giant in the field.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (1949), nos. 3-4, pp. 269-283

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Hewsen's "In Memoriam: Cyril Toumanoff (October 13, 1913-February 14, 1997)," in *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 8 (1995), pp. 5-7.

<sup>10</sup> See *In and Out of the Ivory Tower: The Autobiography of William L. Langer* (New York: Neale Watson Academic Publications, Inc., 1977), pp. 132-33. For persuasive critiques of Langer's treatment of "the Armenian Question," see Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 24, No. 3. (Jul., 1982), pp. 481-509, and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 233-36.

<sup>12</sup> See Garsoïan, Nina G. "Sirarpie Der Nersessian," in Helen Damico, ed., *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline: Volume 3: Philosophy and the Arts* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), pp. 287-305; Allen, Jelisaveta Stanojevich, "Sirarpie Der Nersessian: Educator and Scholar in Byzantine and Armenian Art," in *Women as Interpreters of the Visual Arts: 1820-1979* (Westport, CT: Greenwood

However significant the work of these individual scholars in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s may have been (and this short list should not be taken to be an exhaustive one of scholars whose research touched upon Armenian subjects), their work was not done as part of any permanent programs of Armenian studies, since no such programs existed.

In 1933, an effort was inaugurated to establish a permanent Armenian studies center or program, but that effort yielded little in the way of tangible results and was, thus, largely forgotten.

The one published reference to the effort that I have found is in an article by Matthew A. Callender<sup>13</sup> (Matteos Kalender or Aram Kalendarian, a frequent writer in non-ARF-oriented Armenian-American newspapers), in a 1955 article in *Eritasard Hayastan*. Callender, in an essay critical of the then-fledgling National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, wrote:

[I]t has been stressed that this organization is “unprecedented,” which is contrary to the truth. We mentioned before an effort made at the end of 1933. That first enterprise had been wholeheartedly supported by professors from different universities of America, especially Columbia and Union Theological Seminary, and one well-known professor of them had prepared the initial program. Invitations had already been sent for the first organizational meeting which would be held at Columbia a few days after Christmas.

However, when the repulsive and ignominious act against Abp. Tourian was executed, the majority of those American professors distanced themselves from all “events with the Armenian name on them” and the initiative to install that center at Columbia University was aborted.<sup>14</sup>

Callender also referenced the 1933 effort in unpublished letters to Avedis Derounian (aka John Roy Carlson), now among Derounian’s papers held at NAASR. In one letter, dated March 19, 1955 (less than three weeks after the public launch of NAASR), Callender wrote, in part:

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Press, 1981), pp. 329-56; Agémian, Sylvia, “Chronologie,” *Archives Sirarpie der Nersessian, Vol. 1* (Antélias, Lebanon: Catholicossat Arménien, 2003), pp. 11-46; Kouymjian, Dickran, “Sirarpie Der Nersessian (1896-1989), Pioneer of Armenian Art History,” in Jane Chance, ed., *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 483-494.

<sup>13</sup> Callender (1885-1964) was also one of the April 24, 1915, arrestees in Constantinople: his account of his arrest appeared as “Exile to Changiri with Komitas Vartabed” and was published as an essay accompanying the Armenian Program of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Women’s International Exhibition, Nov. 4-10, 1957, sponsored by the Armenian Exposition Committee, a sub-entity of the Armenian National Council of America.

<sup>14</sup> Matteos Aram Kalenter, “Hay Usumnasirutean Azgayin Enkerutiwn,” *Eritasard Hayastan*, June 21, 1955. Translation by Vartan Matiossian.

I have vast material for a series of articles as to what has been done about such a project as the vitally necessary Center of Armenian Studies ... I also know how the unfortunate event—that of the unspeakable murder of Archbishop Tourian—coinciding with the date of the launching of the project set [it] back in 1933 ... I also know how the 1946 effort was brought to naught by ... Jerejian, again at Columbia, and also because the Ramgavars suddenly pulled out of the efforts to bring to success the vast project.

The young Mr. Young has been known to declare that the present project ‘must be a combined effort by all parties’ (including the Tashnags). If Vertanes has already sent you the photostatic copy of a letter of H.[arutun] Kurdian (an ARF) dated December 26, 1933, written to Vertanes, in which he beseeches to beware of including any Tashnags in the 1933 project.

The letter by Kurdian (1902-76, of Wichita, Kansas, a well-known philologist and collector of Armenian manuscripts), to which Callender refers does not quite contain as explicit a warning as Callender suggests, but Kurdian wrote:

Dear Aznakian, please be very careful about the selection of Armenians for membership. I am referring to the sad and shocking affair of the wanton murder of the Archbishop on Christmas day, a crime committed not only against all human and social standards but also against Christ and God, and all the holiest traditions of Old Armenia; an ugly and inexcusable crime for which I hope the utmost punishment will be dealt by the authorities of New York city.

I do not think that you should take Armenians unless they are well known authors, and authors of Articles whose subjects, ideals and findings are such that are acceptable to the board of the new forming organization.<sup>15</sup>

The letter was written to the Rev. Charles A. Vertanes (aka Yeznique Aznakian), born in Alexandria, Egypt, on March 14, 1905. (His name was legally changed to Charles A. Vertanes in 1944.) Vertanes was an ordained Presbyterian minister and was the Executive Director of the Armenian National Council of America from May 1945.

In 1933 Vertanes was a graduate student at the Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan, and served as the Executive Secretary of a group that attempted to launch an Armenian Studies center.

Details on what was envisioned by Vertanes and the others involved are sketchy. In late 1933, a letter was sent out to a list of potentially interested scholars informing them of the committee’s basic goals.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles A. Vertanes papers at NAASR, folder “Academy of Armenian Studies”

The aim of this organization is to be to encourage and foster research in the civilization and culture of the Armenia of the past, by becoming a clearing house of all research and archeological discoveries going on in this field in Armenia and other parts of the world; by presenting such results in the internationally known languages; by translations into such languages valuable Armenian documents and literature in general; by establishing scientific periodical publications and annual and quarterly society meetings, a chair of Armenian civilization and culture at some central American university as Columbia, and scholarships and fellowships for specialization in this field, a museum and library of Armenian MSS and other valuable writings and prints and objects useful in research, etc. etc.

The temporary self-appointed committee for the founding of this research organization, composed of Professors Wm. Walker Rockwell, D. Phil., D. Theol., Emil Kraeling, Ph.D., the Reverend Yezniq Aznakian, M.A., B.D., and Mr. H. Kurdian, an eminent Armenian research worker and author, invite you to the first founders' conference, to meet at the Union Theological Seminary, 121<sup>st</sup> Street and Broadway, at 6:30 p.m. [on December 28.]

... That the attempt is not a hasty one is to be seen from the fact that the idea of this organization has been in the minds of three of the members of the committee for the last seven or eight months, during which period consultations have been carried on and contacts made with regard to the project with various scholars and others such as Professors James Moffatt of Union and A. V. Williams Jackson of Columbia, the Reverend Mr. Benneyan, editor of an important Armenian weekly publication, Mr. Andonian, and Archbishop Tourian, primate of the Armenian Church in America.<sup>16</sup>

William Walker Rockwell (1874-1958) was, at the time, the Librarian of the Union Theological Seminary, having earlier been associate professor of church history. He had been an active member of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief and had authored various pieces on behalf of the committee including *The Pitiful Plight of the Assyrian Christians in Persia and Kurdistan* (New York, 1916) and *The Deportation of the Armenians: Described from Day to Day by a Kind Woman Somewhere in Turkey* (New York, 1916). Emil Kraeling (1892-?) was also a professor at Union Theological Seminary and a specialist in Eastern Christendom.

In a letter to Kurdian of February 5, 1934, Vertanes wrote: "Our first meeting was attended, besides Dr. Rockwell and myself, by two other Armenians. So we spent the time mainly in discussing generally the whole plan. We have decided to hold another meeting in connection with the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society which meets at the University of Pennsylvania around Easter. Dr. Rockwell at present is trying to make arrangements for it. I am sure the second meeting will be more successful."

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<sup>16</sup> Vertanes papers. The copy of the letter in Vertanes' files is evidently a draft.

According to notes among Vertanes' papers, the two Armenians were Rev. A. A. Bedikian and Arsen Goergizian. Vertanes had compiled a list of thirty-seven "Orientalists Interested (or might possibly be interested) in Armenian Studies" and a list of twenty-five "Armenians Interested in Armenian Research." It is not known how many individuals were invited to the initial meeting on December 28, 1933, which was scheduled to coincide with the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in New York. Vertanes saved notes expressing regrets and offering best wishes from Prof. A. V. Williams Jackson of Columbia University, Prof. A. G. Gulbenkian of the Bronx, and Prof. Robert P. Blake of Harvard, among others.

What exactly was discussed at this first meeting? We do not possess a wealth of details, only some notes taken by Vertanes for a report which may or may not have been written. Under the heading "Plan" he has written such entries as: "Excavations in Armenian Cities," "journal (quarterly)," "Translations of Armenian MSS.," "Encourage Armenian Research Fellowship," "Establish Chair at Columbia," and "Library at Columbia or 42<sup>nd</sup> St. of MSS. & Photostat copies of MSS." Under "Depts" he has listed: "Religious—ceremonies, architecture" "Industrial—arts, techniques, materials," "Social—family, folklore, mores, legends," "Literary," "Art," and "Science."

Various other notes touch on the issue of membership in this entity: "One condition of membership—submit a dissertation on some aspect of past Armenian culture, equivalent to that submitted for a Ph.D. at recognized universities; and undergo an examination upon it before a committee appointed by the Academy, proving his thesis"; establishing "an annual popular lectureship on Armenian culture," a cultural museum in Armenia that would serve as a "clearing house of all research," and "a chair of Armenian language & literature established in England by Gulbenkian endowment."

In undated notes written, apparently, sometime after the fact, Vertanes wrote:

As far as I remember the meeting of Dr. Rockwell, Rev.'s Bedikian & Goergizian & myself came to the conclusion that because of the tension arising from Bishop Tourian's killing, our project should be postponed indefinitely.

It was after that that Rev. Bedikian had the bright idea of starting to teach courses in Armenian in the Extension Dept. of Col. Univ.—which was the best that could be done of the ambitious program.

I myself was never able to pick up my interest in this field because of my researches in early Amer. & Europ. Hist. & because of the Depression—which was most important factor, since all our wealthy men tightening up on gifts.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Vertanes papers at NAASR.

Thus, this first attempt to launch Armenian Studies on a permanent basis in the United States fell victim to the bitter divisions in the Armenian community and to the economic hardships that affected everyone in the 1930s.

#### AMERICAN-ARMENIAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

It would not be until after World War II that another attempt would be made—and it is here that Vartan Matiossian picks up the story. The creation of the American-Armenian Cultural Association and its short-lived publication *The Armenian Quarterly* in 1946 under the leadership of Costan Zarian represents another landmark in the growth of Armenian Studies in the U.S., and it is significant that, as Matiossian suggests, the connection between the Association and the *Quarterly* with the ARF entity the Armenian National Committee may have been what doomed the undertaking to be viewed as a partisan project.

The first notable undertaking of the Association was the October 20, 1945, “Symposium on Armenian Culture” at Columbia University, in conjunction with the department of East European Languages, featuring talks by Henri Gregoire, Sirarpie Der Nersessian, Julian Bonfante, and Zarian, as well as music by Alan Hovhanness and Aram Khatchaturian.<sup>18</sup> Bishop Tiran Nersoyan offered concluding remarks. The symposium program announced the formation of the Association:

The Association was organized by a number of recognized scholars to foster and promote the study and research in the language, literature, art, history and culture of Armenia; to acquaint the American public and individuals and institutions devoted to the study and research of culture in general. The Association hopes to establish in America a center for the study of Armenian culture.

It also announced the forthcoming journal *The Armenian Quarterly*, which in addition to its articles, contained the by-laws of the Association, clearly spelling out their plans in some detail.

The level of mistrust of the Association in anti-ARF circles is indicated in a letter written the day following the symposium by Avedis Derounian (John Roy Carlson) to Bishop Tiran Nersoyan. The letter reads, in part:

I regret that my first letter to you should deal with a subject which some consider sensitive but which to me is part of my work ... [S]ome of us develop

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<sup>18</sup> Matiossian, pp. 627-28, gives an account of the symposium.



an intuitive grasp of the potential dangers in a given situation and cannot rest until a solution is recommended[.]

The meeting of the Armenian American Cultural Association was such an episode. You called it a 'sacred occasion.' May I respectfully term it a potentially explosive occasion.

Derounian proceeds to give details of Zarian and Association Vice-President Vahan Kalenderian's Dashnag ties and proclivities. He continues:

I wonder, my dear Sir, if you realize that the backing of the Armenian American Cultural Association is thoroughly Dashnag. I cannot conceive Zarian and Kalenderian conceiving it themselves. Zarian has a command of himself and of language. I doubt if Mr. Kalenderian can be said to have control of anything. I am not impressed, which convinces me all the more that he is being used as a 'front' by Dashnag elements. How has the Society [sic] been financed so far? Who will be its real editors? With its Dashnag backing what guarantee do Armenian Americans have that it will not eventually develop into a high-toned Dashnag propaganda organ?<sup>19</sup>

Evidently the time was not yet right for such an undertaking to enjoy anything like community-wide support. Two years after the demise of the *Armenian Quarterly*, the *Armenian Review* made its debut, published by the Hairenik Association, part of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, and edited by a leading light of the party, Reuben Darbinian. Its contributions to creating an interest in and an audience for scholarly explorations of Armenian subjects are significant and deserve further attention.

#### ARMENIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA & ARMENIAN AFFAIRS

Around the same time that the Armenian National Committee and the associated American-Armenian Cultural Association were being developed, a parallel entity was also appearing on the scene, the Armenian National Council of America. The Council was formed from a union of the ADL/Ramgavars, the Armenian Progressive League, and the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party. The Council did not, as far as I have been able to discover, have a well-defined program for Armenian studies per se, but given the involvement of Charles Vertanes it is not altogether surprising that it evolved in that general direction.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Derounian papers at NAASR.

<sup>20</sup> There are other indications that it had aspirations in that direction. Callender, in the previously cited *Eritasard Hayastan* article, wrote: "I also remember that around 1946 there was a second initiative, among whose consulting members there were the names of Abp. Tiran Nersoyan, Hrach Yervand, A. Shamlian, M. Martents, and other known fellow Armenians. That initiative did not succeed either, for various reasons; however, Dr.

The most tangible contribution the Council made in the realm of Armenian studies was the short-lived 1949-50 journal *Armenian Affairs*, edited by Vertanes, which must have been conceived of as a retort to the ARF-run *Armenian Review*, which began publication in 1948. Like the *Review* in its early years, *Armenian Affairs* was a mix of the scholarly and the partisan. *Armenian Affairs* had numerous notable scholars connected with it either as advisors or authors or both, including Sirarpie Der Nersessian, Arshag Safrastian, Jane Wingate, Zabelle Boyajian, and two other individuals connected with the 1933 effort, A. A. Bedikian and Arsen Goergizian, among others. Manoog Young, who several years later would be one of the founders of NAASR, served as an editorial associate on the third and final (double) issue. Among Vertanes' papers are plans for and letters pertaining to an anticipated fourth issue that would have been volume 2, number 1, but evidently for budgetary reasons it never emerged.

The Armenian National Council deserves more than a passing mention in a history of Armenian-American affairs of the 1940s and 1950s. For a period of about five years it was especially active—publishing numerous pamphlets relating to the the-post war effort to attach the Kars-Ardahan region to Soviet Armenia and the book *Armenia Reborn* by Charles Vertanes, organizing public events, most notably a rally for the Armenian cause at Carnegie Hall in 1946 and a World Armenian Congress in 1947. It appears that its pro-Soviet leanings doomed it as the Cold War developed, although it continued to exist for some years. It is to be hoped that one day its history can be fully explored.

#### **ARMENIAN COLLECTION OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**

In 1948, a committee was established for the Armenian Collection of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. As announced in the April 6-12 issue of the Library's Information Bulletin, the committee was chaired by Arthur H. Dadian. In May 1948, the committee made its first donation of 111 titles, "including works in Armenian and books in English about Armenia."<sup>21</sup> According to a press release announcing the committee's formation, "the Armenian collection is very limited. It contains only about 200 volumes, a few classics and no manuscripts. As a result, scholars interested in Armenian

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Jerejian alone was able to open an Armenian course in Columbia University, the same way that, after the first initiative, Rev. Bedikian had succeeded in opening a similar course in the same university which I think lasted for 2-3 years." Similarly, perhaps, in Callender's notes found among Vertanes papers, he refers to a 1946 effort "in cooperation with American-Russian Institute (dissolved now)" which he calls a "superb program—the 1933 program incorporated."

<sup>21</sup> LOC press release, "Committee for Armenian Collection of Library of Congress Makes First Presentation of a Number of Armenian Books," May 18, 1948. See also *Hairenik Weekly*, June 17, 1948. From archive of committee member Alice Odian Kasparian, at NAASR.

culture are being told that the Library does not have the necessary material for their studies.”<sup>22</sup> The actions of this committee undoubtedly paved the way for the Library of Congress’ Armenian collection to develop into the large and important resource that it is today under the stewardship of Levon Avdoyan.<sup>23</sup>

### **COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARMENIAN STUDIES OF AMERICA**

The year 1948 saw the rebirth of Armenian Studies at Columbia University with the appointment of Dr. Armen Jerejian (aka Djeredjian) and the formation thereafter of the Society for the Advancement of Armenian Studies of America. *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator* of January 3, 1948, carried a lengthy front-page article by Prof. Andre Martinet of the Columbia department of Linguistics, announcing Jerejian’s appointment as visiting lecturer in the department of Indo-Iranian and comparative linguistics.

Prof. Martinet proclaimed this as “good news for all those, instructors and students of the University, who have long felt the need of a specified and extensive teaching of an important branch of the Indo-European language family, and who have missed accurate and first-hand information about the achievements of an old and fine culture. This will be good news for those who already have some knowledge of modern Armenian, and want to become better acquainted with the cultural and historical background of which the Armenian language has, for centuries, been the medium.”

Martinet also provides a detailed biography of Jerejian, who was born in Lebanon and studied in Brussels under Adontz. Having come to the U.S. for the World Armenian Congress organized by the Armenian National Council of America, he “set himself the task of realizing in this country what he had planned for Brussels, namely the organization of an Armenian Center as part of a well-known learned institution. Negotiations with Columbia University resulted in the appointment of Dr. Djeredjian...”

Martinet continues, “There is little doubt that Dr. Djeredjian’s [sic] Columbia chair can be the nucleus of an important center of Armenian studies, provided our young colleague receives active support from the members of the Armenian community in the United States.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Committee Formed to Build Up Armenian Section of the Library of Congress,” *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, October 25, 1947. See also in same issue the editorial “Armenian Culture and How to Preserve It.” Also, *Hairenik Weekly*, November 6, 1947, for press release and supporting editorial.

<sup>23</sup> For more information see Levon Avdoyan, *To Know Wisdom and Instruction: A Visual Survey of the Armenian Literary Tradition from the Library of Congress* (2012).

<sup>24</sup> See also Teghekatu, “I npast hayagitutian” (For the Benefit of Armenian Studies), *Hayastani Kochnak*, May 26, 1951, p. 496A; an announcement of the formation of a Committee for the Promotion of Armenian Studies with following officers: President:

A 1955 report gives details about what was envisioned at Columbia:

In the past, the Armenian language has been taught as an isolated course at Columbia by W. Jackson, Grey, and the Rev. A. A. Bedikian, and at Harvard by Blake. Through the latter, in 1947, Dr. Jerejian presented a project for an Armenian Chair. Harvard rejected it. Then the proposition went through Profs. Grey, Jakobson, and Martinet to Columbia which established, in the Graduate Faculty of Philosophy, and in the School of General Studies, Armenian courses giving students the necessary credits for majoring and getting B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degrees in Armenian.

In 1948, a Society and an Academic Council for the Advancement of Armenian Studies were organized, and endorsed by the acting president of Columbia University, Dr. Fackenthal and Profs. Martinet, Fowkes, Jakobson, Lotz, Goodrich, Ayres, and others...

At Columbia University, since 1948, about 300 registrations were taken for the [sic] Armenian studies. The most students were prepared for scholarly research or for teaching...

Columbia is not the sole objective of SAAS. It strived and will strive to make of America the scientific center of Armenian Studies and research works. It will continue to create and support Armenian courses or chairs in the high schools, colleges, and universities without neglecting parochial or national schools...It will co-operate with every community or group that wants to foster the [sic] Armenian Studies and research works...

SAAS has started a \$50,000 Endowment Fund campaign for the Armenian Chair at Columbia University; \$10,245 has been collected already.

In the spring semester of 1954, Jerejian was also commuting to Worcester where he was a lecturer in Clark University's evening college.<sup>25</sup> This visiting lectureship was supported by the Committee for Armenian Studies in Worcester, which was formed in April 1954. It appears that due to insufficient enrollment and a poor response to fundraising efforts, by fall 1955 the nascent Armenian program at Clark was effectively dead, not to be revived for nearly half a century when the Kaloosdian-Mugar Chair was established. In light of this, the Committee's motto, "You Have Been Waiting For This For A Long Time," is somewhat poignant.

Jerejian and the NAASR leadership were in communication as early as the summer of 1954, before NAASR had been launched publicly, and face to face meetings took place in the fall. A letter of January 8, 1955, from Acting NAASR Secretary Jack Guveyan states:

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Bishop Tiran Nersoyan; Chairman; Armen V. Jerejian; Secretary: Serpouhie Essefian; Treasurer: Haroutioun Hazarian.

<sup>25</sup> See *The (Worcester) Evening Gazette*, Sat., Jan. 2, 1954, p. 2. Also, flyer from Committee for Armenian Studies in Worcester, March 1955. A collection of papers belonging to Torkom Boyajian of the Worcester Committee, including meeting minutes, is in the NAASR archives.

We appreciate the work you have outlined for your society in New York, but we also recognize that the general aims and spirit of our two groups are one. Despite your views of December 17 to Thomas Amirian and Manoog S. Young that each society should go its own way, we feel that unity will strengthen our common aims. Our purpose is not divided, and the establishment of centers of Armenian learning and research in more than one academic center is a likely possibility.

Our society plans to announce publicly by the end of this month its formation and its program to work for the early establishment of an endowed chair at Harvard University. Of necessity, this program would have to be directed from Boston. Our hope is that you will reconsider your views that both organizations should carry on their activities separately. We trust that it will still be possible in the time remaining that our groups can merge into one organization.<sup>26</sup>

Such a merger, while logical and perhaps desirable, did not occur. In 1959, in the immediate aftermath of the completion of NAASR's \$300,000 drive to endow the Harvard chair, Jerejian wrote to Chairman Young:

We are very happy to know that the plans for the endowment of a Chair for Armenian Studies and Research at Harvard University have been crowned with such success...

The Committee in New York feels that now is the proper time for us to put in effect similar plans, which as you know have long been in our minds, to raise a similar Endowment Fund for a Chair of Armenian Studies and Research at Columbia University.

The Committee hopes that you can help us in the same manner you did the Committee for Harvard University. We would like to confer with you on this matter, and we invite you to New York, at your earliest convenience, to meet the members of the Committee.

In due course, this is more or less what would occur; but Jerejian would no longer be involved. When Nina Garsoian began teaching at Columbia in 1962 as visiting professor, a new era for Armenian Studies began at the university. In 1965 Garsoian was made assistant professor and NAASR's support of the Armenian Studies program began,<sup>27</sup> followed by additional support from the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), thus allowing

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<sup>26</sup> NAASR Archives, folder "Dr. Armen V. Jerejian"

<sup>27</sup> See Armine Dikijian, "NAASR New York Banquet Launches Columbia Armenian Program," *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, June 5, 1965. A total of \$30,000 was raised at the banquet for the Columbia program, and NAASR made annual contributions of \$5,000-\$10,000 in support of the program until 1975-76. See also "Columbia University Program in Armenian Studies: Ten Year Report 1965-1975."

the Armenian program to exist on a full-time basis. By 1969, when Garsoian was named full professor, Ronald Suny and Dickran Kouymjian had completed Ph.D.'s under her supervision. In 1973 a second full-time junior faculty member, Krikor Maksoudian, was added. In 1979 a chair was established, initially called the Centennial Chair and later renamed the Avedissian Chair.<sup>28</sup> The Jerejian-led SAAS and the pre-Garsoian Columbia Armenian program seems to be nearly forgotten today and has effectively disappeared from Columbia's own presentations of the history of Armenian Studies at the university.<sup>29</sup>

#### ACTIVITY ON OTHER FRONTS

Certainly, by the early 1950s momentum was increasing towards the establishment, on some kind of solid basis, of Armenian Studies in the U.S. In addition to the fledgling Columbia program and the efforts of Prof. Frye to continue the work of Blake at Harvard, there was also activity at Cornell, Princeton, and Wayne University in Michigan.

According to a September 17, 1953, article in the *Hairenik Weekly*, Cornell "since Nov. 1952 offered courses in the Armenian language to its students." The author, Khosrov Nersessian, notes that Cornell "is one of three American colleges which carry Armenian language courses, the others being Columbia and Wayne University, in Detroit. An attempt to establish such a field of study at Harvard recently failed."<sup>30</sup>

The article goes on to note that "At Cornell, the Armenian language teaching assignment is handled by two thoroughly capable intellectuals, Jack Karapetian and H. Saninian, both of whom are well known to readers of the *Hairenik* English and Armenian language organs through their articles and stories." Jack Karapetian would later be better known as Hakob Karapents (1925-1994), Iranian-born writer and longtime chief of the Armenian service of the Voice of America.<sup>31</sup>

However, all was not well. The author writes, "Unfortunately, it was sorely apparent that no students of Armenian parentage were numbered

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<sup>28</sup> On Garsoian, see Levon Avdoyan, "Magistra Studentorum per Armeniam et Byzantium," in Jane Chance, ed., *Women Medievalists and the Academy* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 803-812.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the pamphlets "The Armenian Presence at Columbia University: Tenth Anniversary" (ca. 1974), "Armenian Studies at Columbia University" (n.d., after 1974), and untitled program for "Reception celebrating the creation the Centennial Professorship in Armenian History and Civilization, the establishment of the Center for Armenian Studies, and the appointment of Dr. Nina G. Garsoian as Centennial Professor of Armenian History and Civilization and Director of the Center," October 12, 1979.

<sup>30</sup> The meaning of the Harvard reference is not clear.

<sup>31</sup> On Karapents, see Ara Ghazarian, ed., *Karapents: A Bibliography* (Watertown, MA, 1999)

among those studying the Armenian language. Inquiry of the two teachers brought out the information that all attempts on their part to interest Armenian students at Cornell in learning their mother tongue have met with failure, this even despite the fact that the University is prepared to hand out scholarships to those who might wish to study the Armenian language.”

The author then goes on to chastise the Armenian youth:

There are indications that this disinterest on the part of the Armenian students in their mother language will continue unless we all do what we can to shame—yes—shame—them into registering for the Armenian course. But speed is of the utmost importance here. I learned with the utmost trepidation that the university has been forced to decide that unless eight to nine students register this coming year for the Armenian language course, that field of study will have to be done away with!...The gauntlet has been tossed squarely at the feet of the many Armenian students who will register at Cornell this fall. Will they rally to the support of the language of their parents or forefathers; will they register for a one hour course in language whose worth is second to none or will they allow this valiant effort to push ahead the teaching of that language to die out?<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere in the Ivy League, at Princeton University, Prof. Giuliano Bonfante was including Armenian in his “Comparative Linguistics of the Indo-European Languages.” Bonfante had been a Contributing Editor of *Armenian Quarterly* and had written scholarly articles on the Armenian language. However, as elsewhere, such offerings were not part of a program in Armenian. There were fairly extensive communications between NAASR and Princeton in the years 1954-55, but the departure of Bonfante (who returned to Italy) seems to have broken any momentum there and nothing further came of it.

At the same time, at Wayne University in Detroit, beginning in February 1953 Armenian classes were offered in the Department of Slavic and Eastern Languages. The instructor was Rev. Yetvart Tovmassian. According to a document in the NAASR files: <sup>33</sup>

Four local Armenian organizations took upon themselves the responsibility of sponsoring morally and financially the courses at Wayne University. These organizations were the Detroit chapter of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Cultural Association of Detroit, the Armenian Relief Society, and the Educational Council of the Church of Surp Hovhannes [St. John]. These four organizations have allocated \$1000 yearly for the first five years for the Armenian Language Program of Wayne University. In 1955 the

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<sup>32</sup> Khosrov Nersessian, “Experiment at Cornell,” *Hairenik Weekly*, September 17, 1953, pp. 1, 3.

<sup>33</sup> “Hayereni Dasavandutiwn Ueyn Hamalsarani Mech,” no date (1955?). Translation by Vartan Matiossian.

Armenian Ladies Guild of Detroit started to participate too. The Armenian Studies Association of Wayne University has also brought its share by creating a scholarship fund to stimulate the followers of the courses. The fund was put at the disposal of Wayne University.

In 1955, for example, classes were offered in Elementary and Intermediate Armenian, as well as a “Survey of Armenian Culture.”

#### ENTER NAASR

It was into this not-quite-void that a group that initially called itself the Society for the Advancement of Armenian Studies (which suggests that they were initially unaware of the New York group) entered. Prior to its public launch the name was changed to the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR). With similar objectives, in most respects, to its various forerunners, and facing the same community difficulties, it was able to succeed relatively quickly—within five years of its founding—in its first major goal, the funding of an endowed chair in Armenian Studies at Harvard University.

To some extent, NAASR was the beneficiary of a fortuitous timing in the sense that it arose in time to capitalize on the Cold War-era growth of Area Studies, which developed after World War II in response to the changing post-colonial world—a world in which the U.S. was seen to be competing with (in particular) the Soviet Union for influence. It may well be that this is the reason that Harvard and other universities showed an institutional interest in Armenian Studies that they might not have shown at an earlier time and which, perhaps, they no longer have in a post-Cold War world.

Nonetheless, there are numerous reasons why NAASR’s success was hardly a foregone conclusion. One has to think back to what was going on in the Armenian-American community in 1955 when NAASR and the campaign to establish a chair at Harvard were launched. In 1956 the Prelacy/Diocese schism officially came into being, but that was only a formal recognition of what had been happening for more than twenty years, particularly since the Tourian assassination in 1933. The Tashnag press vilified the Ramgavars and the Ramgavar press vilified the Tashnags, and the vilification was done in the most inflammatory possible language. In 1955 the Armenian-American community was in a state approaching open warfare. It has been shown how earlier efforts failed at least partly due to partisan political strife.

Consequently, when NAASR was launched publicly in March 1955, there could not have been many who anticipated that it would succeed where others had failed. In an early announcement, it was stated that “the founding members decided that there is a need for a national organization of many purposes for the advancement of Armenian studies in America. They further



decided that the first major task that needs to be undertaken, in order to place Armenian studies on a scholarly and continuing basis in America, is to work for the establishment of an endowed professorship or chair for Armenian studies at a leading university.” Harvard University was identified as the location of that first chair, and it was hoped that the necessary \$300,000 could be raised within three years.

It took only a little longer than that, and more than 3,000 people made contributions; there had never been a chair established at Harvard University or anywhere else through the kind of community-wide effort led by NAASR. In 1958, as the campaign neared its close, Sir Hamilton A. R. Gibb, then the Director of Harvard’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies, wrote to NAASR Chairman Manoog Young that “[i]t will be, I believe, the first chair to be founded in this way in America, and that fact itself gives to the chair additional—and piercing—significance.”

How this all came to pass may be briefly narrated.

In April 1954, Manoog S. Young of Boston, MA, who at that time was working on a graduate degree in history at Clark University in Worcester, was chairman of the Program Committee of the Boston branch of the Armenian Students’ Association (ASA). He invited Prof. Richard N. Frye of Harvard to address the Boston group on April 9. Frye’s talk was entitled “The Study of Armenian History, Language, and Culture—It’s Need and Importance,” and in it he declared “The Armenians have a long and rich heritage that is deserving of world recognition...yet this is unknown to most of the world...Armenian needs to be an established and respected discipline in the universities and should receive the same status and recognition as Arabic and Persian,” and called for the elimination of Armenian-Americans’ “ghetto mentality.” Armenia and the Armenians are a part of world history, not separate from it, and Armenian literature, history, and culture is worthy of study.”<sup>34</sup>

Following Prof. Frye’s talk, spurred by his remarks, Young had conversations with Arra Avakian and Thomas Amirian about how best to achieve the goals Frye had outlined. Coincidentally, one day Young encountered Van Aroian, today a long-serving member of NAASR’s Board of Directors, at Frye’s office where he, too, had spoken with Frye about the need for establishing a permanent Armenian program.

Thus the NAASR group of three founders—Young, Amirian, and Avakian—came together and Young sent Frye a lengthy memo describing a possible course of action towards the establishment of a chair or program in Armenian Studies at a university such as Harvard. Young also undertook an

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<sup>34</sup> See Manoog S. Young, “Harvard Professor Calls for Center of Armenian Studies,” *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, April 17, 1954. The revised text of Frye’s talk was published across three issues of the *Mirror-Spectator*, May 1, 8, and 15, 1954, under the title “On the Importance of Armenian Studies.”

assessment and cataloguing of what courses were being offered at what schools; the results were published in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*.<sup>35</sup>

The Armenian Students' Association was approached and elected not to take on the task of leading this effort. It was decided that a new entity would have to be created.

In the late fall of 1954, Young wrote a lengthy report, "On Armenian Courses, Studies, Scholarships" that appeared in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* on November 20. The report followed up on and provided additional supplementary information to Young's earlier reports. Additionally, he called for "the establishment of an endowed professorship or chair of Armenian studies at a leading university where a complete program of Armenian studies can be offered under the guidance of a world-renown[ed] Armenian scholar and teacher. Under such a set-up students can be trained in Armenian studies and the other academic disciplines on a graduate level. As a result they can be ready to teach, carry on research, or write on Armenian affairs and subjects in addition to being prepared for their principal professional pursuits."

Young goes on to state that the "logical place" for such a chair is "Harvard with its outstanding scholars, research and library facilities, and long record of interest and activities in the Armenian field" and to confide that "a movement is afoot to initiate steps to bring about the realization of such an urgent need."

A group of nine (Amirian, Avakian, and Young were joined by Richard Malkasian, Jack Guveyan, James Etmekjian, Eghishe Chrakian, Haig Der Manuelian, and Richard Frye) met throughout 1954 and early 1955, and by the time of NAASR's public launch in March 1955 some sixty Armenian-Americans and academics had joined, among them notable members of the Harvard faculty such as Prof. Roman Jakobson, Prof. Michael Karpovich, and Prof. William L. Langer, who was at the time the Director of Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

By June 1955 membership in the organization had grown to more than 250 members. In October 1955, the Association had its kickoff banquet at the Harvard Club in Boston. Among those speaking at the banquet were Harvard President Nathan Pusey, Lt. Governor Sumner G. Whittier, and author William Saroyan. Saroyan hailed the campaign (with characteristic understatement) as the best thing that had come along in the community in generations, and said that the success of the program would bring to an end "the helpless longing of the human heart for an orderly truth." Chairman Young presented pledges totaling \$30,000 to Harvard Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences McGeorge Bundy.

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<sup>35</sup> "Armenian Courses Offered by Six Colleges This Fall," *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, September 4, 1954; "Armenian Courses in Colleges," September 11, 1954.

Fundraising had reached a point by 1957 that Dr. Avedis K. Sanjian was appointed research fellow in Armenian Studies at Harvard, the first time in the U.S. that a scholar held a position solely devoted to Armenian Studies. Also during this period, in 1955 and 1956, NAASR organized the first conferences or symposia focusing on the nascent field of Armenian Studies in the U.S. (“Armenian Studies and Research: Problems and Needs” in 1955 and “Searchlight on Armenian Studies: Conference on Problems and Areas of Research” in 1956).

Fundraising continued apace throughout the next several years. Though successful, this process was not without its ups and downs, and NAASR’s efforts were denounced by Reuben Darbinian, then editor of the *Hairenik*, who wrote, vehemently if not accurately, that “[t]hey intend to use this fund for the publication of books and periodicals on Armenian history and literature which are calculated to defend the Soviet cause, to win the Armenian youth over to the Soviet viewpoint, as well as to give the non-Armenian public a slanted view of the Armenian reality.”<sup>36</sup>

Such criticism notwithstanding, by spring 1959 the goal of \$300,000 was in sight. In May 1959, thanks to a large contribution from the Gulbenkian Foundation, the total raised surpassed the necessary \$300,000, and a “Victory Banquet” attended by more than 1,000 people was held at Harvard’s Memorial Hall on May 16, 1959.

An editorial in the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator* hailed the achievement:

This interest has been evident for decades but the interest in such study is not enough to bring a cohesive program into being. Money was necessary and the community responded. The establishment of the chair reiterates the desires of scholars in kindred fields for the establishment of such a chair. As an Armenian, you should rejoice in your present accomplishment just as an Armenian you must clearly realize the effort necessary to carry on the multitude of projects which NAASR will indulge in now that their first goal has been reached. A lamentable void has been filled and NAASR’s role in the filling of this lamentable void is to be hailed by every single scholar today, let alone every Armenian in the world today.<sup>37</sup>

Avedis Sanjian was named Assistant Professor of Armenian in 1961 and continued at Harvard—without ever being appointed to the chair—until 1965. During this period the Harvard Armenian Texts and Studies publication series, the first of its kind in the U.S., was inaugurated with Sirarpie Der Nersessian’s *Aghtamar: The Church of the Holy Cross* (1964).

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<sup>36</sup> Darbinian, “The Truth About NAASR,” *Hairenik Weekly*, Dec. 4, 1958

<sup>37</sup> Editorial, *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, May 30, 1959.

In 1969, Robert W. Thomson, who began teaching at Harvard in 1963 as a language instructor, was appointed to the chair, which in 1980 was named the Mashtots Chair, a position he held until the early 1990s when he took the Gulbenkian Chair at Oxford. Thomson was succeeded by Prof. James R. Russell.

#### NAASR TURNS TO THE WEST COAST

NAASR had established a West Coast section in 1957, which functioned under the direction of Dr. J. Michael Hagopian. Hagopian's communications with UCLA began even as the Harvard Chair campaign was winding down: a letter of November 14, 1958, from UCLA Dean Paul Dodd to Hagopian states that "I am really serious when I suggest that it would be a wonderful idea for your national organization to establish another chair out here at the University of California at Los Angeles." On May 21, 1959, Hagopian wrote to Dodd of the completion of the Harvard campaign that the NAASR "Assembly voted unanimously to establish the next chair of Armenian studies in California. We do not yet know when we will actively proceed with the campaign, nor can I at this time commit the National Association as to the direction we will move. This much seems clear: we will want to explore the possibilities of such a chair at one of the several large universities of our State."

In a letter of November 4, 1959, University of California President Clark Kerr wrote to Chairman Young that:

Because I am greatly impressed with the "General Purposes" and "Specific Objectives" of the Association, and because these purposes and objectives appear to fit so well into the development of the program in Near Eastern Studies and Languages on the Los Angeles campus of the University, I am taking this opportunity to write to you about this program.

Although it was established only a few years ago, the program in Near Eastern Studies has found a favorable climate on the Los Angeles campus and has developed even beyond our expectations...

I understand that the drive to establish the endowed Chair of Armenian Studies at Harvard has met with complete success, and I am wondering if the Association would be interested now in turning its major attention toward the establishment of a counterpart of that Chair on the Los Angeles campus of the University of California. I am confident that such a Chair would find a rich intellectual environment within the Department of Near Eastern Languages there, and also that the establishment of a Chair at Los Angeles would be welcomed by the many friends of the University throughout the west, and especially in California, who are of Armenian descent.

I urgently invite the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research to make its next major national project one of establishing an endowed Chair of Armenian Studies at UCLA which would be the western counterpart of the newly established Chair at Harvard University.

In June 1960, at NAASR's Annual Assembly, it was officially announced that UCLA would be the site of the second Armenian Studies chair. According to a NAASR press release of June 25, 1960:

In making the announcement regarding UCLA being the next center of Armenian Studies, Mr. Young stressed that the full resources of NAASR would be made available in order to make this a reality but that no active fund-raising is contemplated until Harvard's program for Armenian Studies has been put into motion. Meanwhile NAASR will seek to build up the UCLA Library's Armenian Collection and will work with the University Administration in developing an active interim program consisting of lectureships and extension courses. He disclosed that UCLA has already taken steps to offer courses in Armenian language and history next fall and that further details will be forthcoming soon....President Clark Kerr, in his most recent letter to NAASR's Board Chairman, reiterated this when he said that "We consider Armenian Studies to be an integral part of our program in Near Eastern Studies in the Los Angeles campus."

Very shortly thereafter, Dr. Hagopian arranged for the donation of the Khantamour collection of more than 1,000 Armenian books to UCLA (over, it should be noted, the objections of NAASR Chairman Young, who felt they should go to Harvard's library) and Louise Nalbandian was appointed as lecturer in Armenian History for the 1960-61 academic year.<sup>38</sup> In addition, in spring 1961, Armenian Studies courses, presented by the University of California Extension in cooperation with the Near Eastern Center at UCLA, began being offered at Van Nuys and Fresno, where the instructor was Richard G. Hovannisian.

The process was not without difficulties. Some in the California community resented the intrusion of meddling Easterners. *California Courier* editor George Mason, in a rather pointed commentary piece on February 15, 1962, entitled "Easterners Are Fine But They Don't Realize We Have Schools," complained that "NAASR is asking for a capital fund, the interest from which can be used for educational projects. And what began as a fine and simple organization which only was going to ask for money to get a chair at Harvard—is now becoming a huge Goliath that plans to perpetuate itself in perpetuity."

Moreover, there were significant conflicts between the West Coast and the East Coast over priorities and methods. A major disagreement existed over whether the UCLA campaign should be launched at once or whether it should be deferred until NAASR's larger capital campaign was further advanced. This

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<sup>38</sup> "UCLA Given Rare and Valuable Armenian Library," UCLA press release of July 8, 1960; letter of Paul Dodd to Manoog S. Young, July 11, 1960 (NAASR Archives, folder "UCLA")

problem was exacerbated by what appeared to be mixed signals from the University of California.

Concurrent with developments centered on UCLA, efforts unrelated to NAASR were ongoing to establish a program at UC-Berkeley. In fall of 1959, a Society for Armenian Studies was established at Berkeley under the leadership of Zaven Guiragossian, Pakrad Kazazian, and Vartkes Yeghiayan. The stated aims of the organization were:

1. To support the introduction of Armenian language and culture at the University of California, for example by the establishment of a chair for Armenian Studies.
2. To promulgate and to advance the studies and research in the language, literature, art and history of the Armenian people.
3. To establish a library of books pertaining to Armenian studies and a microfilm library of important Armenian manuscripts and documents for research purposes.

In the fall 1959 semester, the society sponsored lectures by Vartan Gregorian on "The Cultural Heritage of Armenia" and Richard Hovannisian on "Soviet Armenia Today," and in the spring 1960 semester Gregorian taught a course in the university's extension school on "Political and Cultural History of Armenia."

In light of NAASR's developing relationship with UCLA, there was great concern about the possibility of another nascent Armenian program within the same university system. In a letter of March 23, 1960, NAASR Chairman Young wrote to UCLA Vice Chancellor Paul Dodd, "this raises a serious question in our minds as to what is the policy of the University administration regarding the location of the Armenian Chair.

Further questions were raised in coming months. In July 1960, the Berkeley Department of Near Eastern Languages issued a press release stating:

The Department of Near Eastern Languages on the Berkeley Campus of the University of California is pleased to announce that a program of courses in the Armenian language, literature, and civilization will be inaugurated in the fall semester of 1960. The program, under which instruction in this subject will be offered on this campus for the first time, has been made possible by a generous gift of \$20,000 to the University by the Armenian Educational Foundation, Inc., of Los Angeles; the gift will support the program for an initial period of two years. Mr. Alex Pilibos, the vice-president of the Foundation, himself contributed half of this sum.

The Armenian Educational Foundation has hitherto devoted its efforts primarily to furthering the cause of Armenian education in the Near East. It now feels, however, that interest in the subject is growing in the United States, as evidenced by the recent establishment of positions for Armenian at other

American Universities....[T]he initiative which led to the establishment of the new position came from a group of its students who are organized as the Society for Armenian Studies at the University of California. Through its officers, Mr. Zaven Guiragossian, Chairman, and its secretaries Mr. Pakrad Kazazian and Mr. Vartkes Yeghiayan, this group has at all times actively supported the University administration in the latter's now successful efforts to make instruction and research in Armenian a reality on this campus.

The release further announced the appointment of Dr. Paul Essabal as the head of the fledgling program.

This release prompted NAASR Chairman Young to write to University of California President Clark Kerr on July 8, 1960, stating that "the recent announcement of the acceptance of a gift of \$20,000 for the inauguration of a two-year program on the Berkeley campus will probably cause our Board of Directors to re-examine its position and deliberate at length before embarking on any fund raising effort. In good conscience we cannot recommend to our members and friends...to participate in a large scale fund-raising effort comparable to that which we undertook in order to establish the Armenian Chair at Harvard when they note the developments taking place at Berkeley and the prospects of the program becoming permanent with a subsequent legislative appropriation at the end of the two years." Noting that NAASR's own focus on UCLA was based on the understanding that "the overall University administration itself had decided that the Los Angeles campus was to be the locale for its permanent center of Armenian Studies," Young stressed that "this parallel development...will be a source of confusion in the minds of the Armenian community and which will hamper any fund-raising activity."

It was reported in the Oct. 26, 1961, issue of the *California Courier* that "The Society for Armenian Studies has been reactivated this year at the University of California... [Corresponding secretary Alice] Abeghian stated that one of the aims of the Society was establishing a chair of Armenian studies at the University, which it has succeeded in doing...Among those present at the first meeting were Armenologist Dr. Paul Essabal, professor of Armenian language and civilization at the University and acting advisor for the Society." However, the program did not become permanent until the establishment of the William Saroyan Visiting Professorship was created in the 1990s.

The *Courier* reported on Dec. 14, 1961, a \$5,000 grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation to UC-Berkeley for library materials and stated that "During its first two years, the program has been aided by a grant of \$20,000 from the Armenian Educational Foundation which was donated by Alex Pilibos."

At the same time, the University was attempting to reassure NAASR about its plans to make UCLA the focus. A letter of December 12, 1960, from

Chancellor Franklin D. Murphy to Chairman Young reported that this “knowledge of the program at Berkeley is largely hearsay. I have been told that the initiative at Berkeley came from a group of foreign born Armenian students through whom a gift of some \$20,000 was made to the University by a small number of wealthy Armenians who are associated with the Dashnak Party...Of course, the development of the program at Los Angeles is certainly more vital and extensive because the University decided that the center of strength in Middle Eastern Studies is to be at Los Angeles rather than Berkeley.”

Matters came to a head in 1962 following Chairman Young’s visit to California in March. Although Young wrote to Hagopian on April 12 that “the entire trip was worthwhile” and “the Board has voted to refer the UCLA proposal favorably to the Assembly,” feathers had decidedly been ruffled in Berkeley. An open letter, dated April 11, and signed by Vartkes Yeghiayan, was harshly critical of Young and of NAASR and asserted that “what you have achieved for \$400,000” had been achieved at Berkeley, “for almost nothing.”

However, by less than a month later, on May 3, the *California Courier* reported that “The University of California will not continue the Armenian program [at Berkeley] without outside support.” According to Dr. J. J. Finkelstein, the chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages, “while the enrollment for the Armenian courses during the past two years was impressive it was not great enough to justify University funds for its continuation.” Thus, approximately \$15,000 per year would be needed from outside sources. In the May 24 *Courier* Finkelstein endeavored to provide assurances that there had been no change in university policy on this issue and that “the Armenian program at Berkeley takes second place to no other program in Armenian studies anywhere in this country,” and in June the *Courier* reported that the university had pledged to continue Armenian courses for the coming year thanks to a financial commitment from Alex Pilibos, who also would head fund-raising efforts.

However, it is evident that the university as a whole did not see Berkeley as a center for Armenian Studies. In a letter to NAASR of May 10, Vice Chancellor Foster H. Sherwood, in part addressing issues raised in Yeghiayan’s open letter, stated:

At the time of the original gift of \$20,000 from the Armenian Educational Foundation several years ago, there was considerable discussion within the statewide University as to the implications which this gift had for the future. This question was raised in the context of the fact that UCLA had been designated as the statewide University’s chosen instrument for Middle Eastern Studies, a policy which remains unaltered. It was finally agreed that the gift would be accepted with the clear understanding that it would not constitute any commitment for the future with respect to the continuation of Armenian studies at Berkeley. Thus, I believe it is inaccurate, if not misleading, to say [as



Yeghiayan wrote] that “the university would shoulder the burden of continuing the Chair for Armenian Studies on a permanent basis,” at Berkeley. The Berkeley campus has maintained a program of instruction in Armenian, at the service level, as has UCLA, for the last several years. My discussions with Mr. Manoog Young have been concerned with devising ways and means for increasing our offerings in this regard, since student demand arising out of our program in Near and Middle Eastern studies has already generated considerable interest.

Again, I believe it is inaccurate to say, as the letter from Vartkes Yeghiayan does, “the Armenian Chair in Berkeley was going to be supported by the State of California.” No such understanding has ever been established, to my knowledge, nor does it seem likely in the foreseeable future.

Any lingering doubts were dispelled by a July 3 memo from university president Clark Kerr, stating: “I have reached the following decision: The Berkeley campus may accept gifts for service offerings of Armenian Language, but will not engage in a fund campaign for such purpose or use State funds or unrestricted endowment funds for support of instruction in Armenian.” Pilibos continued to seek support for the program, including from NAASR, which contributed \$1,000 in 1964. But by 1967 support had dried up, and Armenian Studies at Berkeley would not revive until the 1990s.

Thus, the path was clear for efforts to establish a chair at UCLA. In September 1962, the university’s Board of Regents voted:

That the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research be authorized to use the name of the University in a fund-raising campaign for the purpose of establishing a \$1 million Permanent Fund for the Advancement of Armenian Studies, \$200,000 of which will be utilized to establish an endowed Chair for Armenian Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, it being understood: (a) that campaign material will receive prior approval in accordance with University policy;(b) that \$150,000 of the \$200,000 will be provided within five years and the balance within three years thereafter; and that the Los Angeles campus will establish and fund the Chair with a regularly budgeted tenure faculty position at the time the initial amount is received, thereafter reducing University support as the endowment income grows.

NAASR’s California chapters began organizing events to call public attention to the organization and its campaign for a UCLA chair. Lectures were given by author and translator Aram Tolegian, Richard Hovannisian, and others. By the May 1963 UCLA kickoff banquet, nearly \$30,000 had been raised.

Although serious disagreements persisted between East and West, at times boiling over into rancor, and the road ahead was by no means a smooth one, by 1969 \$150,000 had been raised and a chair in Armenian Studies was

established with Avedis Sanjian as the first occupant. A decade later the chair would be named after Narekatsi, and in 2000 Peter Cowe became the second holder of the chair. In the same year of 1969, Richard Hovannisian, who had been teaching at UCLA for several years already, was hired to teach Armenian History on a full-time basis. Eventually, Hovannisian's position would itself become an endowed chair funded by the Armenian Educational Foundation and, upon his retirement, was renamed the Richard G. Hovannisian Chair in Modern Armenian History and is currently held by Sebouh D. Aslanian.

Also in 1969, NAASR organized the "Conference on Armenian Studies in the United States," the first attempt to bring together all who, at that time, were working in the field in the U.S., including those teaching at Harvard, UCLA, and Columbia. After the conference, Richard Hovannisian wrote that "[t]he consensus of all those who attended is that the conference proved useful and beneficial to the field in general and to the participants personally. A certain esprit de corps was generated. The problems in Armenian studies and the approaches to surmounting those problems were crystallized during the concentrated and intense sessions. It was gratifying to note that the participants from the existing three primary centers, Harvard University, Columbia University, and the University of California, were in basic agreement on nearly every fundamental issue placed on the agenda."<sup>39</sup> Such agreement would become increasingly rare as the field expanded in the coming decades, but the foundation had been laid for Armenian Studies to develop.

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<sup>39</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian to Manoog S. Young, NAASR archives, folder "Richard Hovannisian"

*The movement to establish endowed teaching positions in Armenian studies in the United States has continued since 1969. There are currently 14 endowed professorships and three endowed visiting positions as well as two centers with endowments.*

### **Endowed Chairs and Programs<sup>40</sup>**

1. Harvard University: Mesrob Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies (1969)
2. University of California, Los Angeles: Grigor Narekatsi Chair in Armenian Language and Literature (1969)
3. Columbia University: Gevork Avedissian Centennial Chair in Armenian History and Civilization (1979)
4. University of Michigan: Alex Manoogian Chair in Modern Armenian History (1981)
5. University of California, Los Angeles: Richard G. Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History (formerly Armenian Educational Foundation Chair in Modern Armenian History) (1986)
6. University of Michigan: Marie Manoogian Chair in Armenian Language and Literature (1987)
7. California State University, Fresno: Haig and Isabel Berberian Chair in Armenian Studies (1988)
8. Tufts University: Arthur H. Dadian and Ara Oztemel Chair in Armenian Art and Architectural History (1989)

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<sup>40</sup>Some information in this list, including dates, is gleaned from *Armenian Studies Chairs, Programs, and Related Graduate Studies, 1969-2003* (Dearborn, MI: Armenian Research Center), compiled by Dennis R. Papazian and Gerald Ottenbreit, Jr. Only included are currently existing, permanent chairs/programs/professorships/lectureships in Armenian Studies. Thus, not included, for example, are the defunct Tarzian Professorship at the University of Pennsylvania or the extant, but not Armenian Studies centered, Arsham and Charlotte Ohannessian Chair at the University of Minnesota, the Melikian Center at Arizona State University, or the Norian Armenian Lecture Series at the University of Connecticut.

9. California State University, Fresno: Henry S. Khanzadian Kazan Visiting Professorship in Armenian Studies (2000)
10. Tufts University: Hagop and Miriam Darakjian and Boghos and Nazley Jafarian and Son Haig Chair in Armenian History (1998)
11. University of California, Berkeley: William Saroyan Visiting Professorship in Armenian Studies (1995)
12. Columbia University: Nikit and Eleanora Ordjanian Visiting Professor of Armenian Studies (1998)
12. University of Chicago: Lectureship in Armenian Studies (1998)
13. Clark University: Robert Aram and Marianne Kaloosdian and Stephen and Marian Mugar Chair in Modern Armenian History and Armenian Genocide Studies (2002)
14. Boston University: Charles K. and Elisabeth M. Kenosian Chair in Modern Armenian History and Literature (2007)
15. University of Southern California: Turpanjian Early Career Chair in Contemporary Armenian Studies (2014)
16. University of California, Irvine: Meghrouni Family Presidential Chair in Armenian Studies (2016)

#### **Other Endowed Entities at U.S. Universities**

1. University of Michigan, Dearborn: Armenian Research Center (1985)
2. University of Southern California: Institute of Armenian Studies (2005)