

ETHNIC PITTSBURGH:

Language, Music, Culture

ARMENIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

8 Wednesdays, January 30—March 19, 6:30-8 p.m.

This course is an overview of Armenian language and culture. Half of each session will be devoted to language and the second half to a special aspect of Armenian culture which will be presented by guest lecturers: Dr. Ohannes Shnorhokian, Araxy Avakian, Hagop Bedrossian, Vahe Belouzian, and Sylvia Merian. Topics will include an introduction to Armenian history, geography, religion, and legends. There will also be a special emphasis on the visual arts including architecture, textiles (rugs and lace), coins, metalwork, manuscripts, potteries, tiles, paintings, and crafts. **Viken Sassouni, D.D.S.,** School of Dental Medicine University of Pittsburgh, is chairman of the Armenian Nationality Room Committee. FEE: \$40

COURSE/WORKSHOP/STUDYTRIP REGISTRATION FORM

To register by mail, please complete this form and return with registration fee to:

University of Pittsburgh
Pitt's Informal Program
407 Cathedral of Learning
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Name _____

Address _____

Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____

Business Firm

(It may be necessary to reach you during the day in case of change or cancellation of classes.)

Please list below the courses and workshops you plan to take during the fall term.

_____ \$ _____

_____ \$ _____

_____ \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

The Armenian Student Club of
the University of Pittsburgh

Dear Compatriot

The Armenian Student Club of the University of Pittsburgh is organizing and sponsoring a PIP course in Armenian Language and culture.

See enclosed a reprint of the announcement by the University of Pittsburgh.

This is the first time such a course has been offered in Pittsburgh. Your registration to this course will mean support and the continuation of this program. The fee of \$40 is for a family and an individual fee is \$20.

A SYMPOSIUM ON "THE ESSENCE OF ARMENIA"

On Saturday, November 17, took place the most important event in the history of the Armenian community of Pittsburgh, organized by the Armenian Nationality Room Committee at the University of Pittsburgh.

This symposium was devoted to the identification of the "Essence of Armenia and Armenians". Some of the best international scholars, experts on diverse aspects of Armenian culture, participated to clarify and express the essence of Armenia and its people.

The symposium started with welcoming words from Gerard Koshkarian, president of the Armenian Club of Pittsburgh. He was followed by Ms. Maxine Bruhns, Director of Nationality Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Programs, who gave a brief historical background of the nationality rooms of the University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. Sassouni, chairman of the Armenian Nationality Room Committee, stated the purpose of the symposium: The Armenian Community of Pittsburgh has undertaken to develop an "Armenian Nationality Classroom" in the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. This unique 42 story Gothic structure is classified as an historical monument because 19 of its classrooms have been designed to reflect the cultural heritage of the ethnic groups living in Pittsburgh.

Dr. Sassouni stated that in the past many error in decorations and design have been made. In order to establish what is a genuine Armenian style and decor, as well as the materials to be used, and before initiating the actual design of the classroom, it was decided to clarify the spirit of the "Essence of Armenia and Armenians". Hence, the development of the symposium. Dr. Sassouni thanked particularly, Mr. Jacque Merian and Dr. Ara Papazian, co-chairman of the "Design subcommittee for their unhurry effort to bring the symposium untiring to existence. He also praised the community and all members of the committee for having each contributed time and effort to the success of the organization.

The first speaker was Dr. Vahe Oshagan, Terzian professor of literature, University of Pennsylvania. Describing the spiritual and cultural constants of Armenia, he identified five major cultural periods during which the essence of Armenia went into formative changes. These five periods were: The pagan period, early Christian period, the middle ages, the first diaspora, and the present diaspora. According to Dr. Oshagan, two central cultural realities are important: The church and the nationality temperament. The main function of the church was to preserve and promote the various arts and to symbolize the nationality unity. The Armenian temperament, the cause and the product of the Armenian history that some poets called "Hay Hoki", the Armenian Soul, whose elements are, pride, sense of duty, generosity, and love of work. The Armenian essence affirms itself by a constant Transcendance of suffering and evil through acts of creativity, through struggle for freedom, and dignity. It ascerts the primacy of spiritual and human values more than any other value.

Dr. Oshagan concluded that the architects should somehow reflect these characteristics in the design of the classroom.

The second speaker of the day was Dr. John Greppin, professor of linguistics, Department of English, Cleveland State University.

In his topic of "Visual world of proto-Armenian", he traced the origin Armenians from their Indo-European homeland up to the time when they were identified as Armenians.

From the year 3500 B.C., the date of Indo-European unity, major cultures broke from that homeland and developed linguistic cultures that exist until today. The Armenians were one of them. The Armenians, he said, originated as two major groups: one which went south and settled in the area where now we call Greece, and became intermingled with those people. The other group went east and south and rode to Anatolia, crossed the high plains to become the Armenian nation.

Dr. Greppin suggested that in the beginning, the Greeks and the Armenians were one nation. He based his theory on language. He, and other scholars, have found the correlation between the classical Greek and the classical Armenian very compelling. Thus implying the fact that the Armenian language is closer to Greek than any other Indo-European language and it is because of the closeness in language that we must acknowledge very early union between the Armenians and the Greeks.

Dr. Edith Neubauer, from the Karl-Marx University in Leipzig, DDR, took the stand next and illustrated the distinctive characteristics of "Armenian architecture and manuscripts" in the context of their application and design of the Armenian Nationality Classroom.

Dr. Neubauer noted that the adoption of Christianity in 314 AD was an important landmark in the history and development of Armenian architecture and art. The first climax of Armenian art was in the 6th and 7th centuries, illustrated by the monument of Zevartanotz, the Cathedral of Talish and Taline and the Cathedral of Odzun, thus this period became characterized by the austerity, severeness, and majestic appearance of Cathedrals and monuments.

The next climax of Armenian architecture was reached in the 10th and 11th centuries. Dr. Neubauer illustrated the church of Holy-Cross on the island of Aghtamer. It is unique by its rich decorations illustrating the old and new testament. According to Dr. Neubauer, the Khatchkars are unique to Armenia and exist nowhere else in the Caucasus.

The third climax in Armenian architecture is illustrated by Keghart, which is the best monument of rock architecture in this respect. Dr. Neubauer concluded her presentation by suggesting the use of only stone rather than wood for the decoration of the Armenian Nationality Classroom. She also suggested the use of a dome or a vault type of ceiling since there are no flat roofs in Armenian architecture, a fact, which is also seen in Armenian manuscripts and miniatures.

Mr. Tachjian, the president of the Armenian American Artists Association from Watertown, Mass., presented a very well illustrated overview of Armenian painters of the 20th century. This series was part of a collection that Mr. Tachjian gathered during his recent visit to Soviet Armenia.

The second part of Mr. Tachjian's presentation was devoted to the life and work of a young painter, Minas Garabed Avedissian, who lost his life at an early age in Armenia. According to Mr. Tachjian, Minas influence in contemporary art today is very important because the artist continuously looked at the old Armenian manuscripts for motifs. Mr. Tachjian stressed the fact that Armenian art in modern paintings comes from ancient manuscripts

Dr. Paul Bedoukian was the next speaker, his presentation dealt with Armenian art as reflected on its coins and metal work.

Dr. Bedoukian stated that rocks and minerals are abundant in Armenia. The rocks made possible an original style of Armenian architecture. Metals, led to the development of metal art with many distinctive features: Armenians coins reflect the brief periods of independence in Armenian history. Two main issues of coins existed in Armenia, the first was during the Artaxiad period and the second during the middle ages by the Roupinian dynasty in Cilicia. Dikran I, in his rule from 123-96 B.C., struck coins which were later developed by his son Tigran, the great, who organized the mints and began a coinage which was very unique in its style. Some distinctive features of those coins were the Armenian Tiara, adorned by an eight pointed star flanked by two eagles.

According to Dr. Bedoukian, the middle ages produced more interesting coins specially by King Levon whose coins illustrate his coronation by the Roman emperor. Other coins has some Armenian letters or the famous Armenian Lions.

Dr. Bedoukian pointed out that the Armenian Classroom, on its walls and ceilings should reflect the original stone and metal art.

Dr. Sassouni presented the contribution of Armenians to the "Art of rug making." He established that rug-making dates back to the 7th century BC as revealed by the discovery of the Pasyryk rug. He referred the audience to a recent paper in "Ararat" magazine by Mr Lemyel Amirian, who hypothesized that the Pasyryk rug was probably woven by Armenians.

There is a hiatus, said Dr. Sassouni, in our knowledge up to the middle ages - Marco Polo refers to the Armenians as making the most beautiful rugs in Anatolia. There are also illustration of spinning in Armenian manuscript of the 11th century.

Then, Dr. Sassouni reviewed the Armenian "Dragon Rugs": elaborate and powerful carpets made in Caucasus. Martin at the turn of the century and most of modern scholars attribute them to Armenian Weavers. One particularly: the so-called "Kohar" carpet famous for its inscription and date (end of 17th century) is important because the Armenian writing establishes the origin.

Dr. Sassouni then reviewed the different geographic locations where Armenians were engaged in rug-making: He described the Kazak, Lori-pambak, Ercebouni, Sevan, Karabagh called rugs in the confines of present Armenia. In Anatolia where about two millions Armenians were living in the turn of the century, the area of Kars, Van, Erzeroun, Sivas were famous for their Armenian rugs. Some are now identified by their inscriptions.

In Bursa, Hereke and Kum-Kapu Armenian were engaged in making silk rugs for the court or for commercial use. In Persia, there were villages entirely populated by Armenians like Lillihan making rugs as famous as the Sarouk.

Dr. Sassouni stressed that there is a tendency among collectors and dealers to identify according to the geographical origin and ignoring the people making them. Thus in Turkey, the Armenian rugs that changed ownership during the massacres are claimed to be Turkish. He stressed that it was critical to gather all rugs with Armenian inscription. He congratulated Mr. Gregorian from Massachusetts for such an initiative recently.

Then Dr. Sassouni presented a personal and original hypothesis. A certain number of rugs do reflect as their basic design, the floor plan of Armenian churches. He elaborated in comparing some rugs from Lampa-Karabagh to the floor plan of Etchmiadzin. He made a strong point to stress that Etchmiadzin was built about 200 years before the Arab invasion. Therefore, this particular floor plan could not have been Islamic in origin, and the rugs of Islamic inspiration as many have claimed. Dr. Sassouni illustrated many analogies between Armenian rugs and church wall decoration and extracted many similarities between Armenian rugs and Armenian manuscripts. Finally, he reminded, that it was the Armenians who had developed certain characteristic and famous dyes: the Vortan Garmir (Carmine, Carnation) the Armenian Blue (indigo), and golden yellow. These were used for wool, manuscripts, and church Frescoes.

Dr. Sassouni concluded that the Armenian Room to be developed should reflect these Armenian colors, and the Armenian rugs should be used as part of the decor to transfer to the room a piece of Armenian Soul.

The second part of the afternoon was devoted to a panel discussion under the leadership of Yervant Terzian of Philadelphia. The purpose of the panel discussion was to bring all of the information presented by the speakers together to serve as background material for the design of the Armenian Nationality Classroom.

Mr. Terzian, with help of the speakers and the audience was able to formulate the philosophic basis upon which the design of the Armenian room should be based:

It should be made of stone as the prime material. The stone should be preferably the "Douf", the red-pink volcanic stone with which are made most of the Armenian churches and other monuments.

A vault or Dome should be incorporated in the design as this is a genuine and original contribution to world architecture. Aghtamar and Tathe should taken as model for wall carvings and sculptures.

In the decoration, the predominant colors should be Blue, Red, and Gold. If frescos are used they should find their roots in the illumination of the Armenian manuscripts. Similarly designs of every day objects like chairs and tables should be searched in the illuminations. Copper should be the predominant metal used. Coins from Dikran or Levon could be used for decorative motifs. Finally the floor should be covered by Armenian rugs specially the ones which bear the floor plan of Armenian church. Rugs could also be used for decorative basis on the seat of chair or table cover.

Above all these details, the creativity and uniqueness of Armenian spirit should strike the visitor and student who enters this Armenian room.

Dr. Sassouni thanked warmly the speakers for their contributions and announced at the conclusion of the panel discussion that Mr. James Tashjian, editor of the Armenian Review, has agreed to devote an issue of the Review to the proceedings of the symposium.

The symposium ended with enthusiasm and cheerfulness. The task now is to identify the architects and artists who will put these projections to work. The Armenian Classroom Committee is now concentrating on two directions: first, bring forth a room design which is faithful to the spirit formulated and second but not least to raise the funds necessary to realize this project. Anyone interested in contributing either area should contact: Dr. Viken Sassouni, chairman of the Armenian Room Committee, 607 Washington Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15228, (412) 563-4166.

CAPTIONS

FIG 1 PARTICIPANTS OF THE SYMPOSIUM

From left to right

Bedoukian, Oshagan, Tachjian, Neubauer, Sassouni, Bruhns, Terzian, and Greppin.

FIG 2 PARTICIPANTS OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

From left to right

Terzian, Bedoukian, Oshagan, Greppin, Baltan, Bruhns, Tachjian, Neubauer, and Sassouni.

FIG 3 PART OF THE AUDIENCE DURING THE SYMPOSIUM

From left to right

First row: Dr. Greppin, Dr. Bedoukian, Dr. Sassouni, Mrs. Maxine Bruhns, Ms. Oshagan, and Dr. Oshagan.