



IN MEMORIAM

Avedis K. Sanjian

Professor of Near Eastern Languages & Cultures, Emeritus
Los Angeles
1921– 1995

On July 22, 1995, UCLA lost a truly great friend. Avedis K. Sanjian, an internationally respected pioneer in Armenian studies who helped make UCLA a major center for the discipline died at the age of 74.

The Turkish- born Sanjian earned two degrees in English: a bachelor's degree from the American University of Beirut in 1949 and a master's degree from the University of Michigan in 1950. In 1956, he became the first graduate student at Michigan to receive a doctorate in Near Eastern studies.

Sanjian's academic career began in 1957 with an appointment at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies as a postdoctoral research fellow in Armenian studies. During the four years (1957-61) of his postdoctoral fellowship, Sanjian researched and wrote his first book, *The Armenian Communities in Syria under Ottoman Dominion*, published by the Harvard University Press in 1965. In 1961, Sanjian was appointed assistant professor of Armenian studies at Harvard University — a milestone in the history of higher education in the United States, as it was the first full- time appointment in Armenian studies. At the urging of the noted Orientalist, the late Sir Hamilton Gibb, then Director of Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Sanjian developed the first curriculum of Armenological courses in the United States. It encompassed Armenian language, literature, and cultural history. While at Harvard, Sanjian also compiled *A Grammar of Classical Armenian* (Harvard University, 1963), to enable students to learn this ancient language.

In 1965, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), invited Avedis Sanjian to join its faculty as associate professor of Armenian studies. Three years later, he was promoted to the rank of full professor. The next milestone in his professional career came in 1969 when he was appointed to the newly created Chair for Armenian Studies at UCLA, the first ever endowed chair established at UCLA. At his suggestion in 1979, the Chair was named after the great medieval Armenian mystic poet Grigor Narekatsi. Also in 1969, Sanjian inaugurated the Graduate Program in Armenian Studies. His fourth book, *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301-1480: A Source for Middle Eastern History*, was published in 1969 by the Harvard University Press.

From 1970 to 1974, Professor Sanjian served as chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, which had four undergraduate and seven graduate degree programs. During that time, he also worked on his monumental tome, *A Catalogue of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts in the United States*, which was published in 1976 by the University of California Press.

Professor Sanjian wrote 10 books and authored more than 40 articles in English and Armenian on various Armenological subjects published in scholarly journals. He was a founding member of the Society for Armenian Studies, an international organization dedicated to the promotion of Armenian Studies. He was the editor- in- chief of its scholarly publication the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, whose first issue won the "Best New Journal" award in 1985. He was also a member of various scholarly organizations and Armenian cultural organizations, such as the Tekeyan Cultural Association and the Armenian General Benevolent Association — to name the two closest to his heart. From 1981 to 1989, he served as chairman of the board of the Tekeyan Cultural Association's Arshag Dickranian Armenian School.

Sanjian received many honors and awards, but the two that he cherished the most: the “Saint Sahak- Saint Mesrop Medal” bestowed upon him by His Holiness, the late Catholicos Vazgen I, of Echmiadzin, Armenia for his “many years of dedicated cultural and scholarly services... as an educator, philologist, historian, and expert in literature” and in appreciation for his 30 years of “most meritorious accomplishments in the interests of the Armenian people...”; and the “Mesrop Mashtots Medal,” awarded to him by the Directorate of the famous Manuscript Library of Armenia called Matenadaran. These medals were awarded to Sanjian on the 30th anniversary celebration of his dedication to Armenian Studies, which was organized by the graduate students in Armenian Studies and celebrated by members of the UCLA faculty and administration, by organizations representing the Armenian community, and numerous scholars and institutions in the United States, in Europe, the Near East and Armenia. The event took place in March of 1987.

The absence of this kind and gentle man will be deeply felt by all those whose lives he touched. He will be particularly missed by his students, towards whom he was so caring and nurturing. He is survived by his wife, Helen Sanjian, mother, Nazeli Sanjian, son and daughter- in- law Professor Gregory S. and Andrea Sanjian, and grandson Alex G. Sanjian; brothers Arsen K. Sanjian and family, Garabed K. Sanjian and family, and Harout Sanjian and family.

Gia Alvazian
Nancy M. Henley