

ՅՈՐԵՆԵԱՆ**YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY****Founding Rectors**

**Prof. Hagop Manandian, Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian
(1921-2021)**

In view of the most recent controversies on the exclusion of the Armenian Church History from the curriculum to compliment the Armenian History and Literature in the schools in Armenia, it is highly instructive to learn the founding of the State University of Yerevan with full responsibility at a most trying time a century ago on January 23, 1921.

Golden Age Armenia Revisited

The 5th century Golden Age Armenia brightened our country simultaneously with the collapse of the Arshakuni Kingdom in 428 AD, and the rise of the literary kingdom of Armenia instead, by the efforts of our greatest leaders of our history St. Sahag Barthev Catholicos, St. Mesrob Mashtots Vartabed, and the Holy Translators of the Holy Scriptures into Armenian. In the middle of the fallen political kingdom they resolved courageously to replace it with the lasting Kingdom of letters and literature, culture and academia.

Likewise, when the First Armenian Republic ended in 1920 following the Soviet domination on November 28, our distinguished leaders who graduated from Kevorkian Seminary of Holy Etchmiadzin, upon their return from higher education in Germany and Europe, resolved to establish immediately the State University of Yerevan against all odds.

Those distinguished founders of the State University included Hagop Manandian, first Rector, Bishop Karekin Hovsepian, Manoug Abeghian, Hrachya Ajarrian, Stepan Malkhassian, Arakel Babakhanian (Leo), Arsen Derderian, B. Kalantarian, and M. Toumanian. In 1925 the State of Armenia conferred on all of them the degree of professor and sanctioned the operation of the University. The inauguration on January 23, 1921 marked a heroic undertaking indeed, rapidly and most courageously to challenge the imminent uncertain and undependable political future, without which the destiny of the Armenian academia could remain in serious jeopardy. It marked a milestone for the present day Armenia to respect it and reflect on it seriously and responsibly before endangering the solid academic system in the schools in our homeland as we hear nowadays. To trample on one essential subject, such as the History of the Armenian Church, and remove it or confusedly dilute it with the history of our people is a serious regress and therefore inadmissible.

The Foundation

As early as January 23, 1921 the foundation of the Yerevan State University took place

within a temporary building until later when the present impressive building of the University was built, with Prof. Hagop Manandian as rector. The new institution offered highest opportunity both for local Armenian students and eventually for those from the Diaspora. Professional graduates became schools leaders in the homeland, and those from abroad returned to assume corresponding leadership in their respective communities.

Prof. Manandian was a distinguished historian before assuming the leadership of the University, having accomplished his philological publications when invited by His Holiness Mkrtich Khrimian Catholicos (1892-1907) as a lecturer at Kevorkian Seminary from 1900 to 1905, at the same time editing the official monthly “*Ararat*” of the Mother See for 15 years. His monumental works included *Feodalism in ancient Armenia*, *Critical review of the Armenian history* (4 volumes), *The foreign trade of Armenia*, *Armenia’s economic prosperity*, *The importance of Armenia during Arab invasions and Bagratuni kingdom*. The first two, *Feodalism* and *History* are outstanding in their originality and exhaustive contents with supportive ancient sources, Creek, Latin and Syiac. The 4-volume *History* explores the Armenian History from prehistoric times to the establishment of the Arshakuni Kingdom in 66 AD through the entire succeeding centuries until 428 the fall of the kingdom and beyond.

Curriculum and Students

Initially the University included in the curriculum engineering and pedagogical subjects, soon to follow with the faculty of the medicine, physics and related subjects. The founders did not lose time to definitely include Armenian literary subjects from its Golden Age heritage all the way down to its one thousand years developed Armenian historiography. This was associated with the study of philology to develop the History of the Armenian people based on each of the series of historians in each century from the 5th to the 17th centuries. Naturally through its one hundred years the curriculum in general adopted numerous changes and met challenges according to the widespread Universities of Europe and elsewhere to keep pace with the required progress. The fact that today the State University of Yerevan is following the norms and the systems of higher education in modern times is in itself the guarantor of full-fledged existence and endorsement.

The students up to 1925 numbered 1300 with the first 37 graduates. Within the next year the number of the students climbed much higher reaching 3500 in 1927, as the University began offering courses for the degree of the doctorate with additional new faculties. Earlier in 1923 the State Conservatory in the name of Komitas Vartabed was dedicated in Yerevan. The first two decades the University offered some 1500 graduates including 435 pedagogues, 296 medical doctors, 130 engineers, 324 agriculturists, 93 veterinarians, 252 economists, and 11 artists. In addition the State University has offered thousands of educators, lecturers, lawyers, and geographers.

The Two Giant Founders

I was an ordained deacon attending the Seminary in Antelias, a first year student in the

faculty of theology, when we heard from our teacher of the Armenian ancient historiography Simon Simonian that in February of 1952 Prof. Hagop Manandian had passed away in Armenia the same week. Entering the classroom with the sad note to tell us to remember him constantly in view of his monumental literary legacy, among them to read the voluminous “*Critical history of the Armenian people*” as the standard and comprehensive book for all times.

Four months later, in June 1952 the second giant His Holiness Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian passed away in his pontifical residence in Antelias, Lebanon. Mr. Simonian was in grief again. His Holiness had assigned him in 1946 his assistant while completing his monumental volume “*Colophons of Manuscripts*” just released from the press of the Catholicosate. The venerable Catholicos had seen the large volume just the year before.

As young students hearing the passing of Hagop Manandian, and actually seeing in front of our eyes the demise of our beloved Holy Father Catholicos of Cilicia Karekin I Hovsepian, we could visualize how important of a role they performed earlier in their lives being the pioneers of letters and literature, and the initiators of the State University in most difficult times of our history. Today’s leadership of Armenian academia must look back and evaluate their responsibilities based on those real and honorable giants who had no other interest than promoting the Armenian highest education in our homeland as their first priority without any further consideration.

Both Manandian and the Catholicos were the founders of the State University, and their loss was irreparable indeed. Their legacy remains unshaken as the most essential institution of higher education in Yerevan. How blessed we were, the students at the Seminary, especially those under the Venerable Catholicos Karekin I Hovsepian who learned under his watchful blessings in the late forties and the early fifties.

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