Winning this prize enabled me to spend a month in Armenia completing several activities essential for both my current doctoral research and my long-term career prospects. In the first instance I was able to attend the ARMACAD Armenian Studies Summer School, lasting three weeks, moving around different parts of Armenia, and providing forty-five hours of intensive language learning, as well as twenty-four hours devoted to lectures on Armenian literature, history, anthropology, arts and culture, linguistics, politics and more, all tailored around the interests and backgrounds of the attendees. Over this period I was able to bring my modern eastern Armenian reading ability up to an academic standard, and my speaking and listening to a conversational level, all in a welcoming, fun and relaxing environment. The lectures were of the highest critical standard, introduced me to new materials, methods and resources that will be of enormous benefit going forwards, as well as allowing me the opportunity to meet some of the field’s established names and rising scholars.

In the second instance the prize enabled me to carry out two pieces of research essential to my current and future projects, visiting the site of Amberd, and investigating the earliest manuscript of my doctorate’s central text. Amberd is a central medieval site consisting of a large set of fortifications, the remains of an elite domestic compound including a bathhouse and cistern, and an eleventh-century church. It is the largest and most complete secular complex to survive from the Armenian Middle Ages, and the family which owned it in the eleventh century are central figures in my doctoral research. Visiting this site was an amazing and edifying experience, enabling me to see the physical context in which the historical actors produced the sources I study, and providing rich material for a future project that will cover archaeological and architectural remains more explicitly.

In order to view the manuscript I spent the last week of my time in Armenia at the Matenadaran, the National Institute for Ancient Manuscripts. Here I was able to spend one day viewing the physical manuscript as a whole – copied in the thirteenth century but containing much older works, including that which I study of the eleventh century – in order to see how the text is integrated with the rest of the contents. Thereafter I spent a week studying digital images of those sections containing the text itself, and using the institute’s extensive library. Thus I was able to carry out fundamental original research alongside getting acquainted with perhaps the most important institution for pre-modern Armenian Studies worldwide. Overall my time in Armenia was extremely beneficial and enjoyable, and I am hugely grateful for the prize which enabled me to go on the trip.

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