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HP Studio: Reading Buildings
Problem 3: Field Documentation and Formal Analysis
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The first thing confronting a visitor to the Dazian mausoleum is a simple concrete path leading from street to door. Most of the other mausolea on the street are missing this detail, and its presence in this case instantly draws attention—the mausoleum is sized similarly to its neighbors and surrounded by individual gravestones, but looking down at the path and then looking up places the eye squarely at the Dazian door.

Two steps lead to a heavy bronze door flanked by delicate, geometric granite detailing that is a common theme at this site. The door is heavy both literally (pushing it open is no easy feat) and visually—the dark bronze contrasted with the lighter grey granite is formidable and commands respect. The building itself is symmetrical and highly vertical—strips of granite make up most of the detailing around the door and under the entablature, creating a frame that gives the appearance of great height.

The entablature itself is rigidly ornamental—a pattern consisting of a wreath overlaying a torch wraps around the building, and alternates with a granite square surrounded by a slightly larger geometric shape. It is classical in no particular way—one gets the sense that the ornament is meant more to impress upon the visitor a sense of monumentality and reverence than to evoke or represent something specific to the interred.

The roof continues to advance vertical theme, appearing to consist of a set of stacked boxes that grow smaller as they reach higher. This emphasizes the square

that is the main building space and at the same time tricks the eye—the building measures much shorter than it looks, and from side and rear angles, where the door and door-framing details are missing, the whole structure appears more squat than lean.

The interior of the building is equally imposing. The walls and tomb are white marble, but the bronze door and granite that surrounds it leave the visitor in almost total darkness even when the door is propped open on a sunny afternoon. Once inside, it becomes apparent that the structure is a basic square, something emphasized by the fact that the ceiling is not vaulted (the exterior roof is a dummy roof above the entablature). Each side window is stained-glass and painted with flowers, and the rear window, situated above the tomb, depicts an angel with the lifelike face of a woman, likely one of the Mrs. Dazians. This window is the focal point of the mausoleum's interior, and reinforces the idea that the eye is meant to continue looking up—from the base of the path at the end of the street to the top of the back window is a straight, steadily rising line that makes the visitor feel the building announcing its formal purpose.

Erected in 1906 by the C. E. Tayntor Granite Company (about which little information exists), the mausoleum is made from Hallowell granite, white marble, and bronze. It sits on a small hill, which adds to its vertically impressive appearance—only from the front can a visitor view the structure without straining their neck, though it is important to note that the Greek-inspired ornament wraps around the entire building. The landscaping is minimal, at the request of the owner(s). Letters in the Woodlawn archive impress upon the cemetery the

importance of cost-cutting wherever possible, especially after the Dazian estate took on the responsibility of maintenance. At one point, begonias flanked the front steps, but were removed when the estate's executors slashed the mausoleum budget in the mid-1960s.

The firstborn son of a Bavarian immigrant, Henry Dazian was a lifelong Manhattanite, spending his early years shadowing his father at the family business, a theatre costume house originally located on the Bowery. Upon his father's passing, Henry took over the shop and quickly turned it into a theatrical powerhouse—he stocked ready-made costumes, employed designers and seamstresses, and personally travelled to Europe to purchase fabrics that would eventually clothe the biggest stars of turn-of-the-century New York—Sarah Bernhardt was said to have been so pleased with Dazian's work that she personally sent him shoes she had worn in a production of "Camile".¹²

Henry Dazian's personality seems to have expanded along with his business—he was a founding member of the Lamb's Club, and was often mentioned in society columns, being fond of gambling with his architect Stanford White and celebrity ne'er do well "Diamond" Jim Brady. Many assert that a theatre curtain never rose until Dazian was in his seat³, and all newspaper accounts present the image of Dazian as the consummate gadabout:

¹ "'Costumes By Dazian' For A Century", Ruth Arrell. *The Sun (1837-1985)*; Sep 21, 1941. Pg. M3.

² Dazian was also tasked with finding a way to make Ms. Bernhardt's wooden leg look more realistic under gowns, something he was chosen to do based on his shop's pioneering use of 'symmetricals', a delicate term for pads used to fill out the rears of slender dancers.

³ "The Dazian Dynasty", Irving Spiegel. *New York Times*; Apr 11, 1943. Pg. X2.

“Like Thomas Mann's “Buddenbrooks” history, the Dazian family went a little soft with Henry. Although he did well by his inheritance, he managed nevertheless to be off to the races or a perpetual pinochle game by 3 o'clock each afternoon. Instead of the irascible, energetic old man, we find when Henry reached his prime fastidiously tailored bon vivant whose only concession to an older conservatism was in the neatly trimmed droop moustache, which he kept with him until he died. He was romantic and theatre-struck all his life.”⁴

Little information exists about either of Dazian's wives, both of whom reside with him at Woodlawn. A minor scandal appears with Mary, his second wife—her first husband sued Dazian for alimony he paid to Mary after she began travelling in Europe with Henry and styling herself Mrs. Dazian before the pair were legally wed, but her name appears nowhere else connected with Dazian. She accompanied him on what were presumably buying trips to Europe, showing up on ship registers until 1931, a year before her death.

It is the first Mrs. Dazian, Emma (maiden name Berg) that provides the biggest clue about the mausoleum's relationship to its inhabitants. Married from 1881 until her death in 1906, Henry and Emma were childless (Dazian's second wife also bore him no children) and travelled often—she, too, appears on passenger manifests until a year before her passing. Emma Dazian's obituary tells readers that she was 43 at her date of death, and that internment was to happen at the family's earliest convenience, lending credence to the idea that Dazian turned to the Tayntor Granite Company for a ready-made mausoleum because he was in need of a place to rest his wife post haste.

The Dazian mausoleum is formal, antiquated, and austere—its character comes from its lines, all of which exist to remind the visitor that it is a place of rest for the departed. It commands a solemnity that, based on research, seems out of

⁴ “A Century of Costumes”. *New York Times*; Mar 23, 1941. Pg. X3.

step with its occupants. It is quietly imposing and remarkably solid in its assemblage, qualities associated with death and mourning—it is, in short, exactly what one expects a catalogue mausoleum to be.





