



# ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume II, Number 1 San Francisco, California, USA February, 2005

## NOTES FROM ARMENIA

Since the splash made by the *PASSAGES* exhibit in San Francisco in the summer of 2002, the ripples continue to expand not only in the United States but abroad; individuals and organizations alike are more interested in Armenian rugs and the ARS. In fact, before my departure to Paris, Lorraine Parker received an e-mail from Edgard and Alexandre Hamalian of Paris (father and son) inquiring about membership. I met them at their office on the Rue Lafayette. They were very gracious, taking time from their busy schedule to receive me; they were curious and enthusiastic about the activities of the ARS; and they themselves are passionate collectors of fine antique and Armenian rugs (see photo with their latest acquisition, an inscribed double Sevan). After exchanging information and ideas, they purchased a copy of the *PASSAGES* catalogue,

filled out the application, and became our newest members from France. Bravo! While in Paris, I also paid a visit to the Samuelians' "Librarie Orientale" on the Rue Monsieur Le Prince, where they have sold more than ten copies of *PASSAGES* during the past year.

On November eighth, I arrived in Yerevan. I was told they've had a long, mild and beautiful autumn. I caught the tail end of it, enjoying the golden sunlight, a few



Edgard Hamalian with his new rug

days of rain, and tasty and fragrant apples, pears, grapes and pomegranates. My visit was short, but long enough to renew some of my previous contacts with museums and with friends. As you may recall, a year ago, on behalf of the ARS, we gave a commercial grade vacuum cleaner and a donation of \$500 to each of the three museums with rug collections (newsletter vol. I, #2). This visit, the contribution from the ARS was to be another \$500 to each museum, to be used exclusively towards the restoration of one or more rugs. I also offered each museum a copy of the *PASSAGES* catalogue containing the following message in Armenian and English: "On



Alexandre and Edgard Hamalian, our newest members, Paris

*continued on page three*

## NEXT MEETING

Saturday, March 12, 2005, at 10:00 a.m., at Alexander's Rug & Furniture Co., 1130 E. Gene Autry Way, Anaheim, CA 92805. PH: (714)535-5197 (call for directions). General meeting, including election of officers, show and tell (bring rugs!) and an evening dinner at a location to be announced at the meeting. Check page 5 of this newsletter for the schedule, and our website for more information, <http://www.armenianrugssociety.com>.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

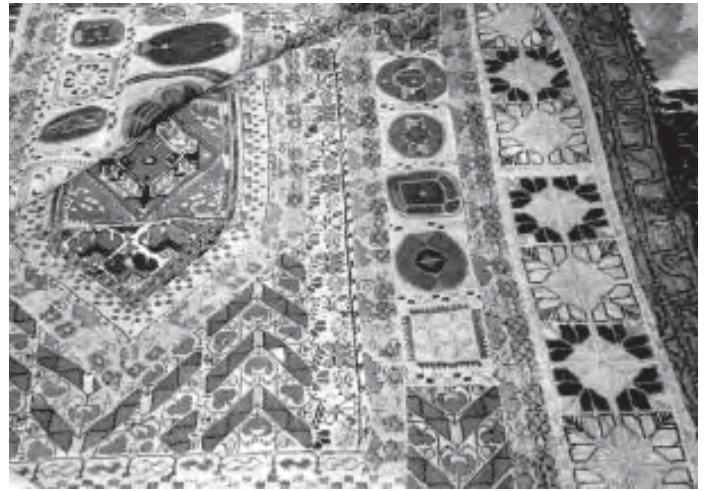
First of all, I wish you a Happy New Year. May 2005 be a prosperous year for all! We are kicking off the New Year with ambitious plans.

Richard Hagopian and his daughter Ginny, the uncle and cousin of our member Lorraine, have donated eleven Persian carpets to the ARS. The intent is to auction off these rugs and use the proceeds to facilitate our projects. The ARS is very grateful for friends like these, and thank you, Lorraine, for helping to make this happen.

We are proceeding with our pledge to help the textile museums in Yerevan, Armenia, by sponsoring rug restoration projects. We are now undertaking the restoration of a fine Lori Pambak rug.

The last election of ARS officers was in San Francisco in 2002. Our board members have decided to hold a general meeting in the greater Los Angeles region to elect new officers and board members. Los Angeles, the center of a large Armenian community, is an ideal venue to attract a wider audience and membership. The meeting dates are March 12-13, 2005. We urge all who can to attend this meeting (see the box on page one and the schedule on page five for more information).

We are hearing of many fake inscribed Armenian rugs on the market. Within the last few years, the demand for these rugs has been so high that many forgers have found ways to add an Armenian letter or word to a rug and then sell it as a genuine Armenian inscribed rug. There are ways to tell if the inscription has been added or if the date has been altered. Phil Lichtman, an engineer and rug restorer, in one of his recent articles, says: "The two principal ultra violet techniques are (a) shining a UV lamp on the rug in a darkened room to see what shows up, and (b) fitting a camera with filters that block out any light except UV and taking pictures in sunlight or very strong, high color temperature incandescent light. With a digital



18th Century Ottoman Silk Embroidery

camera, the recorded image can be seen immediately on the camera screen." We, the members of the ARS, should be scrupulous in preserving our heritage in its purest form, working to ensure these forgeries are detected.

We are constantly updating our website; please visit us at <http://www.armenianrugssociety.com>.

If you have not paid your yearly dues, please do; you are supporting a very worthy cause. If you have an article or essay pertaining to Armenian rugs or rug merchants, please forward it to us—we are always looking for interesting items to print in the newsletter.

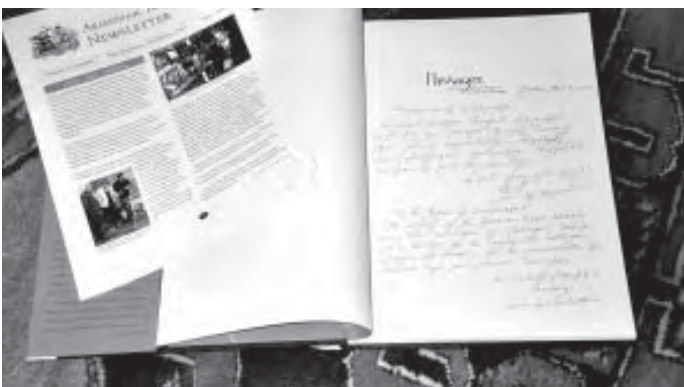
—Joseph Bezdjian



Work at the History Museum

## OFFICERS OF THE ARS

President	Joseph Bezdjian
Vice President	Levon Der Bedrossian
Secretary	Karleen Hall
Treasurer	Lorraine Amirian Parker
Newsletter	Parker, Jones, Hall
Database	Loretta Boxdorfer
Senior Advisors	Murray L. Eiland Jr., John Sommer
Advisors	Harold Bedoukian, Joan Quinn, Haig Klujian



Passages catalogue as presented to museums in Armenia.



Levon with Saro Saroukhanyan, Director of the Folk Art Museum

*continued from page one* behalf of the Armenian Rugs Society, may this catalogue of *PASSAGES* serve as a bridge for the cooperation between the Diaspora and Armenia for the preservation of Armenian rugs, our precious heritage."

At the History Museum, I met Garen Khatchadourian, the Vice President; together we visited the restoration room, where an expert staff member was working on an eighteenth century Ottoman silk

embroidery. Their textile collection is noteworthy; they maintain a permanent display of rugs, kilims and other textiles. Their archeological collection, however, including recent discoveries, is very impressive and is not to be missed when visiting Yerevan.

At the "Joghovrtayin" Folk Art Museum at 64 Abovyan Street, I met the Director, Saro Saroukhanyan, and presented him with a copy of the *PASSAGES* catalogue and a \$500 contribution towards rug restoration. He was grateful and most appreciative of our activities. Last year, due to ongoing renovations, I couldn't visit the second floor; this time we toured the whole museum. It was an enjoyable experience to see the rugs, kilims and folk art objects made of clay, wood and metal—earthy and heartwarming. While there, I couldn't help thinking that this museum would be an ideal venue for a future ARS rug exhibition in Yerevan. I asked Mr. Saroukhanyan if such an exhibit would be feasible. He was very excited and offered all his help to realize this goal; after an exhibit in Los Angeles, one in Yerevan would seem to be the next step.

At the Sardarabad Museum, we adopted a Lori Pambak rug which was hanging in the hallway. It was missing its upper and left side borders; I believe it was a good choice. I'm looking forward to seeing it restored when I return in the fall. Hratch Mardirossyan, the Director, accompanied me to the restoration area, where two staff members were repairing damaged rugs. Restoration is a slow process, and in the basement of the museum there are many beautiful but damaged rugs waiting. This is a long-term project and a very positive one. Mr. Mardirossyan, as usual, didn't let us leave without a toast of cognac, fresh fruit and coffee.

Also memorable was a day spent with Vahram and Maria Tatigian, a couple devoted to the arts. Vahram is a modern-day



Sardarabad Museum Director Hratch Mardirossyan and a staff member

troubadour—a writer, poet, and singer—as well as being a lover of rugs and an expert on the subject. During the last thirty years, he has traveled throughout the land and has collected over 3500 slides of rugs from different regions and villages of Karabagh and Armenia. The publication of his comprehensive book on Karabagh rugs will be completed any day. The book will be in Armenian with many color photographs, and it will have an introduction in Russian and in English. He is also finishing the manuscripts of his next two publications, one on the rugs of the Zanzezour region and the other about Turkish-Armenian rugs. In 1983, when Volkmar Gantzhorn visited Armenia, the two had met and shared information about Armenian rugs. Vahram showed me a letter from Mr. Gantzhorn addressed to him, thanking him for his cooperation and for sharing his ideas. In a future newsletter I will have a more detailed report on Vahram Tatigian, about his contributions and his views on Armenian rugs.

Armenia, with its centuries-old artifacts and architecture, its museums and collections of rugs, with its past and present unknown and untapped artistic and intellectual resources, should and will be part of the mission and the activities of the ARS. A partnership and a bridge between the Diaspora and Armenia is essential for our true and full understanding of



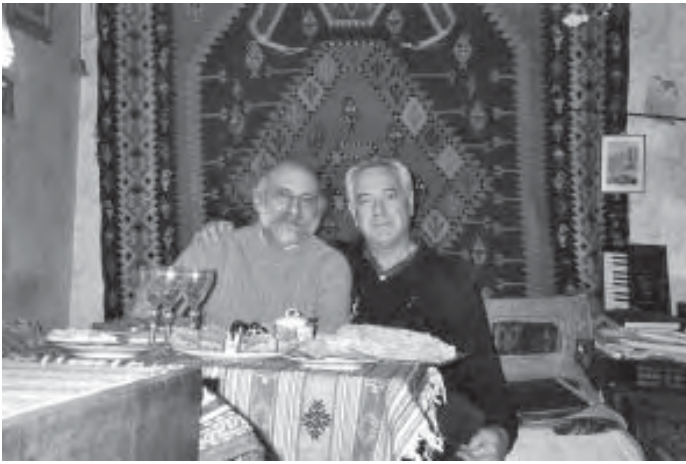
Restoration Department at the Sardarabad Museum

## NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

At the Armenian Rugs Society meeting held on August 31, 2004, the group had the pleasure of listening to Dr. Murray Eiland III, a fascinating, erudite and enthusiastic speaker. He is the son of well-known author, rug scholar and ARS member Dr. Murray Eiland, Jr., and he was a Fulbright scholar in Syria, studying archeology and working with the Syrian Ministry of Tourism, until the current Iraqi war halted his activities. He did, however, make it clear to us that Syria is a safe, stable country, and welcomes visitors in the same friendly way as do Lebanon and Jordan.

Dr. Eiland gave us an overview of the historic relationships between the art and culture of the various peoples of the Near East, with particular emphasis on the Syrians and the Armenians and the cultural cross-pollination that has long existed between these two nations. Although he said he would be discussing rugs and other textiles, he did inform the audience that his own interest is more specifically in the movement of peoples, which would also be a part of his talk.

Armenians have long been an established nation in the region. Early Armenian kings (350 BC-280 AD) were relatives of the Parthians (a nomadic tribe, originally from the east); the two peoples were on very good terms (in fact St. Gregory, who brought Christianity to Armenia, may have been a member of a Parthian family). As Armenia became more powerful, the country expanded, with Armenians moving south into Syria and even into Jerusalem, providing a natural explanation for the historic Armenian presence in that city. In his discussion of the ensuing relationship between Armenian and Palmyrian culture, Dr. Eiland showed evidence of the similarities between the Armenian artifacts with which we are familiar and artifacts uncovered in historic Palmyra (modern Tudmur, in Syria). Even the royal headgear of the two areas was much the same, leading to the conclusion that the Near East was formerly a more inclusive region than it has become today. To illustrate this, he showed slides (some items dating back as far as the second century BC) of textiles, coins, shrouds, camel saddles, bas reliefs and other sculptures, architecture, and many other antiquities, stating that as difficult as it is to distinguish between urban and Bedouin work, it is often even more difficult to distinguish between the work of different peoples from the region. There were sometimes intentional differences, however. In a flat country such as Syria, without much of a vegetation cover, people were used to being recognized from afar, so there were unique clothing traditions between different tribes, for example.



Vahram Tatigian with Levon

Armenian rugs, their place in history, the interpretation of their symbolism, and their classification by region and village. All this is based on objective and concrete evidence, not speculation.

To be able to embark on this new level of cooperation and open discussion, we first must create and establish a relationship based on trust. The small steps the ARS has taken since last year, the modest contributions we've made to the three museums are, I hope, the building blocks of this new relationship.

—Levon Der Bedrossian

### IN MEMORIAM

It is with great regret and sadness that I learned about the death of Professor Garlen Avetissyan in the winter of 2004, in Yerevan, due to a stroke. In a past newsletter (vol. I, #2), I highlighted his career and activities.

Unfortunately, he passed away prematurely, before his manuscript (about the esoteric symbolism in rugs) was published. We hope to do everything we can to ensure that his work sees the light. —LDB



Garlen Avetissyan



If you have undocumented Armenian textiles, let the ARS know; we would like to include them in our rapidly expanding databank.

The color of clothing was also an indication of one's status. Dr. Eiland further noted the close relationship between women and textiles in the Near East. There is also evidence of trade in Palmyrian digs, as archeologists have discovered pearls from the Persian Gulf and fabric scraps from China (although the Persians dominated trade with the Orient until about 650 AD).

Dr. Eiland also discussed the generally damaging effects of the Crusades, even though Armenians played an important role as intermediaries between the two sides in this conflict. Many castles in Syria, however, seem to have been fifty years ahead of construction being done in Europe; the Crusaders certainly carried Near Eastern building styles back to Europe.

There has clearly long been a common culture between Armenia and Syria, as can also be seen in their similar types of decoration. Dr. Eiland did point out that the Armenian style is somewhat more robust, which may be due to the greater difficulty in carving basalt (commonly found in Armenia) compared to the sandstone used in



Dr. Murray Eiland III

Syria. He also discussed the carving tools used by both groups and the similarity of their motifs. Another important feature of both Armenian and Syrian carving was the use of frontality in the depiction of people, an uncommon technique elsewhere; he showed several slides from Palmyra illustrating this type of work.

Dr. Eiland ended his talk with a brief discussion of Mamluk art (especially rugs) and an explanation of the term itself. There is apparently no ethnic identification associated with the name; instead it indicates a social position that is not quite that of a slave—the word “Mamluk” means “property of the Sultan.” There is thus no domestic continuity among the Mamluks, for even their children are not labeled as Mamluk. Instead, it is their rugs that are unique, even to the color schemes and designs. He also showed the audience several rugs and kilims with designs derived from other sources but reinterpreted by weavers from different, often less sophisticated, traditions.

This was a terrific meeting, and the ARS hopes Dr. Eiland will speak to us again the next time he visits the area. For pictures of the meeting visit our website at: [www.armenianrugssociety.com/arsmeet8\\_31\\_04.html](http://www.armenianrugssociety.com/arsmeet8_31_04.html).

The meeting was held at the Simonian Rug Co. in San Mateo, California, owned by members Joe and Araxi Bezdjian. Many thanks to Araxi, Nevart Kechichian, Levon Der Bedrossian, and Garbis Bagdassarian for preparing a delicious *mezza* buffet. Joe, the ARS president, also encouraged everyone to check our website for the Rug of the Month and to submit candidates for this feature; at the end of a year, the board will decide on a Rug of the Year, and the owner of that rug will win a copy of the *PASSAGES* catalogue.—Editor

NEXT MEETING MARCH 12-13, 2005  
ALEXANDER'S RUG & FURNITURE CO.  
ANAHEIM, CA

Saturday March 12, 2005

10:00-10:15am - Introduction by Joseph Bezdjian  
10:15-10:45am - Report by Levon Der Bedrossian  
10:45am-12:00pm - Business meeting  
12:00pm-1:30pm - Lunch break  
1:30-3:00pm - Election of new board members  
3:00-4:30pm - Show and tell  
6:30pm - Dinner

Sunday March 13, 2005

11:00am-1:00pm - Excursion to member Hratch Kozybeyokian's rug store.

Armenian Rugs Society  
939 N. Amphlett Blvd.  
San Mateo, CA 94401



The Armenian Rugs Society, founded in 1980, is dedicated to the preservation, documentation, and advancement of the artistic and cultural contributions made by Armenian rug weavers to the rich and vibrant history of textile arts.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION AND RENEWAL

NAME

DATE

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

HOME PHONE

WORK PHONE

FAX

E-MAIL ADDRESS

Patron \$500\_\_\_

Donor \$100\_\_\_

Member \$50\_\_\_

Student \$25 \_\_\_

Please include Membership Fee made payable to "Armenian Rugs Society". Mail form and payment to:

**Armenian Rugs Society \* Bay Area Chapter \* 939 No. Amphlett Blvd. \* San Mateo, CA 94401 \* 650-343-8585**