



ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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REPORT ON DECEMBER, 2006, CONFERENCE

On Friday evening, December first, 2006, ARS members and friends gathered at the Simonian Rug Company in San Mateo, California, for the beginning of the biennial conference. The shop was decorated with an interesting assortment of Armenian rugs, an Armenian band was playing, and tables were laden with food provided by Joe and Araxi Bezdjian of Simonian's and by La Méditerranée restaurants, owned by members Levon Der Bedrossian and Garbis Bagdassarian

The evening began with a welcome by Joseph Bezdjian, our outgoing president. He introduced Dr. Murray L. Eiland, Jr., our speaker for the evening. Murray has been part of the ARS almost since the founding of the organization, and he has been crucial to the writing and editing of the books produced in conjunction with our two most important exhibitions, *Weavers, Merchants and Kings* (1984) and *PASSAGES: Celebrating Rites of Passage in Inscribed Armenian Rugs* (2002).

Murray discussed his introduction to Armenian rugs by one of our founding members, Lemyel T. Amirian, who encouraged him to study these unique carpets. Murray then presented a detailed picture of how, over the course of the twentieth century, the rug world awakened to the role Armenians had played in all aspects of Oriental rug weaving and sales.

By 1980, when the Armenian Rugs Society was formed, although the "funny writing" on some rugs was accepted as Armenian, most rug experts still maintained that those

rugs had merely been commissioned by Armenians. The founders of the ARS thought it was important to have an exhibition of rugs that were known to have been woven by Armenians. Loretta Boxdorfer, another early member, began to investigate museums and soon met Emily Sano (now director of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco), who at that time was a director of the Kimball Museum in Fort Worth. Plans were soon made for *Weavers, Merchants and Kings*. Over four hundred inscribed rugs from throughout the world were submitted, and Murray, Lemyel, Loretta, and Haroutiun Gayayan (another early member) selected what would ultimately be the sixty-eight rugs shown. Murray said there were so many sunburst rugs with Armenian inscriptions that from then on, even without an inscription, he had to consider sunburst rugs Armenian. Several rugs which had dropped from sight after having been published during the early part of the twentieth century appeared out of the blue and were included in the exhibit, including the incomparable Gohar carpet,

dated 1149 (1700 A.D.), which contained a heartfelt plea by Gohar, the weaver. The opening of this exhibit was a major event in the rug world. Murray characterized the whole experience of having been part of this exhibition as "incredible."

After questions

and a reminder about The Year of Armenia in France (during which the Gohar carpet will be displayed—

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December first festivities

MESSAGE FROM OUR OUTGOING PRESIDENT

I would feel remiss if I did not say a few words as I relinquish my post as President of the Armenian Rugs Society.

I have had the honor of working with the board for the past six years to organize fund-raising events and exhibits, to publish a catalogue, and to arrange lectures and trips to Anaheim, Boston and Atlanta. None of these events would have been successful if it were not for the dedicated and unconditional effort made by all of you. I thank each one of you and would like you to know that I am proud and privileged to be part of this group.

The Society is now confronted with even more daring challenges. There are current projects that will require major efforts, be it the translation of Tatikyan's book *Ancestral Carpets of Karabagh* or a rug exhibition in Armenia. I ask the membership to help our new board accomplish these goals.

There are too many people to name individually, but I thank everyone who gave us the benefit of their expertise, who produced newsletters, planned and executed events and exhibits, organized the membership drive, and designed and managed our web site. All of you, even with your busy schedules, were always ready to help. Together we put the ARS on a respected plateau among other rug societies. I love all of you, and I will always be a part of this wonderful organization. To the new president: I will be supporting you, and I wish you the greatest success. Thank you, all.

—Joseph Bezdjian



Levon and Joe—new and past presidents



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for more information, check the web site: <http://www.armenie-mon-amie.com>), the floor was cleared, music began again, and everyone spent the rest of the evening socializing, eating and drinking, and dancing.

The next morning, members met at the Hyatt Regency/San Francisco Airport for a breakfast buffet followed by a business meeting. Joe introduced Levon Der Bedrossian, who reported on his most recent trip to Armenia. Levon described Yerevan as being as dynamic as a European capitol. He stressed the necessity of making more of a connection with Armenia, in part because it is home to Vahram Tatikyan, with whom we have a relationship due to his books, and also because of the museums there, especially the Sardarabad Museum, home to an outstanding collection of Armenian rugs. Tatikyan is working on a revision of his first book, adding more photographs and maps and doing some rearranging of the material, and he has written a second book, which we also plan to translate and publish. He has over 3000 slides of rugs and other textiles, some of which are starting to deteriorate; it seems the most critical

need is to provide him with an office in Yerevan, preferably close to his home and his position at the university, so that he can get there without discomfort due to his many health problems. Several of his students at the university assist him in his work, so an office must be convenient for them, too. This facility could also serve as the office of the Armenian Rugs Society, which should have a presence in Armenia.

We discussed ways to cover the expenses entailed in setting up an office, seeing that Tatikyan and his students are supported while doing their work, maintaining computer capabilities and contact, etc. The Megerian family said they might be able to provide an office in one of their buildings; this generous offer is certainly a possibility if Tatikyan is able to make the trip to their factory without undue physical strain.

We then moved on to regular business. Lorraine Parker presented the Treasurer's Report, and we voted to set aside money specifically for the translation and publication of Tatikyan's first book, *Ancestral Carpets of Karabagh*. We also heard a report on our

recent membership drive, headed by Carol Hoerner, which was very successful. We now have over 130 active, paid members, plus a group that pays \$10/year just for mailings. We agreed to discontinue this category and encourage more people to become full-fledged members.

Nancy Kushigian then gave a Powerpoint presentation about her work with the new program the ARS has purchased for the database. The program was specifically designed for small museums; it is the program that ALMA (the Armenian Library and Museum of America) uses, and for many reasons, such as possible future collaboration and sharing of information, it makes sense for us to use the same program. There are also considerations of funding and staffing the database. We need to build an infrastructure that can be sustained over time; it may make the most sense to pay the software company to maintain our database site, as there is permanent professional support available. Further, much of this material would thereby be available for use in Armenia.

After a quick review of the bylaws pertaining to elections and a discussion of the nomination process, members of the board were elected (see list on page 4 of this newsletter). Board members will serve for three years, but members of the Executive Board (President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer) retain their positions for only one year unless re-elected.

Lunch was served at the hotel, and then members and guests gathered for the afternoon lectures. The first was a presentation by Susan Lind-Sinianian, Textile Curator at ALMA in Watertown, Massachusetts. Susan gave a brief overview of the history of ALMA and the artifacts housed there. Most listeners had not realized the extent and breadth of the collections until hearing this talk; there are over 50,000 artifacts housed at the museum. Susan and her husband, Gary Lind-Sinianian, joined the staff of ALMA in 1986, and a permanent home for the museum was opened in 1990. Susan described the storage areas of the facility and showed slides of a number of objects in the textile collection, including clothing, samples of fabrics made in Kharpert and other Armenian cities, embroidery, needle lace, dolls, ecclesiastic textiles, rugs, and a fascinating reconstruction of rooms in a typical Armenian home, set up for an exhibit on the city of Kharpert. She also told of the many ways the museum and the collections are made available to the community, through outreach to schools, tours of the museum, volunteer opportunities, dress-up days for children, etc.

The next speaker was Ed Krayner, who gave a brief talk called "The Confessions of a Middleman," describing how, in the Near East, he obtained some of the rugs he has brought back here. From photos on cell

phones to long waits for merchandise, from beautiful rugs pulled out of cheap luggage to unknown, unspoken journeys made by these works of art, we heard a fascinating account of a rug importer's experiences, and we got a look at some of the rugs he discussed.

The afternoon closed with an auction during which everyone had a chance to bid on rugs, textiles, dolls, books, and other items contributed by members. After a break, everyone met in the lobby of the hotel to take a shuttle to Neptune's Palace Restaurant in San Francisco, where we had cocktails and a wonderful dinner while enjoying a view of the bay.

The conference was judged a great success. Everyone is ready for the next one!



Our keynote speaker, Murray L. Eiland, Jr, showing us a rug book

MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT

First of all, I would like to thank the board and the members of the Armenian Rugs Society for making our December conference such a success. I particularly want to thank our president during the last four years, Joseph Bezdjian. He assumed a huge responsibility by accepting the ARS torch handed down by our former president, the late James Keshishian. With his fairness and modesty, Joe, aided by the dedication of his wife, Araxi, and by our treasurer, Lorraine Amirian Parker, and secretary, Karleen Hall, accomplished many projects, not the least of which was the *PASSAGES* exhibit in San Francisco. Working closely with Joe over the past several years, I have come to appreciate his passion for the Armenian Rug and his dedication to the society. Well done Joe, "Vartsket gadar"! And we still need you....

I would also like to congratulate the new and returning board members and our new vice president, John Megerian. As you all know, the Megerian family has been very involved in promoting the role of Armenians in the art of rug making and the contribution of our people to the rug trade. After a slow start, I look forward to working with all of you and making 2007 a successful year.

I believe the time has now come to organize another major exhibit and symposium. For that to happen, we need to form a committee, decide on a topic and choose a venue: Los Angeles is overdue, Chicago is a possibility, and Yerevan should certainly be considered. I also hope that the English translation and publication of Vahram Tatikyan's book *Ancestral Carpets of Karabagh* will see the light of day before year's end.

To inspire us and to refresh our memories, I will share with you a paragraph written by Elsie Nazarian and James Keshishian from the catalogue of the 1985 ARS symposium, held in Washington D.C.:

On October 16, 1980, in Washington, D.C., the Armenian Rugs Society was formed. Messrs. Lemyel Amirian, James Keshishian and Viken Sassouni, the co-founders, learned that they were not alone in their ideas: To found a society for all; to expound truth, exchange information and give exhibitions; to gather facts, documents, photos and analyses; to enjoy the culture, cooperation, and comradery of fellow enthusiasts; to seek new direction; 'to be lifted up and lift others.'

—Levon Der Bedrossian



Levon celebrating on December first

ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

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JOINT ARS AND SFBARS MEETING ON MAY 16, 2007

Our next regular meeting will be held jointly with the San Francisco Bay Area Rug Society on Wednesday, May 16, 2007 at the Simonian Oriental Rug Company, 939 North Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, California. There will be a reception and refreshments at 6:30 pm, and the lecture will begin at 7:30 pm. Our speaker will be Jim Allen, who will discuss "Identifying Armenian Rugs without Inscriptions." Jim proposes a new category of collectable Armenian rugs: Uninscribed rugs incorporating minimalist crosses. By means of scholarly analysis, he will show that these weavings are the product of Armenian weavers and must be identified and catalogued as such.

Jim has been a rug collector, particularly of Turkman weavings, since the late 1970s. He is a prolific writer on antique carpets, and his articles can be found in *Hali*, *Ghereh*, and *Oriental Rug Studies V*. He has also lectured at national and international conferences on Oriental rugs. His scientific background enabled him to verify and record the first 17th century Turkman artifact, using Carbon 14 dating. He is known to many of us as the on-line rug dealer/expert with a marvelous collector's eye at [A-bey.com/Antique Carpets and Weavings](http://A-bey.com/Antique_Carpets_and_Weavings).

Admission to this event is free to members of the ARS or the SFBARS, and will be \$5.00 per person for all others. This should be an interesting evening, and we hope to see you there!



Watch for information: On August 18, 2007, the ARS will meet in Seattle at Emmanuel's Rug and Upholstery, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year! Thea Sand, our new Membership Chair, is the President of Emmanuel's; she has arranged for a lecture by Barry O'Connell. Thea is the fourth generation of her family to operate the business, founded by her ancestor John Emmanuel(ian) after he came to the United States from Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in the early 1900s. For more information about Emmanuel's, check their website: emmanuelrug.com.



AT NEPTUNE'S PALACE....



Jeffrey Reich, Thea Sand, and Susan Lind-Sinianian



Levon Der Bedrossian with Erika and Alan Odian



Hratch Kozibeyokian, Ed Krayner, Garbis and Silva Bagdassarian, Nancy Kushigian, and Jane Kimball

Armenian Rugs Society
939 N. Amphlett Blvd.
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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.

JOINT MEETING OF ARS & SFBARS

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 16, 2007, at the Simonian Rug Co. Our topic will be "Identifying Armenian Rugs without Inscriptions," a slide lecture by James Allen. Details inside, or call (650)343-8585.