



ARMENIAN RUGS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume I, Number 3 San Francisco, California, USA

August, 2004

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

In our last newsletter, we included a photograph of Armen Sahakyan of the Madenataran (a library and museum in Yerevan, Armenia) with a bottle containing his collection of *Vortan Karmir* insects. For those of you who were curious about this photo, here is some information on this important dye insect excerpted from the recent book by Harald Böhmer, *KOEKBOYA: Natural Dyes and Textiles, A Colour Journey from Turkey to India and Beyond*, published in 2002. -Editor

Ararat Kermes or **Armenian Kermes** [known as *Vortan Karmir* in Armenian]
Porphyrophora Hameli BRANDT (1833)

This insect is native to the area of Mount Ararat in Turkish eastern Anatolia and in Armenia. This insect is a parasite on the roots of two varieties of grass... [that] grow in the salt marshes on both sides of the river Aras (Araxas), which flows past the north side of Mount Ararat and forms the border between Turkey and Armenia. At a certain time in the fall, the female insects, which can be up to a centimeter long, come up to the surface.

The traveler Parrot (Parrot 1834) writes in his book *Trip to Ararat* that the sheep that grazed in the salt marshes on the slopes of Ararat get red feet.

This story about the sheep with red feet fascinated us 20 years ago.... [Our] trip in 1990 was successful: ...we found the right bugs. Before sunrise, they were crawling around on the surface of the ground and let themselves be easily



A host plant of the Ararat kermes with Mount Ararat in the background. (Bohmer, page 207)

gathered and put into Turkish tea glasses. An hour later, the red animals had all disappeared underground again. (207)

In additional discussions of Ararat and other kermes insects and dyes, Böhmer says:

Kermes with an alum mordant dyes wool and silk a bright red.... The origins probably go back to the Sumerians, that is, to the 3rd millennium BC. The Phoenicians were masters at scarlet dyeing. Scarlet is a bluish red. The Greeks and Romans greatly treasured kermes. (205) [Polish Kermes] is native to Eastern Europe and probably also farther east to Siberia.... The use of Polish kermes in

continued on page three

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, August 31, 2004, at 7:00 P.M., at the Simonian Oriental Rug Showroom, 939 No. Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, CA 94401.

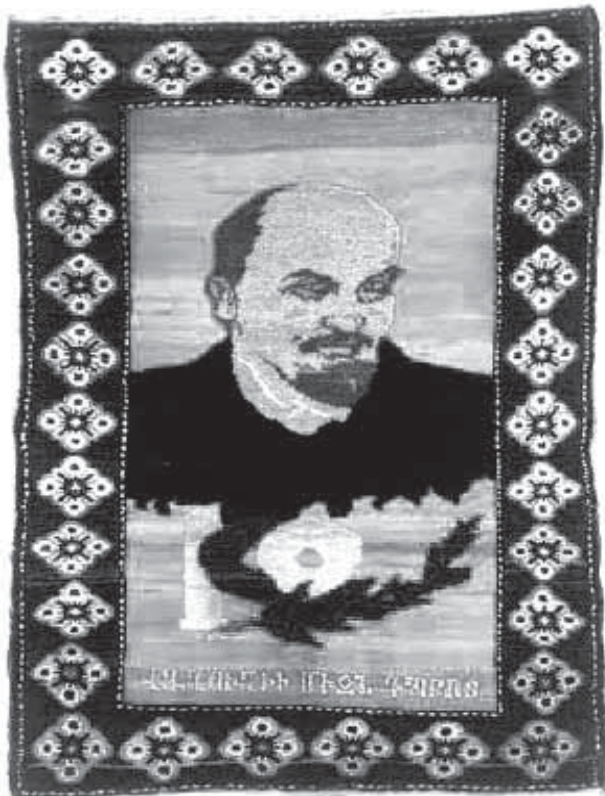
Murray Eiland III will present a broad-ranging picture of Syrian culture with particular attention paid to the contributions made by Armenians. The lecture will be illustrated by slides and accompanied by carpets and textiles. Images of archaeology in Armenia will also be briefly covered, time permitting.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

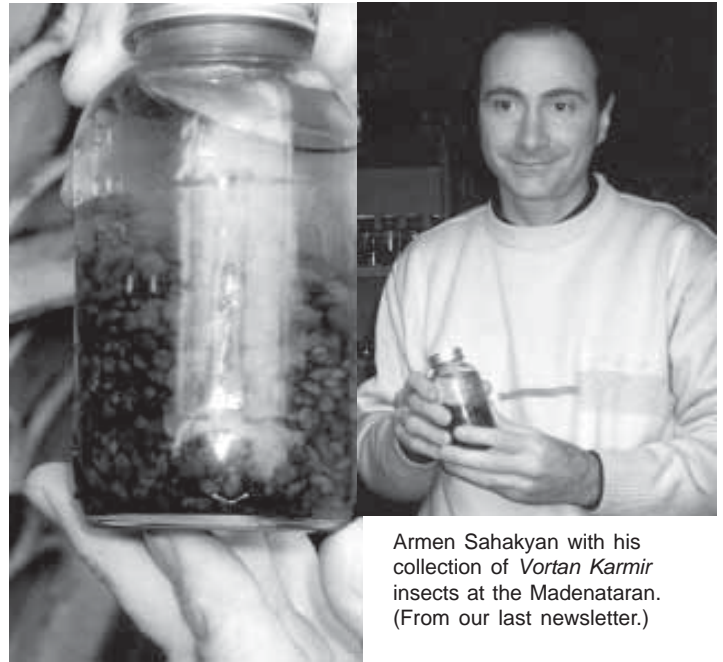
I hope you are enjoying your summer holiday. I would like to thank Paul Ramsey, who, last autumn, took time from his busy schedule and traveled to San Francisco from Denver to speak to our group about inscribed Armenian kilims. These beautiful kilims were selected by his scouts (pickers), in Turkey; believe me, it is not an easy task to collect Armenian inscribed kilims in Turkey. The Armenian Rugs Society is grateful to Mr. Ramsey, owner of Krimsa and Shaver-Ramsey.

Our speaker for August is well-known scholar, archeologist, rug enthusiast and author, Murray Eiland III. He is the son of Murray, Jr., and Astrid Eiland. Murray III has traveled extensively throughout Europe, the Caucasus and Asia. He was doing archeological research in Damascus, Syria, when he was called home immediately after the start of the current Iraq war. Fellow members, this is one lecture that you cannot afford to miss. Mark your calendars!

For those of you who have always wanted to visit Australia, here is the perfect time! The International Conference on Oriental Carpets is having a regional conference in Sydney from September 16-19, 2004. Registration forms can be found at www.rugsociety.org.au or by writing to The Oriental Rug Society of NSW, PO Box 343, Woollhara, NSW,



Armenian Rugs Society website Rug-of-the-Month for July, 2004.



Armen Sahakyan with his collection of *Vortan Karmir* insects at the Madenataran. (From our last newsletter.)

1350, Australia. You can also check the link on our website for additional information. Registration includes an invitation to the gala opening of the Powerhouse Museum's Central Asian Exhibition, the ORS exhibition, and ICOC Down Under 2004, as well as entry to the Dealers' Fair, all academic sessions, and morning and afternoon teas. There are also several optional extras (for an extra charge) such as a Sunday evening cruise and cocktail party on Sydney Harbour, and an overnight trip to the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra.

I am happy to announce that our web site is in place. You can log on at www.armenianrugsociety.com We will post announcements, events, activities and information about other rug societies. We had our first Rug-of-the-Month in July: Lenin's 100th year anniversary rug, made in 1970 by students in a small town in Armenia.

Don't forget that the holidays are coming, and a copy of our book *PASSAGES: Celebrating Rites of Passage in Inscribed Armenian Rugs* makes the perfect gift. Contact us to place your orders!

—Joseph Bezdjian

OFFICERS OF THE ARS

President
Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer
Newsletter
Database
Senior Advisor
Senior Advisor
Advisor

Joseph Bezdjian
Levon DerBedrossian
Karleen Hall
Lorraine Amirian Parker
Parker, Jones, Hall
Loretta Boxdorfer
Murray L. Eiland, Jr.
John Sommer
Harold Bedoukian

continued from page one

the Pazyryk Carpet proves, however, that this dye-insect was used much earlier, more than 2,500 years ago. Probably its qualities as a dye-stuff were known and used even before then.... (206) Kermes dyeing was supplanted to a great extent by cochineal dyeing centuries ago. Cochineal [a dye-insect native to Central America] from the New World is a far more effective dye than any of the Old World dye-insects [Lac from Southeast Asia and the four varieties of kermes]. (205) Soon after the discovery of Mexico by the Spaniards in 1512, cochineal began a worldwide conquest. There were whole fleets of vessels transporting cochineal to Spain. Its qualities as a dye surpassed that of the dye-insects of the Old World many times, both in the volume of dye produced as well as in the brilliance of the color. (210-11) [Both cochineal and Ararat Kermes contain the same dyestuffs (Carminic Acid and traces of Kermes Acid), according to the chart on page 212. One difference may be that] ...the Ararat kermes consists of up to 50% of lipids, fatty substances. Apparently, these...impede the dyeing process. (208)

This excellent book can be ordered from Shaver-Ramsey Oriental Rugs, 2414 E. Third Ave., Denver, CO 80206-4704. The telephone number is (303)320-6363. This is one of the shops owned by our speaker of last fall, Paul Ramsey.



Ararat Kermes in a tea glass. (207)



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

NEXT MEETING: 7:00 PM,
TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2004



Murray Eiland III, the son of Astrid and Murray Eiland Jr. was educated at UC Berkeley, receiving a BA in Near Eastern Archaeology, and at Oxford University, where he received a Doctorate in Near Eastern Archaeology. He continued his education at UC, Santa Cruz, in archaeological science, earning his MS in Earth Sciences with particular emphasis on ancient technology as revealed by ethnography and science. His language training was done at Indiana University, where he studied Georgian and Turkmen, and by travel to the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the Georgian Republic, he was co-director of two seasons of excavation to uncover early carpet and textile fragments (www.caucasusrug.by.ru/carpetweaving.htm). He was also a Fulbright Scholar in Syria, working for the Syrian Ministry of Tourism (www.syria.by.ru). His recent carpet publications include the small guidebook *Starting to Collect Antique Oriental Rugs* (Antique Collectors Club, 2003).

The lecture, which will be illustrated by slides and accompanied by carpets and textiles, will concentrate upon presenting a broad-ranging picture of Syrian culture, with particular attention paid to the contributions made by Armenians. Images of archaeology in Armenia will also be briefly covered, time permitting.

The meeting will be held at the Simonian Rug Company, 939 No. Amphlett Blvd., San Mateo, California. There will be light refreshments.