

Pianist Nara Avetisyan Performs in “Young Armenian Talent” Series



Left to right: Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, pianist Nara Avetisyan, Keyboard Concert Director Prof. Andreas Werz, and Dr. Hagop Ohanessian.

Photo: Andrew Hagopian

YERVAND BOYAJYAN
STAFF WRITER

The month of February ended with an amazing and professional concert with pianist Nara Avetisyan. The Philip Lorenz International Keyboard Concerts and the Fresno State Armenian Studies Program presented the third and final musician in the “Young Armenian Talent” series, bringing joy to the audience with a memorable performance of various repertoires. The Concert was made possible through the generous support of the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation.

Avetisyan opened her Friday, February 28 concert with Georg Händel’s popular “Suite in D minor.” This famous work presents a challenge to all pianists with its six movements and technical passages. Händel’s compositions were influenced heavily by Italian Baroque and some German Choral music. He was a German and British composer, famously known for his work “Hallelujah.” His music has that element of surprise and occasional rapid passage. Avetisyan’s efforts to replicate such style did not go unnoticed. She was able to stay faithful to Händel’s interpretation and played the music wonderfully. Her selection of this specific composition portrayed both Italian Baroque and German Choral styles.

The next piece was written by well-known 20th century Spanish composer, Enrique Granados. Avetisyan played “El Amor y la Muerte” (Love and Death) which is a ballad from the famous Goyescas Opera. Granados’ writing is considered “romantic” and many pianists agree that due to the opera’s ornamentation, it is exceedingly difficult to master. The difficulty of the piece is also attributed to its challenging improvisational style. This style is most clear in “El Amor y la Muerte.” Avetisyan overcame the difficulty of the Spaniard’s composition and eloquently pieced together the ballad of “Love and Death.”

Before the intermission, Avetisyan performed a contemporary sonata for piano entitled “Sonata” by Armenian composer Vago Zakaryan. This piece is

fairly new, and Avetisyan intended to introduce its freshness to the Fresno audience. Even though an Armenian composer wrote the piece, it still lacked Armenian components. It did not sound like an Armenian composition, but that was not the intent of the composer. The last movement out of the three, “Allegro con Fuoco (Cheerful with Fire),” represented the style the composer was aiming for. It had the intended fast and unexpected runs with that fiery personality. Avetisyan truly gave an amazing performance capturing the essence of Zakaryan’s piano sonata.

The three unique pieces Nara Avetisyan performed were all challenging, musical, and breathtaking. Her reputation and years of schooling made it possible for her to perform such amazing works of art. Born in Yerevan, Armenia into an artistic family, Avetisyan began playing at the age of six, winning her first competition a year later. Avetisyan has since won numerous piano competitions all around the world. She has a double bachelor’s degree along with a double master’s degree from prestigious music schools and is currently working on her DMA, Doctor in Musical Arts, at Stony Brook University. She has also performed in a variety of groups and philharmonics from around the world and is considered one of the most talented young pianists of our generation.

After a short intermission, Avetisyan continued her concert with Robert Schumann’s “Kreisleriana.” The piece is inspired by the writings of Ernst Theodor Wilhelm Hoffman. Hoffman was a Gothic and fantasy writer who portrayed his alter ego as a moody, asocial composer, Johannes Kreisler. This character inspired Schumann’s piece that was so beautifully played by Avetisyan. The composition consists of eight individual movements, each telling a story of Kreisler and his personality. The last movement, “Schnell and Spielend” (Fast and Playful), was by far the most breathtaking and expressive piece of the night. She was able to capture the spirit of the movement and to play it very

California State University, Fresno
Armenian Studies Program
Fall 2020 Schedule of Courses

Course	Units	Time	Day	Instructor
General Education-Breadth, Humanities, Area C2				
• Arm 1A-Elementary Armenian (Class #72231)	4	10:00A-11:50A	MW	B. Der Mugrdechian
General Education-Breadth, Arts, Area C1				
• ArmS 20-Arts of Armenia (Class #72797)	3	11:00A-12:15P	TuTh	B. Der Mugrdechian
General Education-Breadth, Area D3				
• ArmS 10-Intro Arm Studies (Class #73126)	3	9:00A-09:50A	MWF	H. Ohanessian
General Education-Integration, Area IC				
• Arm 148-Mastrpcs Arm Cult (Class #73211)	3	2:00P-3:15P	MW	H. Ohanessian
Upper Division Armenian Studies Course				
• ArmS 108A-Arm History I (Class #76021)	3	9:30A-10:45A	TuTh	B. Der Mugrdechian
• ArmS 120T-Hist Ottom Emp (Class #76010)	3	2:00P-3:15P	TuTh	Kazan Visiting Prof.

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Check on requirements for the Minor in Armenian Studies in the current catalog.
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HYE SHARZHOOM

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2) The Armenian Studies Program can also be supported in the future in estate plans.

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Left to right: Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, Dr. Sergio La Porta, and Dr. Dickran Kouymjian in 2016. Photo: ASP Archive

GAZARIANS, FROM PAGE 1

Chair, provided by Dr. Dickran Kouymjian.

History of the Berberian Endowed Chair for Armenian Studies

Back in the 1980s, Fresno State’s Development Officer, Richard Francois, approached me about establishing an Endowed Chair for Armenian Studies. My first question was, were there any endowed chairs at our University, no he said. Since I was a tenured full professor, my second question was why would I need to endow a Chair? He replied, “Well when you retire or if you should leave before, what guarantee do you have that the university will search for a replacement in Armenian Studies?” It seemed to me that the answer to why was self-evident; there was a large and generous Armenian community attached to the University and hiring a replacement in my field would be natural, if not automatic. Francois was not convinced and at my insistence began to do some research on the subject of endowed chairs in the California State University system. So did I.

The first discovery was that among the 22 campuses in the system at the time, there was only one endowed position and that was not really a full endowment, at California State University, San Francisco, if my memory serves me well. The next question I posed was obvious: how much are we talking about? Richard Francois had no idea, so I encouraged him to ask the Chancellor’s Office, but they had no idea either, though they sent a two-paged prepared document about such an eventuality. Somehow with no apparent justification, a sum of \$300,000 was put forth.

Two separate avenues toward such an endowment seemed essential. The first was to establish an Armenian Studies Advisory Board from among important members of the Fresno Armenian community, which was done with great care and lots of advice from those involved. I felt the Armenian Studies Program had to have such a body both to represent the Program and back it. I was saddened when the Advisory Board was eventually dissolved. Secondly, I decided to ask for the contracts and details of the endowed chairs of Armenian Studies at Harvard, Columbia, and the University of

Michigan. I noticed that not one of the agreements I was able to get a copy of had a protection guaranteeing that the endowment income would only be used for Armenian Studies. In fact, many older endowments, including ones centuries-old at British Universities were now being used in any way the administration wished.

With this information I, and the Advisory Board, drew up a contract with the University in which it was clearly stated that the funds were to be raised for an Armenian Studies Endowed Professorship. If in the future a time came when Armenian Studies was no longer taught at Fresno State, then that endowment money had to be transferred to an American University where Armenian Studies was taught. If eventually, a century or so later, Armenian studies was no longer taught at a university, the endowment was to be transferred to a recognized Armenian charitable institution, I believe the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was specifically mentioned as an example.

The announcement of an endowment fund drive was made at the following Armenian Studies Annual Banquet where more than \$10,000 was raised, including a generous \$1,000 donation by University President Harold Haak. It was shortly after this that Arnold Gazarian and I were chatting one afternoon in the hallway of the Leon Peters Business Building Auditorium when Arnold asked me what it would take to name the Chair. Once again, I said I had no idea and found out that Richard Francois had none either. Ultimately, I took the logical approach that half the project endowment target of \$300,000 plus one dollar would allow the donor to designate a name. Thus, Arnold and Dianne Gazarian chose to donate \$151,000 and name the chair after Dianne’s father and his father-in-law Haig Berberian and his wife Isabel. The rest of the fund drive scheduled to take a couple of year took only a few months, thanks to community members like Sarkis Sahatdjian, who drove me around the valley to solicit funds from Armenian farmers. The rest is history, and very happy history indeed.

Dickran Kouymjian
25 February 2020, Paris

Dr. Gutman Discusses Armenian Immigration from Ottoman Empire to United States, 1885-1915

ARSHAK ABELYAN
STAFF WRITER

For many Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during the mid-1880s, migration to the United States presented opportunities of political and economic prosperity and security. This was the case for one Armenian by the name of Ohannes Topalian, who like many Armenian men, immigrated to the United States in the early 1890s. He worked for several years in a factory in Providence, Rhode Island, and five years later was naturalized as a United States citizen. He also ended up enlisting in the United States Army, from where he would later be honorably discharged. Guest speaker Dr. David Gutman stated that in 1901, Ohannes Topalian received a communication from his father, asking him to return home and to get married.

Unfortunately, once Topalian returned to the Ottoman Empire, there was no possibility of returning to the United States. He went to Sivas to speak to the United States Consul so that he could get a passport to return, but was rejected, even though he was a naturalized United States citizen and had served in the Army. He ended up going to another American Consulate in Alexandria, but was also rejected there.

Topalian’s story served as a vehicle for many such examples that Dr. Gutman includes in his recently published book, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh Press, 2019). Dr. Gutman is Associate Professor of History at Manhattanville College, New York and received his Ph.D. in History from Binghamton University.

Dr. Gutman was a Tuesday, March 10 guest speaker for the Armenian Studies Program Spring Lecture Series and his talk, “Sojourners, Smugglers, and Dubious Citizens: The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915,” was based on his recently published book.

Dr. Gutman’s research interests revolve around the politics of migration and migration control, the intersection of mobility and citizenship, the social and political history of Ottoman peripheries, and Ottoman Armenians in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. He became interested in Armenian migration when he was doing research in consular records located in the United States archives. There he discovered the rich stories of migration to the United States, sparking his more specific interest in Armenian migration.

Dr. Gutman stated that approximately 75,000-80,000 Armenians, just like Ohannes Topalian, came to the United States during this thirty-year period. Dr. Gutman said that these estimates came from several sources which he believes are accurate.



Photo: Andrew Hagopian

Left to right: David Safrastian, Suzanna Ekmekchyan, Yervand Boyajyan, Matthew Mugrdechian, Dr. David Gutman, Dustin Vartanian, Dr. Ari Şekeryan, and Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian. Dr. Gutman discussed the broad topic of Armenian migration to the United States.

Surprisingly, “the majority came from the 50-kilometer radius in and around the city of Kharpert, which is a combined city of Kharpert and Mezre, a large administrative center. About 50-70% of the Armenians that came to the United States before the Armenian Genocide came from an area centered around these dual cities,” stated Dr. Gutman.

Dr. Gutman pointed out three converging factors that made large-scale migration of Armenians from specific cities such as Kharpert possible in 1885-1915. The first had to do with the missionary presence in the region. For example, there was a missionary institution, Euphrates College, which produced many graduates who ended up migrating to the United States to further their education in American universities and to establish traditional rug businesses in the United States.

The second factor had to do with the expansion of European steamship service that began to serve secondary ports in the 1890s. In turn, this made travel cheaper and allowed for Armenian men to continue their pre-existing tradition of temporary labor migrations outside the Ottoman Empire. The final factor was simply that Kharpert was much more of a politically and economically stable city in comparison to other majority Armenian cities in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Dr. Gutman explained that this made migration to the United States much easier and less of a risk.

As migration took place early in the mid-1880s, Sultan Abdul Hamid II became much more paranoid and imposed restrictive

regulations. “In 1888, just as these migrations started to pick up, the Ottoman state officially outlawed Armenian migration to the United States and sought to prevent Armenians from leaving. Abdul Hamid II’s regime was convinced that the emergence of these large-scale Armenian migrations was the same phenomenon that caused the simultaneous emergence of Armenian political organizations,” said Dr. Gutman. “From the perspective of the Ottoman state, migration and the emergence of these political networks are one of the same, even when the evidence doesn’t sustain that.” In Ohannes Topalian’s case, this policy was what kept him from returning to his new adopted home, however, he would eventually return to the United States.

Nonetheless, the outlawing of migration didn’t stop the Armenians, and instead, they created sophisticated smuggling networks. According to Dr. Gutman, they were very successful, and often many Armenians would return to the Ottoman Empire to seek a bride, to tend to elderly parents, or because of feelings of homesickness. Dr. Gutman also stated that these smuggling networks were used until 1908 when Abdul Hamid II was deposed. The only thing that the new constitutional government considered illegal was when Ottoman citizens returned as naturalized citizens of a foreign state, without obtaining official permission from the Ottoman government.

Dr. Gutman gave a fascinating presentation explaining many little-known facts about the broad topic of Armenian migration to the United States.

AVETISYAN, FROM PAGE 2

musically.

Before Avetisyan concluded her wonderful evening full of joy and music, she performed Arno Babadjanian’s “Poem.”

This work was written expressly for a solo piano performance and is considered one of Babadjanian’s most beautiful pieces. The music is inspired by the Romantic style of the 19th century. Romantic music

is considered individualistic, emotional, and dramatic. All of these characteristics are typical of poetry, which is exactly the style Babadjanian was aiming for when writing *Poem* in the 1960’s. Avetisyan did a magnificent job encapsulating the style of this music. Her professionalism and many years of experience was evident through her performance of *Poem*, along with her other performances of that evening.

Congratulations Armenian Studies Minors and Graduating Seniors of 2019-2020



MARINA CHARDUKIAN
Liberal Studies
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

I wanted to really develop and connect with my Armenian heritage. Listening to all the stories from my grandparents made me want to learn more about the history of the Armenians that came before me.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

I found all my classes interesting, but I really enjoyed the lecture series held every semester. My favorite class was when Prof. Der Mugrdechian took a group of us to Armenia in the summer of 2017.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

Besides getting to know my fellow Armenians, I cherish the everlasting friendships I have made with my peers throughout my years in the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State.

What are your plans after graduation?

I plan to complete the Credential Program at Fresno State and become an elementary school teacher. I also plan to be a part of the Armenian community in Fresno and the many church organizations.

DAVID SAFRAZIAN
Biology
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

I planned on coming to Fresno State for the sole reason that they had an Armenian Studies Program with Armenian Studies courses. I am very involved in the Armenian community and I wanted to take these courses to learn more about the history, art, and language of the Armenian people.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

Although I enjoyed every Armenian Studies class I took, Armenian Studies 20 and Armenian 148 were my favorite because I enjoyed learning about the churches in Armenia that I had the privilege of visiting. I also enjoyed being a member of the Armenian Students Organization and serving as the Treasurer and Vice-President. My favorite event was the Genocide Commemoration because planning an educational event to inform fellow students at Fresno State, as well as welcoming the Armenian community with poems, dancing, and prayers, created a memorable experience.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

The friendships I have made and the people I have met throughout my time at Fresno State is what I have valued the most. The first thing I did when I came to Fresno State was to go to an Armenian Students Organization meeting. At the time, I only knew one student and this was my way of getting to meet other fellow Armenians who had the same interests as me. I enjoyed being a writer for *Hye Sharzhoom* because I was able to critically think and write about events, which helped me become a better writer. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to go to Armenia with the Armenian Studies Program in both 2017 and 2019. My first trip to Armenia was in 2017 and without going with Fresno State, I possibly would have never been to Armenia, and for that I am truly grateful.

What are your plans after graduation?

In the fall, I will be attending CHSU College of Pharmacy in Clovis as the class of 2024.



JOSEPH BELTRAN
History
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

I took my first Armenian Studies course because it fit into my schedule, but that one class eventually made me want to continue and learn more. That one class began a journey that would end with me graduating with a Minor in Armenian Studies.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

My favorite Armenian class was Armenian Studies 108B, Modern Armenian History, the first Armenian class I took. This class taught me many things I was able to use in other Armenian Studies courses.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

I value everything I have learned over these past couple of years. I went into these classes not knowing anything to now knowing a great amount. I never thought going into college that I would end up graduating with a Minor in Armenian Studies.

What are your plans after graduation?

I will be going to law school.

MICHAELA ZEPURE WALKUP
**Landscape Architecture Design-
Plant Science & Construction Management**
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

Fresno State was my first-pick for college because I was aware they offered Western Armenian courses. I wanted to take full advantage of these Armenian language classes to connect with my family.



What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

My favorite class was Armenian 1A and noticing how I was learning baseline Western Armenian at a fairly quick pace. Though Armenian 1A and 1B were some of my more difficult classes, I felt fortunate to have the opportunity to take these language classes. Another noteworthy class would be Arts of Armenia. The architecture component of this course gave me design inspiration for my Construction Management major.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

I valued the personal growth I developed while completing my Minor. I received a full sponsorship to enroll at the American University of Armenia for Summer 2019. I am grateful for the Kashian family who sponsored me and thankful for the students and professors who encouraged me to go. I had never flown by myself before, let alone out of the country, but the Armenian Studies Program gave me the tools to confidently travel and live overseas.

What are your plans after graduation?

I have applied for Masters programs throughout the country involving environmental sciences. I also applied for the Plant Science program at Fresno State. I would like to potentially enroll at the University of Oklahoma for their Ph.D. program in Planning, Design, and Construction, with a concentration in Landscape Architecture. For now, I am simply waiting to hear back from my Masters applications to see where that takes me. I do not know where I am going from here, but I promise it will not be boring.

YERVAND BOYAJYAN
Philosophy, Pre-Law Option
Minor in Armenian Studies
Minor in Criminology

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

My main motivation for taking course offered by the Armenian Studies Program was to familiarize myself more with my cultural heritage. I was born in Yerevan and did not get much education in Armenia because my family and I came to the United States

when I was only seven-years-old. I was never really exposed to Armenian literature, language, writing, or reading. I thought taking Armenian Studies courses would bring me up-to-date with all that I have missed throughout my childhood.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

My favorite classes were Armenian Studies 20, Arts of Armenia, and Armenian 148, Masterpieces of Armenian Culture. In the former, I studied famous Armenian churches and what makes those churches uniquely Armenian with Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian. I was exciting learning about all the distinct details that distinguish an Armenian Apostolic Church from all other churches around the world. In the latter, Prof. Hagop Ohanessian introduced me to an array of Armenian literature from various periods of time in Armenian history. I was particularly interested in the writings of modern Armenian writers like William Saroyan, Daniel Varoujan, Hovhannes Toumanian, and Khatchadour Abovian.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

I valued the education I received from Prof. Der Mugrdechian, Prof. Ohanessian, and Dr. Ümit Kurt. Four years of continuous education in Armenian language, literature, and history really was the most valuable thing I took away from the Armenian Studies Program. I am truly grateful to attend a university that offers such extensive education in Armenian Studies.

What are your plans after graduation?

I plan on attending law school. Fortunately, I have been accepted into Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and will be a full-time student in the Fall as a member of the 2023 graduating class. My legal studies will have an emphasis on Criminal Law, International Criminal Law, Human Rights Law, and Trial Advocacy.



CLAIRE KASAIAN
Business Administration-Marketing
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?

I knew entering Fresno State that I was planning to take Armenian Studies courses and pursue the Minor as well. I knew about Armenian history and culture growing up, but I was never really involved in anything “Armenian.” I wanted to learn more about my culture and make more friends who

were Armenian. My cousins, who took Armenian Studies courses at Fresno State, always talked about how much fun they were and how they remember people who took the classes with them and Professor Der Mugrdechian. I wanted to have that experience too.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?

My favorite Armenian Studies event was definitely going to Armenia in the summer of 2017. It was my first time going out of the country, except for Mexico. I was going with people my age and I knew it was a once in a lifetime experience. I learned so much and made many memories with my friends. The people who went on that trip are currently my closest friends today and I cannot imagine my life without them.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?

I valued the fact that everyone in the Armenian Studies Program is like a family. I would have never met my best friends if it were not for the Program. Also, Prof. Der Mugrdechian, Dr. Ohanessian, and Dr. La Porta made each course fun and interesting. They have always been there to give me advice on classes or to write recommendation letters.

What are your plans after graduation?

I am not too sure what I am doing after graduation. I am waiting to hear back from one college to attend graduate school for my MBA. Besides that, my goal is to work in digital marketing for either a magazine or a clothing company.



Graduating Minors in Armenian Studies



COLE EGOIAN
Business Administration-
Accountancy
Minor in Armenian Studies

What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?
I chose to take Armenian Studies courses and complete the Minor because my Armenian heritage on my father’s side was always something I was proud of, yet

ignorant of in some ways.
What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?
One of my favorite courses in the Program was the Modern Armenian History class because it put all the subject matter into the larger context of Armenian identity. My other favorite was the short-term course, Armenians in Fresno, because it felt personally relevant as a 3rd generation Central California Armenian.

What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?
Aside from the invaluable insight into my culture and history, the greatest thing to come from my time in the Program are the memories and friendships I have developed with other Armenians and students that have an interest in Armenian culture.
What are your plans after graduation?
I plan to get licensed as a Certified Public Accountant and build a career. I also plan on contributing to the Armenian community.

STEPHEN GONZALEZ
History
Minor in Armenian Studies



What encouraged you to take an Armenian Studies course?
After I took Armenian Studies 108A, Medieval Armenian History, I wanted to learn more about Armenians and share that knowledge with my best friend who is also Armenian.

What was your favorite Armenian Studies class, activity, or event?
My favorite Armenian Studies course had to be Armenian Studies 20, Arts of Armenia. Being able to see and talk about the different types of breathtaking art that Armenians produced was amazing. Professor Der Mugrdechian made each class interesting and I always went home with something exciting to show my parents.
What did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?
What I valued most from my experience was the ability to learn about a culture rich with history and gain an understanding of a people that I share the world with. I also value my two trips to Armenia because I was able to witness what I read and learned about in class first-hand, as well as experience Armenia in a way that no book could ever teach me.
What are your plans after graduation?
My plans are to obtain my teaching credential and teach at the high school level for a few years and then teach at the college level.

COMPILED BY **SOSSE BALOIAN**, *STAFF WRITER*

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The Armenian Series of
The Press at California State
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Armenian Studies Program Hosts Successful “Armenian-American Musical Heritage” Day



Photo: Barlow Der Mugrdechian

Left to right: Dr. Yektan Türkyılmaz, Richard Hagopian, and Andrew Hagopian at the Feb. 29 “Musical Heritage” day.

CARINA TOKATIAN
STAFF WRITER

“You don’t necessarily think of traditional Armenian music in the United States as having such complex roots because we are so familiar with it—but it does. It is interesting to put a spotlight on these aspects of life that we are familiar with but may take for granted,” stated Malina Zakian, archivist for the Armenian Studies Program.

Whether it was sheet music, photographs, or records, a large variety of Armenian-American musical archives were collected on Saturday, February 29 during the “Armenian-American Musical Heritage of the San Joaquin Valley” day organized by the Armenian Studies Program and held at Fresno State.

The “Musical Heritage” day began at 1:00PM with a scanning event followed by a musical concert and discussion at 3:30PM in the University Business Center.

The purpose of the scanning event was to encourage San Joaquin Valley Armenian community members to submit artifacts pertaining to Armenian music and heritage, especially items that date back to the early twentieth century in America. Between 100 to 125 photographs and musical scores were collected and digitized during the event. While items were being scanned, those who attended had the opportunity to tour the University Business Center lobby and view informational boards, sheet music, newspaper clippings, posters, and old photographs prepared by Van Der Mugrdechian. Meanwhile, they could listen to Armenian records play in the background.

This project, “Armenian-American Musical Heritage of the San Joaquin Valley,” was made possible with support from California Humanities, a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Visit www.calhum.org.

Armenian Studies Program Coordinator Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian has been collecting Armenian records donated by the community for more than thirty years. Two years ago, he and Zakian discussed plans on how to make the recordings available for researchers and the public. The Program successfully applied for a Grammy Museum Grant

to inventory and catalog nearly 1,500 recordings on 78-rpm discs from the Armenian-American diaspora.

Since then, Zakian has been working on interpreting and cataloging these records with Dr. Yektan Türkyılmaz, whose main area of study is on the history of musical recordings in the Eastern Mediterranean region and its Diaspora. Through Dr. Türkyılmaz’s assistance, Zakian hopes they will be able to “curate and contextualize the collection” to make it more usable for the community. “Part of this process is to try to fill some of the gaps that might be in the historical record,” said Zakian. “We are trying to understand the role music has played in life here as a form of community expression.”

The University Business Center Auditorium was filled by the 3:30PM start of the concert and discussion. Dr. Yektan Türkyılmaz, who earned his doctorate in cultural anthropology from Duke University, was invited from Berlin, Germany, to moderate the discussion. Dr. Türkyılmaz interviewed internationally recognized *oud* master Richard Hagopian, asking him questions which gave an overview of the history of Armenian music in the San Joaquin Valley.

Hagopian shared his personal musical journey as well as recounting humorous anecdotes from throughout his life. His fascination with the *oud*, a Middle Eastern pear-shaped string instrument, motivated him at a young age to learn from *oud* masters such as *Oudi* Hrant Kenkulian and *Oudi* Garbis

Bakirgian. Hagopian later formed the well-known “Kef Time Band,” which has performed throughout the United States.

Both Hagopian and Dr. Türkyılmaz discussed how many village songs were “creatively edited” upon their arrival in the United States. Sometimes, these edits could amount to ten different versions of a song based on each artist’s style. Another interesting point Hagopian highlighted was that sixty percent of Armenian songs were written with Turkish lyrics up until the 1960s. Armenian musicians would frequently borrow Turkish melodies and rewrite them with Armenian verses. These lyrics often reflected the social conditions immigrants encountered in America. For instance, the song, “Sheg Mazerov er” (She had Blonde Hair), centers around the struggles of a musician searching for an Armenian wife in America.

Dr. Türkyılmaz conducted a guided conversation with Mr. Hagopian, revealing the rich history of Armenian music in the San Joaquin Valley. “Who were these early Armenian-American musicians?” asked Dr. Türkyılmaz, to which Mr. Hagopian responded with stories of his earliest recollections of the first musicians.

Though Hagopian indicated that many Armenian musicians settled on the East Coast, the Fresno Armenian community has still fostered its own set of bands and musicians with their own distinct styles of playing. Dr. Türkyılmaz emphasized how Fresno was “one of the most densely populated Armenian settlements in America.” Because of this rich history, many San Joaquin Valley residents like Hagopian developed their own stories about music and dancing events at Armenian coffeehouses and picnics.

Even if they may be a part of Armenians’ history, these events remain ongoing traditions as Hagopian proved at the end of the concert. Handing over his *oud* for his grandson Andrew to play and sing, he demonstrated that these songs have yet to bear more memories.

Through both digitized records and the continuation of live music, these archives and traditions will be preserved for the next generation to relish.



Photo: Alain Ekmadian

Zar Der Mugrdechian, left, and Mary Balonian at the “Musical Heritage” day scanning event.

Dr. Şekeryan Presents Talk on Armenian Orphans and Refugees after First World War (1918-1923)



Photo: Andrew Hagopian

Dr. Ari Şekeryan, the 16th Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies, with students and faculty after the lecture.

CARINA TOKATIAN
STAFF WRITER

On Thursday, March 5, Dr. Ari Şekeryan spoke on the topic of “The Survivors: Armenian Orphans and Refugees After the First World War (1918-1923),” the second lecture of a three-part series on “Armenians in Istanbul during the Post Armistice Period.”

Dr. Şekeryan is the Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring semester. A graduate of Oxford’s Department of Oriental Studies, he is currently working on a book, *An Untold Story of Survival*. In the 2018-2019 academic year, Dr. Şekeryan was an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research in the Humanities.

The presentation was sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program and the Clara Bousian Bedrosian Fund, and was held in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium.

Dr. Şekeryan initially began his presentation by explaining his fascination with Armenians in Istanbul and Anatolia during the Armistice period of 1918-1923, which immediately followed World War I. He observed how scholars typically focus on outside relief organizations such as the American Near East Relief, the British Lord Mayor’s Refugee Fund, and the American Red Cross and their work in northern Syria and the Caucasus. However, the large Armenian population in Istanbul and the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire is often understudied. In fact, Dr. Şekeryan highlighted how the Istanbul Armenian community itself donated almost \$1 million in relief aid during the Armistice, an amount that exceeded donations collected from outside relief organizations.

Dr. Şekeryan stated that there were many Armenian orphans as a consequence of the Genocide. Some of these orphans, especially young boys, were driven from their homes and compelled to serve in Muslim families. Fortunately, the new Ottoman government, which succeeded the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in 1918, ordered the return of Armenian orphans and women to their families. The Armistice of Mudros also secured the right to search for these individuals and

to return them to the Armenian community. In addition, influential Armenian leaders such as Boghos Nubar Pasha encouraged the “unification and repatriation of refugees.” Eight refugee camps and ten orphanages were established in Istanbul to assist refugees from Anatolia. However, Dr. Şekeryan stated that these locations often contained unsatisfactory conditions. For example, there were sanitary issues and food shortages present in refugee camps. In orphanages, children sometimes slept on the floor and consumed only bread and tea, an insufficient diet lacking in protein. Nevertheless, orphanages sought to preserve the children’s Armenian identity, language, and culture. One orphanage even held Olympic-like sports competitions for the children.

Identifying Armenian orphans posed a challenge in itself. Dr. Şekeryan labeled it as an “orphan hunting race” between Armenians and Turks to discover Armenian orphans. One particular orphanage, the Neutral House, sheltered children with unclear backgrounds for a ten-day period while its administrators attempted to learn their true identities. Some orphans were fearful of revealing their ethnicity because of threats they received from the Muslim families they were living with. In spite of this, administrators successfully identified some children by exposing them to Armenian lullabies or by their interactions with other Armenians. From these

encounters, administrators could learn a child’s identity based on their reactions. As an example, Dr. Şekeryan mentioned how an orphan’s identity was often revealed by witnessing a priest making the sign of the cross.

To fundraise for the orphans, the Armenian community in Istanbul imposed its own tax on the Armenian community. Dr. Şekeryan specified how on some occasions, priests refused to perform religious ceremonies for Armenian families until they paid the tax. In addition, to gain support, Armenians were encouraged to adopt children or purchase expensive certificates as a way to harness a positive rivalry between the donors. Yet, not all Ottoman Armenians maintained a suitable income to support orphans and refugees as the “Horror in Tokat” proved. Inspired by Mustafa Kemal’s Turkish National Movement in 1919, Turks boycotted Armenian businesses in Tokat, and in other areas, leading to further impoverishment of the Armenian community. Dr. Şekeryan drew attention to similar boycotts toward Armenian businesses in Greece. These Armenian orphans were sponsored by the Near East Relief organization and by Armenians in Istanbul, and were moved to Corfu, Greece. Unfortunately, when they arrived, they were met by Italian bombardment. Dr. Şekeryan noted how the Italians were informed of the group’s refugee status, yet, they still continued to shell the refugees. As a consequence, sixteen refugees were killed and three times this amount were wounded. The remainder of refugees continued to live and thrive in Greece, successfully establishing and managing their own businesses. Yet, boycotts interrupted this short-lived period of prosperity as Greeks pressured the large refugee population to move elsewhere.

Despite all that they endured as a result of the Genocide, Armenians in Istanbul proved determined to get back on their feet during the Armistice. Through their aid to orphans and refugees and resettlement across the globe their perseverance was clearly manifested.

purchased the company. Valley Foundry became a world recognized supplier of equipment to the agricultural industry.

Leon and Alice Peters have a long connection to Fresno State, with the Leon S. Peters Business Building being named for him, honoring the spirit of the man who served on the University President’s Advisory Board, the Fresno State Foundation Board of Governors, and the University’s Agricultural Board. For his many contributions to Fresno State, Leon S. Peters was posthumously awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters by The California State University in 1997.

The Armenian Studies Program honors the memory of Leon S. and Alice Peters.

PETERS, FROM PAGE 1

expresses its appreciation to the Foundation Board and its current President, Mr. Kenneth Peters. The late founder of the Foundation, Mr. Leon S. Peters and his late wife Alice Peters were supporters of the Program

Leon S. Peters was born in Fowler, California, and graduated from Fowler High School as valedictorian. He worked daily on his father’s ranch, helped raise his siblings and also did custom tractor work in what little spare time he had. Leon’s industrious and enterprising nature soon caught the attention of the manager of Valley Foundry and Machine Works. He was offered a job, worked his way up to manager and eventually



L. to R: Tahir Elçi, Raci Bilici, and Selahattin Demirtaş commemorating the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2015.

Photo: ASP Archive

QUEST FOR PEACE, FROM PAGE 1

destruction of Dersim, the torture of thousands of political prisoners in Turkish jails during the 1980s, and the oppression of Kurds in the Turkish Republic.

Yet, from the moment of its appearance, the monument was associated with the Armenian Genocide of 1915. At the unveiling ceremony, Abdullah Demirbaş, the mayor of the Sur municipality responsible for the monument, stated that, before discussing the violence suffered by the Kurds in Turkey, the Kurds themselves should recognize the violence that their ancestors meted on Armenians [and Assyrians] in 1915. His words were taken as an act of contrition in many circles, and some stated that the monument actually constituted a public recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Kurdish community of Turkey.

The erection of such a monument in Diyarbakir was not surprising. The city had already been at the forefront of addressing the legacy of 1915 in Turkey by working to openly acknowledge its history, and to nurture its historic Armenian community. These aims were advanced through public education regarding the city’s multi-cultural heritage and Armenians, rebuilding Sourp Giragos Church (today the largest Armenian church in the Middle East), and supporting conferences, concerts, and exhibitions related to Armenians.

On April 24, 2014, the “Monument to Common Conscience” assumed a more overt character when it was used by Diyarbakir’s municipal government as the main venue for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide. The significance of this event was highlighted by the presence of Kurdish intellectuals and politicians. The main speaker, Tahir Elçi, a human rights activist and head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, was categorical in his frank discussion of the Armenian Genocide and condemnation of modern-day Turkey for its refusal to come to terms with its dark past.

Many Armenians rejoiced at the spectacle of such developments, especially on territories where the Armenian Genocide had actually been executed by the Ittihadist regime. While official Ankara continued to deny the genocide, Kurdish intellectuals in Turkey’s mountainous southeast were coming to terms with the issue.

One year later, on the occasion

of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on 24 April 2015, Diyarbakir was again a major focal point in the struggle for the public recognition of this historical crime. The main Kurdish political party in Turkey, the HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party), chose Diyarbakir to highlight the wrongs suffered by the Armenians. The Kurdish elected officials who participated in this event represented millions of people. Diyarbakir – the unofficial “capital” of Turkish Kurdistan – had clearly become the showcase for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

Sadly, the euphoria did not last. Within a few months, Turkey descended into civil unrest. The murder of Tahir Elçi in Diyarbakir was a watershed moment that led to serious clashes between Kurdish militants and Turkish security forces. The latter responded with heavy artillery and flattened a huge part of historic Diyarbakir. The entire Kurdish southeast of Turkey was placed under direct rule by Ankara, with the declaration of a state of emergency. The region became a “black hole” of human rights abuses as the Turkish state dismissed elected officials and brutalized civilians. Kurdish politicians and activists were forced to go underground, or to flee their homeland entirely.

Despite these latest setbacks, the hopes and aspirations expressed by the “Monument to Common Conscience,” and the Kurdish-Armenian reconciliation process that accompanied it, have not faded. Kurdish civil society organizations, professional bodies, and political parties have remained open to constructive dialogue. They have recognized the Armenian Genocide and sought Kurdish-Armenian reconciliation without preconditions.

The core question now remains: what would be the best way to address the legacy of the genocide and reintegrate Armenians into the social fabric of their ancestral lands in Turkey? This question can only be answered with the participation of more Armenians in the historic processes at play.

• Ara Sarafian is a historian and the Executive Director of the Gomidas Institute in London. He has been active in peace and reconciliation projects in Diyarbakir since 2012.

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Dr. Şekeryan Discusses the Role of Patriarch Zaven Der Yeghiayan During Armistice Period



Dr. Ari Şekeryan

Photo: Andrew Hagopian

STAFF REPORT

Dr. Ari Şekeryan was scheduled to give the third of his three-part lecture series on “Armenians in the Istanbul in the Armistice Period,” on Thursday, April 2. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, the lecture was postponed, however, a summary of the lecture is provided below.

In this lecture, “The Armenian Patriarchate, Politics and the Postwar Settlement in Istanbul: the Story of Patriarch Zaven,” Dr. Şekeryan covered the topic of the involvement of the Armenian

Patriarchate of Constantinople in the political developments concerning the Armenian community during the Armistice years (1918-1923).

Dr. Şekeryan is the Kazan Visiting Professor in Armenian Studies for the Spring semester. A graduate of Oxford’s Department of Oriental Studies, he is currently working on a book, *An Untold Story of Survival*, and an article pertaining to Armenian orphans in Corfu.

The first part of Dr. Şekeryan’s lecture focused on the early life of Zaven Der Yeghiayan who was the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople between 1913-1922. Dr. Şekeryan highlighted that Der Yeghiayan became a bishop and prelate for Dikranagerd and served in the Armenian provinces such as Erzurum, Van, and Bitlis. Before becoming the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bishop Zaven became familiar with the community life and sufferings of the Armenian population in the provinces. Dr. Şekeryan stated that the experience that Bishop Zaven acquired in the Armenian provinces was unique in the sense that it helped him to unite the Armenian community in Constantinople with the Armenians living in the provinces, because he became fully aware of the expectations and internal problems of these communities. During his time in the provinces, he became familiar with the relations between the Kurdish tribes and local Armenians, the activities of the Armenian political parties, and the policies of local Ottoman officials regarding the Armenian peasants. Dr. Şekeryan cited numerous sources, such as newspaper articles and archival documents, which he himself had translated from Armenian and Ottoman Turkish into English.

The second part of Dr. Şekeryan’s lecture focused on the Genocide of 1915. Bishop Zaven was elected as the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1913. He was exiled by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government to Mosul during the Armenian Genocide because of his efforts to stop the deportation orders of the CUP leaders in Constantinople. Patriarch Zaven held meetings with European ambassadors in Constantinople to stop the killings, and the CUP regime deported him as a

solution to cease his efforts. Dr. Şekeryan further highlighted that Patriarch Zaven, as the leader of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire, closely witnessed the death march of the Armenians to the Syrian desert and conditions of the survivors in Aleppo and other cities in Northern Syria.

The third part of the lecture focused on efforts of Patriarch Zaven during the Armistice years to save the remnants of the Armenian Genocide, and his active participation in the political efforts of Armenian delegations to secure independence for the “United Armenia” state. “United Armenia” was planned to be established in an area covering the Republic of Armenia and the six Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Patriarch Zaven returned to Constantinople in 1919 following the occupation of the Ottoman capital by the Allied troops. He immediately organized committees under the authority of the Patriarchate to support the relief efforts for the Armenian orphans and refugees. In addition to his efforts to organize relief activities, he became actively involved in the political life of the community, as a leader and representative of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.

Patriarch Zaven participated in the Paris Peace Conference and worked to unite the two delegations representing the Armenian nation: one for the Armenians living in the Caucasus and the Republic of Armenia and the other the delegation representing the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Patriarch Zaven worked with the prominent members of these delegations such as Boghos Nubar and Avedis Aharonian.

Dr. Şekeryan cited articles from the Armenian and Ottoman Turkish press about the activities of these delegations and argued that “all strata of the Armenian community, including political parties, businessmen and intellectuals, united for the establishment of the Armenian state during the Armistice years.” However, following the defeat of the Greek forces by the Turkish National Movement led by Mustafa Kemal and the evacuation of Cilicia by the French forces, Patriarch Zaven was forced to leave Constantinople in 1922 because the leaders of the Turkish National Movement labeled him as a “traitor.” Patriarch Zaven managed to escape from Constantinople to Bulgaria in 1922 with the help of the British and spent the rest of his life in Mosul, Iraq.

“The story of Patriarch Zaven uniquely demonstrates the leadership of the Armenian Patriarchate during a time of chaos and political turmoil following the Genocide and its unifying power in the political decision-making,” stated Dr. Şekeryan. His presentation illuminated a crucial and hitherto understudied area of the history of Ottoman Armenians.

ASP SCHOLARSHIPS, FROM PAGE 1

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Fresno State President Dr. Joseph Castro, right, headed an April 24 ceremony organized by campus leaders. Dr. Castro, Debbie Adishian-Astone, V. P. for Administration (center), and Prof. Der Mugrdechian (left) also spoke.

Photo: University Brand Strategy and Marketing, Fresno State

Armenians, from page 1

Armenians and Kurds in the Later Ottoman Empire has five original articles, which were first presented at a conference entitled “Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds: A People’s History of the Ottoman Empire” organized by Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian of the Armenian Studies Program and by Dr. Ümit Kurt. The conference was held at Fresno State on September 22-23, 2017 and was supported by a grant from the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation.

The book, edited by Ara Sarafian and Dr. Ümit Kurt, is a seminal work in the field of Ottoman history. The volume explores the relationship between Turks, Armenians, and Kurds, and brings a new understanding to the dynamics that shaped these interactions.

The first three articles focus on the Hamidian massacres of 1895-96. They track societal changes to better explain the Hamidian massacres in Cilicia, Aintab, and the bishoprics of Aghtamar. Owen Miller, in the first article, “Uplands, Lowlands, and Mass Violence in Ottoman Cilicia,” looks at Ottoman Cilicia, with a particular focus on Zeitun. Ümit Kurt’s “The Breakdown of a Previously Peaceful Coexistence: The Aintab Armenian Massacres of 1895,” looks at major changes in material conditions and the availability of communal resources over the course of

the 19th century. In his article, “In the Wake of the Aghtamar Catholicosate’s Demise: The Report on the 1895 Van Massacre by the Last Aghtamar Catholicos Khachadour II,” Emre Can Dağhoğlu argues that the Hamidian massacres in this region were directly related to the breakup of longstanding Kurdish-Armenian social relations.

Nilay Özok-Gündoğan’s work is of seminal importance to the understanding of Armenian history and broader histories of the Middle East. Her article, “Are the Voices of the Ordinary Kurds Salvageable from the Enormous Condescension of Posterity? An Agenda for Social History in Kurdish Historical Writings,” reflects on the methodical exclusion of Kurds in mainstream historiographies of the Middle East.

Varak Ketsemanian’s work, “Ideologies Paradoxes, and Fedayis in the Late Ottoman Empire: Historiographical Challenges and Methodological Problems in the Study of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1890–1896),” is an important critique of the historiography defining the Armenian revolutionary movement in the late Ottoman period.

Armenians and Kurds in the Later Ottoman Empire will be available, after June 1, through Amazon or by contacting the Armenian Studies Program.

APRIL 24, FROM PAGE 1
spent approximately seven years separated from his family during the Genocide.

As the Ottomans were perpetrating genocide against his countrymen, Thomas worked as an intelligence officer in the British army in Egypt and Palestine. Though his career was dangerous, he was safe from the tragedies that his people endured. At first, Thomas was able to keep some track of his family, but he eventually lost all contact with them as they fled. Meanwhile, Thomas was bombarded with reports of the atrocities his people were facing in his homeland. He understandably worried greatly about his family, and the separation wore heavily on him.

Thomas finally learned that his family made it safely out of the Ottoman Empire in the fall of 1916. His son Yervant wrote a letter from Tiflis on behalf of the family, notifying his father of their safety.

“My dear father, you will be surprised to get a letter from us from Russia. Moreover, you would be joyful to know your children were lost, but found; destined to death, but brought to life again. God heard our prayers, and with his powerful hand, saved us from the condemned and bloodstained country...If you want to listen to our complete story...take us to you, will you?”

This reunion would be impossible for several more years. In 1917, Thomas entered Palestine with the British Egyptian Expeditionary Force in their attempt to force the Ottomans out of the war. Meanwhile, his wife and daughters were separated from his sons as they fled to safety through revolution-torn Russia.

In the Fall of 1918, Thomas wrote longingly to his sons, as they were the first to reach safety. In these letters, he encouraged his sons to become successful and buy farmland in America, “enough to feed our family.”

“This is the only way you will be able to liberate your mother and sisters from this chaos. When we manage to liberate them and bring them home, it will be much easier for me to come back to you.”

His letters reflect an anxiety at



Photo: Courtesy Michael Rettig

Left to right, back row: Arpeny, Arax. Seated: Thomas Mugerditchian, Esther Mugerditchian, Mampreh Dombourjian (Esther’s brother) Children standing front: Armineh, Alice. Children seated front: Yervant, Zenop, Arsen.

the fact that he had not yet heard from his wife and daughters and did not know if they had escaped from Russia.

“I have no news from your sisters and mother, who are your flesh and blood. You can imagine how upset I am, living away from my motherland. My only pleasure in life is reading your letters. They give me hope and strength to cope with this life. I hope and believe that one day we will come together as a family, feeling happy and praising God. No matter what happens—always stay positive and joyful.”

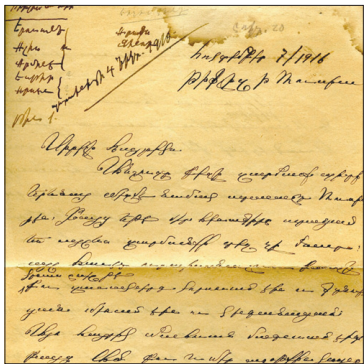
Finally, on August 22, 1918, Thomas received a telegram from the American General Consul in London, informing him that “Your wife and the girls are going through major financial needs.” Thomas immediately wrote his wife, “by receiving this telegram, I realized that, together with the children...you had safely reached London. My eyes filled with tears of joy. My dear Esther, I hadn’t heard from you since January and was about to go crazy. My heart and soul were trembling, and I spent many days and nights praying for you. I wish I could somehow appear next to you and give hugs to you, and our children. My soul and all of my thoughts are always with you.” Thomas informed his wife that their three sons were also safe in America, preparing a place for them in Fresno, California. It took Thomas several more years to reach Fresno from Egypt, but in May 1921, he arrived in Fresno to reunite with his family.

This April, we too find ourselves separated from our loved ones and community. We were not able to gather to commemorate our shared trauma and to celebrate the life we were able to build here in Fresno.

April 24 has always been a day of great heartache, but also great joy for me. On this day, I feel the pain passed down from the stories of our ancestors, but it is also the one day our community gathers in its entirety, from the Armenians who have been in Fresno since the Genocide, to those who have come from other Diasporan communities, and those from the Republic of Armenia. I have always taken heart in this togetherness. This year has already been hard for many of us, but we have faced worse as a people.

I reflect on Thomas, who spent seven years away from his wife and seven children. All of us have these stories, and so few of them end in a happy reunion. I reflect on his words to his wife in 1919: “We will make prosper everything the enemies once destroyed. Pull yourself up, darling, and never be afraid of anything. No matter what happens—always stay positive and joyful.”

It might just be this year that we are not able to commemorate as a community, it might be more. Nobody really knows how long this virus will alter our lives, but I do know with certainty that we will be here to commemorate together when this passes, in every corner of the world, as we have for decades. We will make prosper, no matter the hardships.



Yervant’s letter to his father.

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