

HYE SHARZHOOM Armenian Action ՀԱՅ ՇԱՐԺՈՄ ՈՒՄ



47th Year

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Ethnic Supplement to The Collegian

Armenian Studies Program Hosts International Conference



Conference participants. Front row, left to right: Dr. Merisa Sahin, Dr. Ümit Kurt, Dr. Janet Klein, Dr. Taner Akçam, Dr. Duygu Tasalp, and Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian. Back row, left to right: Dr. Michael Provence, Dr. Hagop Ohanessian, Dr. Yiğit Akın, Dr. Kent Schull, Dr. Ekrem Yener, and Dr. David Zakarian.

Photo: ASP Archive

NATALIE AGAZARIAN
EDITOR

On October 17-18, 2025, the Armenian Studies Program hosted an international academic conference, “A New History-Writing on Late Ottoman-Turkish History: The Impact of Memoirs.” Organized by Prof. Barlow

Der Mugrdechian (Fresno State) and Dr. Ümit Kurt (University of Newcastle, Australia), the conference featured nine scholars from throughout the world. The conference was sponsored by the Thomas A. Kooyumjian Family Foundation, the Leon S. Peters Foundation, the Ralph Shapazian

SEE CONFERENCE, PAGE 6

Prof. Der Mugrdechian Speaks to Osher Class on Armenian Culture



Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, sixth from right, with members of the Osher Lifelong Learning class.

KATHERINE ARSLANIAN
STAFF WRITER

Photo: Katherine Arslanian

The Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI), a program at Fresno State designed for adults ages 50 and up who want to keep learning simply for the joy of it, invited Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian to teach a class, “Armenian Church: Culture and Language,” on two consecutive Mondays, October 6 and October

13. The course covered the origins of Christianity in Armenia and the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in shaping Armenian identity and culture. The first session of the course centered on how Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion and how that decision continues to influence Armenian

SEE OSHER, PAGE 7

Pontifical Visit of His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, to Fresno State



His Holiness Catholicos Aram I and guests at the luncheon hosted by the Armenian Studies Program at the Smittcamp Alumni House on Wednesday, November 5.

Photo: ASP Archive

ANAHD VALENCIA
STAFF WRITER

The Fresno State Armenian Studies Program hosted His Holiness Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia for a campus visit on Wednesday, Nov.

5. His Holiness delivered a brief prayer service at the Armenian Genocide Monument, which was followed by a private luncheon in the Smittcamp Alumni House. There, His Holiness was awarded the President’s Medal of Distinction and presented with a

proclamation on behalf of Fresno State President Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval.

The visit of His Holiness was part of an official trip to Canada, the Eastern Prelacy, and the

SEE CATHOLICOS, PAGE 8

California Assemblymembers Visit Fresno State to Honor Armenian Heritage and Community Legacy

NELLIE CHOBANYAN
STAFF WRITER

Fresno State welcomed several members of the California State Assembly for a special legislative visit recognizing the deep historical roots, accomplishments, and ongoing contributions of the Armenian community in the Central Valley. Assemblymember David Tangipa (AD-8), Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria (AD-27), Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula (AD-31), and Fresno State officials, along with community leaders and students attended the Wednesday, October 16, gathering.

The delegation toured the Fresno State Armenian Genocide Monument, met with campus representatives, and heard firsthand accounts of Armenian history in Fresno. The visit highlighted the close ties between the Armenian community and the San Joaquin Valley, emphasizing agriculture, education, civic leadership, and cultural preservation.

The event opened with comments from Assemblymember David Tangipa, who represents the district in which Fresno State is located and serves as the Vice Chair of the Armenian Caucus.



California State Assembly members, community leaders, students, and Fresno State officials at the Armenian Genocide Monument, October 16, 2025.

Photo: ASP Archive

“It is an honor to be here. This is home for me,” Tangipa said. “A huge portion of Armenian history started right here in Fresno. We couldn’t appreciate this community more, the changes it has made, the impact it has had on our region, and on the entire state of California.”

Tangipa also spoke about the depth of Armenian influence in Fresno. “We cannot go anywhere in Fresno County or in the Valley without seeing the impact the Armenian community has had,

the roots they’ve planted, the facilities they’ve built, and the philanthropic contributions that have shaped this university and our entire community.”

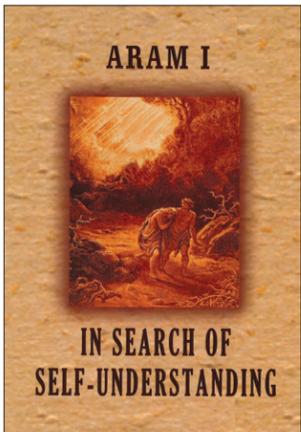
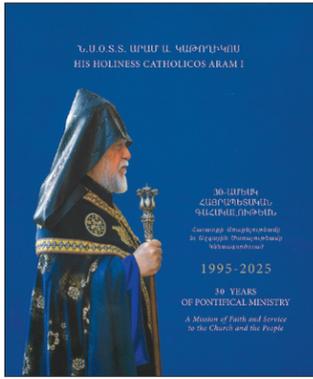
Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria welcomed visitors to Fresno and emphasized the region’s strong agricultural and cultural ties. “Fresno State is a jewel of this entire region. My district is home to thousands of Armenian families. The contributions have

SEE ASSEMBLYMEMBERS, PAGE 2

Armenian Studies Program Book/Video/CD Archival Gifts

The Armenian Studies Program would like to thank the donors, authors, and publishers for the following books, periodicals, videos, and archival gifts, either offered personally, or to the Program.

His Holiness Catholicos Aram I, Antelias, Lebanon, for two books: *30 Years of Pontifical Ministry: A Mission of Faith and Service to the Church and the People (1995-2025)* (Antelias, 2025), 399pp., in Armenian and English. The book is dedicated the past thirty years of the ministry of His Holiness Catholicos Aram I. The beautifully illustrated volume gives an overview of the life and work of the Catholicos



and *In Search of Self-Understanding: A Christian Anthropological Perspective* (Antelias, 2025), 125pp., in English. The book is an introduction to the Christian anthropological perspective and reflects on questions such as, What does it mean to be human? and What are the implications of being human? The Catholicos highlights the core issues, basic principles, and peculiar features which are pivotal for the Christian understanding of the human being.

ASSEMBLYMEMBERS, FROM PAGE 1

been countless. Many of our most successful farmers are Armenian, and their roots in agriculture run deep.”

Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula highlighted the importance of unity and mutual understanding: “In Fresno, we talk about being ‘One Fresno.’ It’s important to listen to our neighbors, to understand their culture, their language, and their contributions to our community...I’m grateful today for the opportunity to learn more about our Armenian community.”

Michael Lukens, Executive Director of Government Relations for Fresno State, emphasized how deeply Armenians are part of the university and the region: “It’s almost impossible to work in Fresno and not work with Armenians. They are all hard workers, and they all move forward for what’s best for the community and for Fresno State. Their impact is everywhere.”

Several speakers also reflected on the significance of having the Armenian Genocide Monument in the heart of campus.

Paul Halajian, the architect of the Monument, showcased how the monument’s symbolism is woven into every structural detail.

He added that Fresno State’s willingness to approve such a meaningful and politically

sensitive monument “demonstrates a commitment to discourse, education, and honoring history.”

Professor Barlow Der Mugrdechian, Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program, provided a historical account of the Armenian presence in Fresno, tracing it back to 1881, when the first Armenian families arrived seeking a drier climate. By 1920, nearly 10,000 Armenians lived in Fresno County, making up a significant portion of the population.

“The Armenian community has always been rooted in faith, hard work, and dedication,” Der Mugrdechian said. “They struggled, faced discrimination, and overcame obstacles, from housing restrictions to limited opportunities in education. But they became an essential part of this community.”

As the morning wrapped up, the Assemblymembers expressed deep appreciation for the Armenian community’s resilience, generosity, and rich cultural legacy in the Central Valley.

The visit served as a reminder of how Fresno’s history, and its future, are shaped by the contributions of generations of Armenian families.

With the Armenian Genocide Monument standing at the heart of campus, the legislators left Fresno State with a renewed understanding of the community they proudly represent.

Armenian Series at The Press at Fresno State

<https://cah.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies/resources/armenian-series/index.html>

California State University, Fresno Armenian Studies Program

Spring 2026 Schedule of Courses

Course	Units	Time	Day	Instructor
General Education-Breadth, Subject Area 3B, Humanities				
• Arm 1B-Elementary Armenian (Class #32671)	4	10:00A-11:50A	MW	D. Zakarian
General Education-Breadth, Subject Area 3A, Arts				
• ArmS 20-Arts of Armenia (Class #33301)	3	11:00A-12:15P	TuTh	B. Der Mugrdechian
General Education-Subject Area 4B, Social and Behavioral Sciences				
• ArmS 10-Intro Arm Studies (Class #33455)	3	9:00A- 9:50A	MWF	H. Ohanessian
General Education-Integration, Subject Area UD3, Arts and Humanities				
• Arm 148-Mastrpcs Arm Culture (Class #33507) Digital Synchronous	3	9:00A-9:50A	MWF	D. Zakarian
• Arm 148-Mastrpcs Arm Culture (Class #33351)	3	2:00P-3:15P	TuTh	D. Zakarian
• Arm 148-Mastrpcs Arm Culture (Class #33895) Asynchronous	3	DGT CAMP		H. Ohanessian
Upper Division Armenian Studies Courses				
• ArmS 108B-Arm History II (Class #32670)	3	9:30A-10:45A	TuTh	B. Der Mugrdechian
• ArmS 120T-Gender + Arm Gen (Class #37385)	3	2:00P-3:15P	TuTh	Kazan Visiting Prof.

GET A MINOR IN ARMENIAN STUDIES
CONTACT PROF. BARLOW DER MUGRDECHIAN

HYE SHARZHOOM

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Give Your Way to the Armenian Studies Program

There are many
ways to support
the Armenian
Studies Program.

1) A gift today could come through the donation of cash, stock, or goods.

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

Hye Sharzhoom is an ethnic supplement of *The Collegian* and is the newspaper of the Fresno State Armenian Students Organization and the Armenian Studies Program and is funded by the Associated Students. Articles may be reprinted provided *Hye Sharzhoom* is acknowledged. *Hye Sharzhoom* welcomes prose, poetry, articles and other material from its student readers. For further information concerning the newspaper or the Armenian Studies Program contact us at:

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Oflazian on “Repatriation” of Musa Dagh Armenians, 1946-48



Seated, Kevork Oflazian. Standing, left to right: Dr. Hagop Ohanessian, Dr. David Zakarian, Emily Sahakian, Katherine Arslanian, Anahid Valencia, and Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdchian.

Photo: ASP Archive

KATHERINE ARSLANIAN
STAFF WRITER

On Friday, November 14, 2025, the Armenian Studies Program, hosted a lecture by Kevork Oflazian, a Fresno State graduate, entitled “Homeland vs. Home: When a Call to Return to the Homeland is Not Answered.” The lecture examined the experiences of the Musa Dagh Armenians in Anjar, Lebanon, during the repatriation period of 1946–1948, exploring why some diaspora Armenians returned to Soviet Armenia while others did not. The lecture was supported by the Ralph Shabazian Armenian Memorial Fund.

Oflazian’s presentation provided a microhistory of a single community, drawing on oral interviews with townspeople, published and unpublished memoirs, contemporary newspaper articles, and secondary sources, including scholarly articles and dissertations. Oflazian opened with a moment of humor, “Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you are a mile away and have their shoes,” before diving into the story of a people shaped by exile, survival, and shifting notions of homeland.

The lecture traced the community’s origins to six villages on Musa Dagh (Mount Moses) in Eastern Turkey, where residents famously resisted Ottoman deportation for 53 days in 1915.

“So from these villages, they went up to the higher verges of this mountain, which was protected on one side by the Mediterranean Sea,” said Oflazian. “After about 53 days, they were running low on food and ammunition. So they made a large red cross, made with bed sheets.” French naval forces eventually evacuated the villagers to Port Said, Egypt, where they lived in refugee camps. After the war, most returned to Musa Dagh, planting orchards and rebuilding their communities. However, in 1939, the Sanjak of Alexandretta was ceded to Turkey, prompting yet another involuntary relocation. The French authorities resettled the Musa Dagh Armenians in what became the town of Anjar, Lebanon.

Oflazian described early

Anjar as “a town with no water, electricity, or roads,” where residents relied on agriculture and largely had to fend for themselves.

Following World War II, the Soviet Union, under Joseph Stalin, and with the support of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, launched a repatriation campaign, inviting diaspora Armenians to “return home.” The campaign was supported by the Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin, but each entity had different motivations.

“The motivation to extend the invitation to the Armenian diaspora was partially, if not wholly, driven by the Soviet Union’s rivalry with the West,” Oflazian noted. Early excitement greeted the repatriation call. One story was about George, a 14-year-old in Beirut, watching his cousins depart for Armenia. “He would have loved to go with them,” Oflazian said, but his father refused, forcing George to borrow money from a family friend to return to Anjar.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, half of Anjar’s population declined to repatriate. Oflazian identified several key factors: ideology and political affiliation, and concepts of homeland.

Financial and material concerns, community and family ties, coded warning and propaganda were also part of the decision-making.

Many were affiliated with the anti-Communist wing of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Hovanes Amoghlian, recalling the discussions in 1946 of whether to go, or not to go, said his father often remarked, “Only Communists, Protestants, and the poor go to Armenia.” Families were sometimes asked to resign from the ARF in order to repatriate, which many refused. Some villagers did not view Soviet Armenia as their true homeland. One recounted her mother stating, “Here we are living under the Lebanese flag. If we go, we will still not be under the Armenian flag.” The Soviet flag, for them, symbolized foreign rule, not national return.

Financial hardship and the high cost of relocation discouraged many families from repatriating, as did the desire to

Dr. Zakarian Discusses Medieval Book Curses and How They Protected Armenian Manuscripts

SYUZANNA KOVALENKO
STAFF WRITER

Many generations ago, Armenians utilized curses for what they believed was necessary in order to protect their sacred manuscripts. Dr. David Zakarian, Haig and Isabel Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies at Fresno State, gave a lecture on “Medieval Book Curses: How Armenians Guarded Their Manuscripts,” on Friday, Nov. 7. He explained the different ways Armenians guarded their medieval manuscripts through various curses.

Dr. Zakarian’s lecture was part of the Armenian Studies Fall Lecture Series and was supported by the Helen Zevart Peterson Memorial Fund.

Armenians, similar to other cultures, have a long-standing history of venerating the Bible. However, Armenians differ in this aspect of culture in comparison to other cultures as other cultures include the veneration of icons which Armenians do not have a tradition of venerating. One of the examples of veneration from other cultures that Dr. Zakarian mentioned was the Icon of the Mother of God of “Tinos” that was significant as a source of divine protection in the Greek Orthodox tradition. The reputation of the icon was perceived to have working powers to perform miracles such as healing the ill and protecting Greece. Another example, which comes from Mexican culture, is called Our Lady of Guadalupe, and served as a symbol of faith and national identity in Mexico. The image of the Virgin Mary is believed to be miraculously imprinted on the *tilma* (cloak) of Saint Juan Diego and has been regarded as a source of healing for nearly five centuries. Each culture venerates it in its own way and through its own traditions.

Dr. Zakarian explained that the detailed manuscripts as seen in the Armenian tradition are

remain together, even when some individual members wished to go, families prioritized staying together with siblings and extended relatives.

Propaganda promising prosperity, “Armenia is a paradise,” was often met with skepticism, particularly as reports from prior repatriates revealed harsh living conditions, hunger, and struggle. Some of these warnings were even coded in letters, further discouraging departures and influencing families’ decisions to remain in Anjar.

Oflazian also discussed how missionary organizations and committees tried to persuade villagers to repatriate, but anti-Communist sentiment, loyalty to local communities, and practical concerns often outweighed these efforts.

Carol Bertram, cited in his research, noted, “Yet an effective loyalty to the Republic of Armenia does not replace the pilgrim’s sense of rootedness in the Western



Left to right: Emily Sahakian, Jordan Mazmanian, Katherine Arslanian, and Dr. David Zakarian. Photo: Barlow Der Mugrdchian

based on deep reverence and veneration of the Bible and other sacred religious texts. There is a deep obligation to protect these manuscripts by any means necessary. For example, Dr. Zakarian briefly spoke about the Shurishkan gospels which was named after a village in Iran, where an enemy attack led the villagers to ensure the safety of the manuscript by burying it in water. The manuscript was then retrieved and miraculously remained dry and intact and now resides in the Matenadaran in Armenia. The Word of God was considered sacred to the Armenian people and they would go to any lengths necessary to ensure it remained safe.

The ultimate question is, why were people trying to protect these manuscripts? These manuscripts were commissioned and sponsored by various people who wanted their names written down for the purposes of prayer. Much of the ideas were surrounded around “remembrance” and praying for people so God could remember them, their families or relatives, and friends in the second coming. They believed that sponsoring a manuscript was a pathway to heaven and this incentivized the idea of using curses to protect the manuscript and their bloodlines in salvation.

Armenia of Ottoman lands, with its distinctive history and culture that differs significantly from those of Eastern Armenia.”

A more conceptual issue also emerged, the idea of what “homeland” meant. The Musa Dagh Armenians were from historic Armenian lands in Turkey, not from the territory of the Armenian SSR.

“Some villagers did not see this movement as repatriation, but rather yet another migration to an imagined homeland that they were not originally from,” explained Oflazian.

On a map, he pointed out, “Armenia is way up there. Musa Dagh is way down here.”

For people who had already endured multiple forced migrations, the promise of a new homeland, this time under Communist rule, was not universally convincing.

By 1948, repatriation efforts ended abruptly, leaving Anjar as the permanent home for those

These manuscripts were protected by various drawings on a wide range of biblical, ecclesiastical, and cultural references. Scribes invoked formidable figures such as Cain and Judas, aligning violators of the text with the most infamous betrayers in sacred history. Individual donors, such as Gariane, issued personal warnings as well, declaring that anyone who sold, pawned, or defaced her manuscript should be cut down by God from within and be placed among the unbelievers. These curses parallel those found in Byzantine tradition, where scribes likewise threatened offenders with afflictions such as sharing “the lot of Judas, the leprosy of Gehazi, and dread of Cain,” reinforcing a shared regional belief in the spiritual peril of violating sacred books.

Armenians using references and drawing inspiration from biblical text for their curses provided them with foundational justification to use them for their own salvational purposes. However, they were never rendered as effective, as many of the manuscripts were uprooted and destroyed and ended up in pawn shops, despite people investing everything they had into a single manuscript in the name of their salvation.

who had chosen not to leave. “After the repatriation ended in 1948, Anjar remained the home for those that did not repatriate,” said Oflazian. “After more than 75 years, they remain Armenians, living in Lebanon, calling it their home. Although they maintain a strong connection to the current post-Soviet independent Republic of Armenia, they are strong nationalists and patriots; very few consider moving there now.”

He concluded with a broader reflection: “Finally, an overarching question is this: At what point does a land become a homeland? What does a nation mean for the multitudes that have in the past and continue to immigrate by choice or force? These questions become more relevant in the increasingly multicultural world of today.”

Oflazian’s lecture offered a nuanced exploration of identity, nationalism, and the complex meanings of “home” for a people shaped by exile and resilience.

ASO Introduces Armenia for “International Coffee Hour”



Grigor Terpogosyan

Anahid Valencia

KATHERINE ARSLANIAN
STAFF WRITER

Photo: ASP Archive

The Armenian Student Organization (ASO) at Fresno State held an engaging cultural presentation, led by ASO President Grigor Terpogosyan and Vice President Anahid Valencia, on Wednesday, Nov. 19, as part of Fresno State’s “International Coffee Hour.”

The goal of the presentation was to introduce students, faculty, and staff at Fresno State to the richness of Armenian history, identity, and tradition through a combination of a powerpoint and discussion.

“We wanted to give everyone a glimpse into who Armenians are, our past, our culture, and the values our community continues to carry,” shared Valencia.

The presentation began with information about when the Republic of Armenia was founded, highlighting Yerevan as the capital, the country’s population of 2.8 million, and its multilingual connections through Armenian, Russian, English, and French. They explained Armenia’s coat of arms, adopted in 1992, which features an eagle and a lion supporting a shield. The Armenian flag was also discussed, with its red, blue, and orange stripes symbolizing sacrifice, hope, and the fertile lands of the homeland.

A significant portion of the talk centered on the Armenian Diaspora, which today includes more than eight million Armenians living outside the country. The largest communities reside in the United States, Russia, France, Ukraine, Syria, and Lebanon.

“Even though so many Armenians live away from the homeland, our communities stay connected through traditions, language, and advocacy,” Valencia explained. The presenters emphasized the political engagement of diaspora communities, particularly in the United States, where Armenian-Americans frequently organize for humanitarian aid, Genocide recognition, and issues involving Armenia.

The talk then shifted to Armenia’s Christian identity. Through historical storytelling, the presenters described how Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a

state religion in 301 AD. They highlighted the roles of key figures such as Saints Thaddeus and Bartholomew, early apostles martyred in Armenia, and the story of King Trdat the Great, who persecuted Christians before eventually converting.

“The story of St. Gregory the Illuminator is one of the most important in our history,” stated Valencia. “After surviving 13 years imprisoned in the prison of *Khor Virap* [the Deep Pit], he healed King Trdat through prayer. That miracle changed the future of Armenia forever.” The presenters also discussed martyrs like St. Hripsime and St. Gayane, whose faith and sacrifice remain important to the Armenians.

The presentation then moved to a discussion of the cultural pillars of food, music, and traditions. Armenian cuisine, explained Terpogosyan and Valencia, reflects both heritage and family. Dishes like *dolma*, *manti*, *kufta*, *lavash*, and *baklava* are staples of Armenian gatherings. Terpogosyan noted a common cultural ritual: “Sometimes families hide a quarter inside a *kufta*. Whoever finds it is believed to receive luck or blessings for the year.” The pomegranate, symbolizing unity and life, was shown in photographs and described as one of the most iconic symbols in Armenian culture.

Music also plays a central role in Armenian cultural life. The presenters showed some instruments such as the *oud* and the *duduk*, the latter known for its haunting, soulful tone. They also spoke about Komitas Vartabed, the renowned priest and ethnomusicologist who collected and preserved more than 3,000 Armenian folk songs, explaining that without Komitas, much of our musical heritage would have been lost. His work is the foundation of Armenian classical and choral music. The power-point also covered elements such as the creation of the Armenian alphabet in 405 AD, the importance of family values, and major Armenian holidays including Christmas on January 6, Independence Day on September 21, and Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day on April 24. Cultural and religious traditions, like *Vardavar*, the summer religious and water

Armenian Students Organization Continues Fall Semester Social and Educational Activities

KATHERINE ARSLANIAN
STAFF WRITER

The Armenian Student Organization (ASO) at Fresno State closed out a busy and eventful Fall 2025 semester, hosting a series of gatherings that highlighted student involvement, cultural exchange, and community presence on campus. From seasonal celebrations to multi-organization collaborations, ASO’s fall semester was busy but meaningful.

The semester began with ASO’s annual Halloween Party on October 23, hosted by the Mazmanian Family. The gathering offered students a chance to unwind during the mid-semester rush while enjoying seasonal activities. Members spent the evening pumpkin painting, decorating cookies, participating in karaoke, and socializing. The event’s atmosphere created an easy opportunity for students both long-time members and newcomers, to meet, talk, and engage with one another outside of academic settings.

On November 6, ASO hosted an Ampersand Ice Cream social that later shifted into a group outing to Nuovo for pizza. Students first met at Ampersand where members shared ice cream and caught up. The group then headed to Nuovo, where they had some amazing pizza. The night served its purpose, offering members an opportunity to interact and have a fun night.

Mid-November brought one of the semester’s most meaningful events, Fresno State Culture Day, held on November 13, in the Resnick Student Union, Room 207. Organized by Students for Palestinian Liberation (SPL), the event brought together several cultural student organizations, including SPL, MEChA de Fresno State, Neum NASA (Native American Students Association), the Hmong Student Association, and ASO. The goal of the event was to encourage cultural awareness and exchange through traditional clothing, food, and conversation. Students were invited to showcase their heritage, learn about the histories of other communities, and recognize the similarities that connect them.

ASO’s executive board reflected positively on the event, noting the value of participating alongside other cultural groups on campus. Vice President Anahid Valencia shared that the event pointed out unexpected overlaps

festival, Easter egg dyeing and “egg fights,” and Armenian coffee cup fortune reading, were described with both historical meaning and a personal touch.

To give the audience a sense of place, the presenters shared photographs of major Armenian landmarks, from Lake Sevan and Republic Square to the Cascade in Yerevan and the “We Are Our Mountains” monument in Artsakh.

They also showed local connections by highlighting Armenian churches throughout



Students at the Halloween party.

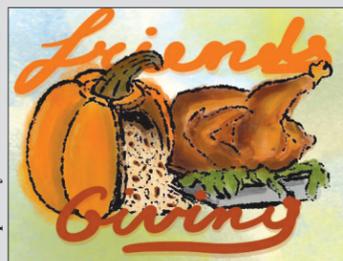
Photo: ASP Archive

across different communities, stating, “Holding cultural nights, especially where multiple cultures come together, is so important for Fresno State. It was really awesome to see everyone in their traditional clothing and trying the unique food! A lot of it reminded me of Armenian culture, we’re all more alike than we think!”

ASO President Grigor Terpogosyan expanded on that perspective, emphasizing the sense of shared history present throughout the event. He stated that it was meaningful to see different communities connect through common experiences, “Many of us carry histories marked by displacement, genocide, or discrimination, yet we still show up with pride and warmth. People welcomed us without hesitation, and that openness created genuine connections.

Experiences like this show how much we can learn from each other, and they make me hope for even more collaborative cultural events in the future.”

“Everyone was so kind and welcomed us with open arms, and I think it would be great to have more collaborative events in the future,” said ASO Secretary Emily Sahakian.



Graphic by Anastasia Eritzian

Following Culture Day, ASO held its annual “Friendsgiving” on Thursday, November 20, at the Khatchikian household, bringing members together for dinner and time to relax before the Thanksgiving break.

the Central Valley, including St. Paul Armenian Church and Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Fresno, St. Mary Armenian Church in Yetem, and St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Fowler.

They pointed out the distinct architectural similarities these churches share with classical

This year also marked the debut of ASO’s new crewnecks, which feature an embroidered Armenian flag on the sleeve, a design element that had not appeared in previous years. The sweaters are now available for purchase at upcoming ASO and Armenian Studies Program events. Students gathered for dinner, games, and conversation, taking part in activities like *karaoke*, foam axe throwing, and spending time around the fireplaces.

Another major highlight of the semester came with the campus visit of His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia. ASO executives were invited to attend a luncheon with His Holiness and accompanied him during his visit to the Armenian Genocide Monument at Fresno State.

Treasurer Jordan Mazmanian described the experience as deeply meaningful, stating, “This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see the Catholicos first hand. When Prof. Der Mugrdchian asked the other board members and I to come to see him, I was so honored and I knew that I couldn’t pass up this opportunity.”

With a few additional events still in the planning stages for December, ASO concludes the fall semester with strong engagement and continued commitment to student involvement.

With a mix of social, cultural, and community-oriented events, ASO has expanded its campus presence and strengthened connections among its members and the broader Fresno State community.

Keep your eye out for upcoming information about it! You can follow ASO activities on Instagram @fresnostateaso.

Armenian design.

The presentation closed with an invitation for students to stay connected with ASO and continue learning.

“Our goal is always to educate, celebrate, and build community,” Terpogosyan stated. “When we share our culture, we keep it alive.”

Hye Oozh-90.7 FM-KFSR
Saturdays • 9:00AM - Noon
Fresno State’s Armenian Radio Show
with host Vartush Mesropyan

CineCulture Program Brings Armenian Film to the Campus



“Armenians in Film: 6 short films by Armenian filmmakers.”

ANAHID VALENCIA
STAFF WRITER

The Armenian Studies Program partnered with the Fresno State CineCulture program on Friday, Oct. 24, for the screening of “Armenians in Film: 6 Short Films by Armenian Filmmakers.” A Q&A with directors followed the screening.

The event was sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Greater Fresno Chapter and the New York-based AGBU Arts.

Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian of the Armenian Studies Program introduced the films to the audience, composed of CineCulture students and a large number of community members.

In common Armenian fashion when it comes to films, the pieces addressed tragedy, human complexity and family dynamics in solemn, sometimes humorous ways that utilized nature and raw expression. The films were: “The Land of Sun,” “Wooden Doll,” “Evie,” “Closer in Strife,” “Time Out” and “Oudenk.”

The first film, “The Land of Sun,” was directed by Ruby Mardirossian. The irony and juxtaposition begins in its title, because in the film, the setting of Shamshadin, Armenia, is often enveloped in fog. The sun is merely a metaphor.

There are scenes of serene nature and daily life in Armenia, which is eventually disrupted by war. But, as Martirossian said later in the Q & A, this was not part of the film’s original plan.

“When we started this film, we didn’t believe that the film was going to be about the situation [war],” she said. “We thought that we were making a movie about the beauty of nature and the beauty of the people there, the villagers.”

However, when the war disrupted this peace in the midst of the filming process, they followed its direction. In this way, “The Land of Sun” perfectly encapsulates life in Armenia: beautiful, historic and lively, but saddled with the responsibility of never-ending defense.

The next film, “Wooden Doll,” directed by Nune Apresyan, also echoes the sadness that comes from war. Here, it is represented through the eyes of a child and his father, whom the child does

not recognize due to the father’s disfiguring war injuries.

The father is depicted as an ominous, mysterious figure who knocks on the child and mother’s door. To viewers, it becomes clear later when they embraced, that the man is the child’s father and the mother’s husband – a very poignant scene. “Wooden Doll” is a powerful depiction of the irreparable effects of war, and of the impact of war on the relationship between a father and a son, and a wife and a husband.

“Evie,” directed by Arpiné Stepanyan, is a film that is especially relatable to young people. A 19-year-old girl is faced with a battle between love and family when she falls in love with a non-Armenian man. Forced to date and live parts of her life in secrecy because of her family’s disapproval, the film alternates between hearty scenes of young love and tense scenes at the dinner table.

It is every young person’s decision to figure out how they will live their life and who will be involved in it, and Evie carefully and deeply “Armenianizes” this concept.

“Closer in Strife” the next film, was directed by Alec Nikghossian and is immediately striking in its composition. The film utilizes little dialogue but many visuals, the most notable being the hue of, almost heavenly, orange that cascades over a grandmother and her grandchild.

Taking place amidst the Port Explosion in Beirut, Lebanon in 2020, “Closer in Strife” illustrates the protection of innocence and, again, the terror of war. The two seem to rely on each other for comfort as havoc is wreaked all around them.



Graphic by Anastasia Ertizian

Lilit Babayan’s film, “Time Out,” followed “Closer in Strife.” Babayan’s piece examines the realizations that can come from loss. In this case, the realizations come from the main character, Artashes, who loses his job.

Having been a scholar all of

Illuminating Armenian Culture Through AS 20-Arts of Armenia Course at Fresno State

NELLIE CHOBANYAN
STAFF WRITER

At Fresno State, Armenian Studies 20-Arts of Armenia, continues to captivate students from all majors and academic backgrounds. Whether fulfilling a General Education requirement, exploring cultural identity, or simply discovering a new artistic tradition, students consistently describe the class as eye-opening, meaningful, and unexpectedly inspiring.

For Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, who has taught the course since 2008, Armenian Studies 20 holds a special place. “It’s one of the classes I enjoy teaching the most,” he shared. “It’s a fun and interesting course that illuminates an area of Armenian culture that most people aren’t familiar with. Most haven’t seen the cultural production, that is, the art, which is beautiful, informative, and spiritual... No one who takes the course can leave unimpressed.”

The class traces its origins back to the program’s early years. Created by the Prof. Dickran Kouymjian, former director of the Program, the course was originally developed in the 1970s as one of the program’s core offerings. Prof. Der Mugrdechian took the class as a student, later sitting in on the class, and eventually took it over after Prof. Kouymjian’s retirement.

Today, Prof. Der Mugrdechian teaches Armenian art from its earliest expressions to the medieval period, covering architecture, miniature painting, frescoes, metalwork, *khatchkars* [stone-crosses], ceramics, carpets, and more.

“The point of the course is to give a general overview of the varieties of Armenian art,” Prof. Der Mugrdechian explained. “When students see churches, manuscripts, sculptures, carvings, and the symbolism behind them, they gain a deeper understanding of Armenian identity.”

While many students enroll to satisfy a General Education requirement, survey responses show that they leave with far more than they expected.

Freshman Hyojeong Kang noted how much she appreciated that “the class explains the historical contexts behind artworks...and seeing how culture and history connected with the art.” She added that Armenian art is “very meaningful and full of symbolism. It feels very historical and emotional, and I like how each piece reflects the identity and experiences of the Armenian people.”

his life, once he no longer leads a life in academics, Artashes realizes that while engulfed in his studies, he neglected the value of human beings and human connection. The rest of the film follows Artashes as he navigates through his new season of life, one that, for many, hits far too close to home.

“Oudenk” (Let’s Eat) closed out the short films. Directed by



Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, standing, with students from the Arts of Armenia course.

Photo: Nellie Chobanyan

“I think Armenian art is one of the foundations to understanding Armenian culture,” said sophomore Anahid Valencia. “Armenian art is everywhere – in churches, galleries, and homes.”

Other students reflected on unexpected elements of the course. Sophomore Alexis Soto Gonzalez wrote, “I didn’t know God would be talked about a lot in this class, which I enjoy.”

Junior Arlet Vergara shared that she was surprised by how “immersive and interactive the course really was.”

Across the student responses, recurring themes emerged: Armenian art is beautiful and unique; its religious symbolism runs deeper than expected; architecture and miniatures are among student favorites; and the course profoundly changes how students understand culture, identity, and history.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian emphasized the point that “Armenian art may be diverse, but it is distinctively Armenian. Students learn that Christianization and the Armenian alphabet deeply shaped our art and architecture. Those two core elements influenced everything.”

Many students echoed this connection. One wrote that Armenian art “reflects the identity and experiences of the Armenian people,” calling it both meaningful and emotional. Another described it as “the evolution and endurance of the Armenian people.”

These reflections highlight an important outcome of the class: students, Armenian and non-Armenian alike, gain an appreciation for how culture and history shape artistic expression.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian has seen firsthand how this introductory course inspires students to explore the program more deeply. “Along with Armenian Studies 10 and the language

Minna Abalian, “Oudenk” is a tribute to family and the value of food, depicted here through a unique collage of photos and animations. Abalian said that, when her grandfather passed away in the middle of production, the project took a turn.

“It kind of became more a way for me to process my grief, but also celebrate my family and his legacy,” Abalian said.

courses, this is one of the key introductory classes,” he said. “If students take it and love it, they often go on to pursue the Minor in Armenian Studies.”

For many, the class serves as their first real encounter with Armenian culture, and the impact lasts long after the semester ends. “Most students have never been exposed to this type of art,” explained Der Mugrdechian. “Taking this class opens their eyes. It’s something that stays with them in whatever field they go into.”

While the core content remains rooted in centuries of Armenian cultural production, Prof. Der Mugrdechian continually updates the course. He incorporates new images, personal photos from his travels, and contemporary discoveries in Armenian art history.

“These works are not just objects,” emphasized Prof. Der Mugrdechian.

“These are items you would see in Armenian homes, churches, and communities. Armenian art is part of a living culture.”

Looking ahead, he hopes the class will continue serving as an essential entry point into Armenian Studies, especially in Fresno, home to one of the largest Armenian communities in the United States.

When asked to describe Armenian Studies 20 in one sentence, Professor Der Mugrdechian summed it up simply but powerfully: “It is a fun and interesting course that illuminates an area of Armenian culture most people are not familiar with – beautiful, informative, and spiritual art that leaves no student unimpressed.”

Armenian Studies 20 is far more than a GE class. It is a journey through history, identity, creativity, and cultural pride, one that continues to resonate with students across campus.

Though the images portrayed in the film are of a family foreign to viewers, it is nearly impossible to not smile while watching “Oudenk,” because of the Armenian connection alone.

The more than seventeen-year cooperation between the Armenian Studies Program and CineCulture has developed into one that brings the best of Armenian film to Fresno State.

Dr. David Zakarian Presents History of Chess in Armenia



Left to right: Linda Shekerjian, Sylva Guluzian, Dr. David Zakarian, Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, Tatevik Hovhannisyan, and Chuck Jamgotchian.

Photo: Natalie Agazarian

NATALIE AGAZARIAN
EDITOR

“First you treat it as a game, then you enter a whole new world,” said chess player and enthusiast Dr. David Zakarian.

On Sunday, October 12, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) Fresno Chapter, in partnership with the Armenian Studies Program, hosted a lecture titled “A Brief History of Chess in Armenia” at St. Paul Armenian Church. The presentation followed the *badarak*, and the audience included many young Sunday school members and church attendees.

Dr. David Zakarian, Berberian Professor of Armenian Studies, began playing chess at the age of five in his birthplace of Armenia. Today, he continues to represent the Republic of Armenia in international tournaments. Chess, he shared, is his “hidden life” – a lifelong passion of his for both playing and teaching the game.

The earliest known reference to chess in Armenia appears in a 12th-century manuscript in the text titled “The Lamentation on the Fall of Jerusalem” by the Armenian Catholicos Grigor Tgha, which mentions players of the game.

“Armenia became a chess country during the Soviet era,” Dr. Zakarian explained. “As far as chess was concerned, it became a state policy.” In the current Republic of Armenia, chess became a formal part of the school curriculum in 2011.

“Chess really teaches you a lot of skills for your daily life,” said Dr. Zakarian. “Chess forces you to sit still for a long time, concentrate and think deeply, understand what your opponent is planning, and create your own strategy. That’s how it trains your mind and that is why I think children should learn the game, so that they learn different aspects of life.”

He also referenced the 2009 BBC documentary “Armenia: The Cleverest Nation on Earth” which explored how a small country like Armenia could consistently outsmart much larger nations through its devotion to chess. That recognition highlighted Armenia in the global sphere, and reflects Armenia’s bond with the game.

Dr. Zakarian went on to highlight some of Armenia’s chess pioneers, including Henrik Kasparian, renowned for his book *Giants of Chess Studies*, and Tigran Petrosian, the first Armenian World Chess Champion.

Petrosian, also known as “Iron Tigran,” became a national symbol of resilience. “He came from a working-class background, helping his father clean the streets,” Zakarian noted. “His hardship helped build his character.”

Beyond his world title, Petrosian’s legacy endures in Armenia’s culture – his face appears on the 2000-dram currency, and a street in Yerevan proudly bears his name.

“I’ve actually played chess with at least three Tigran Petrosians,” Zakarian added. “To tell them apart, they would use their father’s initial – like Tigran L. Petrosian.”

Petrosian’s influence paved the way for a new generation of Armenian chess masters, including Arshak Petrosian, Smbat Lputian, Rafael Vaganian, Artashes Minasian, Vladimir Akopian, and Ashot Anastasian – players who continue to carry forward Armenia’s rich chess tradition.

“I know that Armenians are not always known for working well together,” noted Dr. Zakarian, “but in chess, Armenians have repeatedly proven to be able to play well on a team.”

In 1992, the Republic of Armenia earned a bronze medal in the Men’s Team competition at the 30th Chess Olympiad – the world’s most prestigious team chess tournament – held in Manila, the Philippines.

Their next major triumph came at the 2006 Olympiad in Turin, Italy. These victories, along with subsequent successes, including the 2008 Dresden Olympiad and the 2012 Olympiad in Istanbul, demonstrate Armenia’s growing and enduring presence on the global chess stage with new talents such as Levon Aronian, Gabriel Sargissian, Karen Asrian, Tigran L. Petrosian, and Sergei Movsesian shining on the horizon.

Dr. Zakarian also recognized players of Armenian heritage who represent other national teams,

Armenian Genocide Monument on Campus Reflects a Thirty Year Struggle for Recognition

SOSSE BALOIAN YANEZ
SPECIAL TO HYE SHARZHOOM

In 2015, Fresno State became the first university to erect a monument commemorating the Armenian Genocide on a college campus in the United States. In 1986, however, the realization of such a memorial would have seemed like a distant dream. In that year, the Fresno State Library rejected a display of posters submitted by the Armenian Students Organization (ASO) commemorating the Armenian Genocide on the grounds that it was “too controversial and one-sided” and violated Fresno State Library’s policy “prohibiting presentations that take a ‘point of view’ on political or religious issues (“Genocide exhibit rejected,” *The Fresno Bee*, March 11, 1986).

In the months leading up to the annual Armenian Genocide commemoration on April 24 of 1986, the ASO submitted an exhibit of 20 black and white posters to the Fresno State Library that brought awareness to the victims lost in the Armenian Genocide. Purchased from the Armenian Assembly of America, the placards contained graphic photographs of Armenian bodies, reproductions of newspaper clippings about the Genocide, historical information, and the infamous quote from Adolf Hitler dated prior to the 1939 German invasion of Poland: “After all, who remembers the Armenians.” The quote was painfully ironic given the circumstances faced by the ASO in 1986.

Outraged by the library’s denial, the ASO demanded approval of the exhibit and a public apology (“Genocide posters get FSU’s OK,” *The Fresno Bee*, March 13, 1986.). A week later, Fresno State Library’s position was reversed and the exhibit was permitted. While it is disheartening to read how the perpetuation of genocide denial can affect institutions which pride themselves on fostering knowledge, this episode from

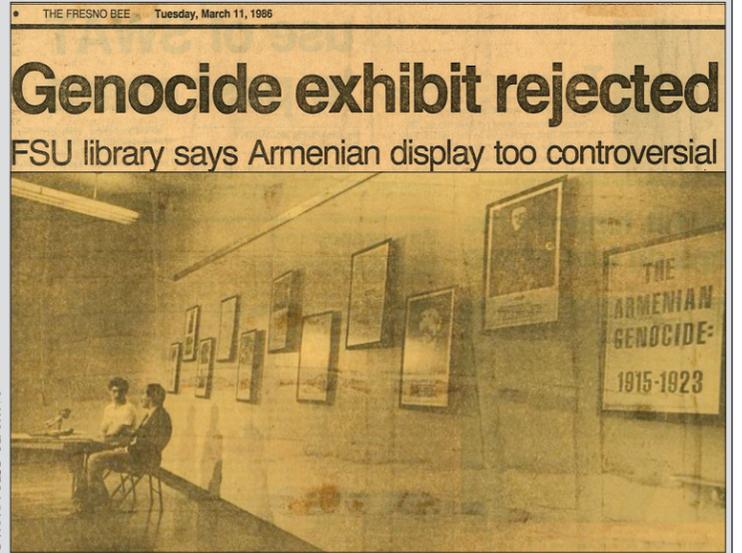


Photo: ASP Archive

The Armenian Genocide posters were mounted in the Fresno State Library after initially being rejected.

history, like the construction of the Genocide monument itself, demonstrates the great power of Armenian activism.

It was not uncommon to hear negationist arguments about the Armenian Genocide from esteemed scholars in the late 20th century. In his book, *The Historiographic Perversion* (2009), Marc Nichanian cites examples of historians who reduced the Armenian Genocide to a deportation gone wrong, arguing that the 1.5 million lives lost were largely due to natural catastrophes (famine, sickness, etc.). He refers to this time as the “1994 campaign” because a number of refutations against the Armenian Genocide came out in that year. According to “Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide” published in the *Holocaust and Genocide Studies Journal* (1995), “foreign scholars were encouraged [by the Turkish government] to revise the record of genocide, presenting an account largely blaming the Armenians or, in another version, wartime conditions which claimed the lives of more Turks than Armenians.” This “encouragement” materialized in monetary compensation on the premise that efforts were made to discredit scholarly accounts on the Armenian Genocide.

The spread of Genocide denial perpetuates doubt in intellectuals and triumphs when scholarly institutions view genocide as a political or religious issue not to be associated with.

Fortunately, Fresno State has come a long way since its misinformed denial. This year marked the 10th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide monument’s construction at Fresno State organized by the Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee.

Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval delivered a speech at the 110th Armenian Genocide commemoration recognizing the Genocide and encouraging future students to further their education in Armenian Studies at Fresno State.

For ten years and counting, the monument has provided a place for the Armenian community of Fresno to gather on April 24 and honor those who lost their lives in the Armenian Genocide. Year round, Fresno State students and visitors enter the monument to learn and reflect on the history of the Armenians. The ASO in 1986 set an example for future members proving that passion and persistence can produce results. One could argue that because of their determination, there is a Genocide Monument on campus today.

CONFERENCE, FROM PAGE 1

Memorial Fund, and the Florence Hamparson Memorial Fund.

The conference was organized into three panels devoted to perspectives on late Ottoman and Turkish historical scholarship, focusing on recent work on the memoirs of members of the Ottoman Turkish Committee of Union and Progress. The conference, which brought together scholars from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, created a forum for dialogue on the complexities of the late Ottoman Empire. The two-day event was held at the University Business Center and the Smittcamp Alumni House on

the Fresno State campus.

Dr. Taner Akçam (director of the Armenian Genocide Research Program of the *Promise Armenian Institute* at UCLA) gave the keynote presentation on “Beyond Fragmented Narratives: The Necessity of an ‘Integrated’ History: The Case of Malak Barsom and the Sheikh Said Rebellion,” in which he argued for a more unified approach to Ottoman and early Republican history.

Following the keynote speech, the conference continued with panel one, moderated by Dr. Ümit Kurt. Dr. Janet Klein (University of Akron), presented “Reading Against the Grain of Memoirs

as well as the accomplishments of both Armenia’s men’s and women’s teams. He highlighted legendary figures such as Garry Kasparov, often hailed as the

“GOAT” (Greatest of All Time), and the young prodigy Sam Sevian, one of the youngest Grandmasters in chess history.

Armenians continue do well

and Diaries in Researching Late-Ottoman Kurdish and Armenian Histories,” examining how these personal writings can yield insights into Kurdish-Armenian relations and late Ottoman political dynamics. The panel concluded with a lecture by Dr. Michael Provence (University of California, San Diego) on “Surprises in the Memoirs of Arab Ottoman Officers and Great War Veterans,” which highlighted the memoirs of Arab officers within the Ottoman military.

Panel two, moderated by Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian (Fresno State), featured three scholars

SEE CONFERENCE, PAGE 7

as a chess nation and Armenians around the world contribute to the development and successes of many countries which they call home.

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CONFERENCE, FROM PAGE 7

whose work demonstrates how personal writings can challenge historical narratives. The first presentation, delivered by Dr. Kurt was titled “Republic of Perpetrators: Talat Pasha’s Genocide Technocrat Mustafa Reşat Mimaroglu,” tracing the life of Mimaroglu, a key bureaucratic figure whose career intersected with the violence during the Armenian Genocide. Dr. Yiğit Akin (Ohio State University) then presented “Local Politics, Intellectual Periphery, and the End of the Empire: The Diaries of Yusif Cemil Bey of Simav.” Dr. Akin explored the diary of Cemil Bey, whose writings provide evidence of local political tensions as the Ottoman Empire collapsed. The final panelist was Dr. Duygu Tasalp (University of Louvain), who spoke on “The Father Figure in the Memoirs of Unionist Young Turks: Between Victimization, Betrayal, and Regeneration,” which examined how Young Turk leaders constructed symbolic father figures within their memoirs.

After a short break, panel three convened, moderated by Dr. David Zakarian (Fresno State). This panel continued the conference’s emphasis on memoirs and personal documents, but studied them through legal, social, and gendered lenses. Dr. Kent Schull (Binghamton University) opened with “Reassessing the Role of Ottoman Prison Convicts in the Armenian Genocide: Triangulating CUP Memoirs

and Trial Proceedings with Ottoman Prison Statistics.” His analysis challenged assumptions and contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of state-directed mobilization. Next, Dr. Merisa Sahin (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) presented “Ahmed Riza and Selma Riza: An Ittihadist Glance on Women’s Rights,” focusing on the sibling pair whose writings reveal the contradictions within Young Turk discourse on gender equality and modernization. The panel and conference concluded with a presentation by Dr. Ekrem Yener (Bilgi University) on “An Examination of Mehmed Cavid Bey’s Newly Disclosed Diary for Insights into the Thoughts and Relationships of Unionist Leaders.” Dr. Yener discussed the diary’s significance in highlighting the personal relationships and political anxieties of CUP leadership during the Empire’s final years.

In conclusion, the conference highlighted the essential role of memoirs, diaries, and personal writings in reconstructing a more nuanced history of the late Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Genocide. By highlighting voices often marginalized or overlooked, the presenters demonstrated how personal documents can reshape broader narratives and deepen our understanding of the era.

The conference proceedings were recorded and are available for viewing on the Armenian Studies Program YouTube channel: bit.ly/armenianstudiesyoutube.

OSHER, FROM PAGE 1

life, art, and tradition today.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian began by situating Armenia’s conversion within the broader context of early Christianity’s spread through the Mediterranean world. While no country was officially Christian in the early fourth century, Armenia’s King Trdat the Great converted to Christianity in 301 CE, making Armenia the world’s first Christian nation.

Christianity quickly became central to Armenian identity, and church building flourished.

The Holy Etchmiadzin Cathedral, constructed in 303 CE, became the headquarters of the Armenian Church. Made from

volcanic tufa stone and crowned with a dome, Etchmiadzin established the architectural style that defines Armenian churches worldwide. It remains one of the four main religious centers of the Armenian Church, together with the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon; the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian also explained the Church’s hierarchy, headed by the Catholicos of All Armenians, currently His Holiness Karekin II. The office of Catholicos has shifted locations throughout history as

the church adapted to political upheavals, including the fall of Armenian kingdoms and the Armenian Genocide that forced the Catholicosate of Cilicia to relocate from Sis (in present-day Turkey) to Antelias, Lebanon. Despite these challenges, the Church preserved unity through its structure and democratic election of leaders, reflecting both its religious authority and national character.

The Armenian Apostolic Church belongs to the Oriental Orthodox communion and does not accept the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), which distinguished between Christ’s divine and human natures. Instead, the Armenian Church affirms the oneness of Christ’s nature, aligning it with the Syrian, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. Its liturgy, known as the *Badarak*, has been preserved in Classical Armenian since the fifth century. Chanted hymns (*sharakans*) and the Eucharist form the heart of the service, connecting worshippers to centuries of unbroken tradition.

“Even here in Fresno, the Divine Liturgy is celebrated in classical Armenian,” noted Prof. Der Mugrdechian. “It hasn’t changed in 1,500 years. The language gives an air of mystery to the Liturgy.”

Christianity profoundly influenced Armenian art, architecture, music, and literature. Prof. Der Mugrdechian illustrated this through illuminated manuscripts like the Queen Mlke Gospel and the works of the 13th-century painter Toros Roslin. St. Gregory of Narek, the tenth-century mystic poet, embodied the spiritual depth of Armenian Christianity in his *Book of Lamentations*, a collection of meditative prayers still revered today. Prof. Der Mugrdechian also played hymns such as “Soorp Soorp” and “Hayr Mer,” noting that “Armenian music is really embodied in the Armenian Church music, and it was all inspired by Christianity.”

In concluding the first class, Prof. Der Mugrdechian emphasized that the Armenian Church remains a unifying force for Armenians worldwide. From Etchmiadzin to Fresno, the same liturgy, prayers, and rituals connect communities across continents. The Church’s influence extends beyond spirituality, it serves as a cultural and social anchor for diaspora Armenians, preserving language, tradition, and identity. As

“It is the one institution that still ties Armenians, no matter where you live in the world,” stated Prof. Der Mugrdechian. “I can go to France and attend an Armenian Church, and it is exactly the same service as in Fresno.”

Through this presentation, it became clear that Christianity in Armenia is not just a religion but a foundation of national identity. The lasting impact of the Armenian Apostolic Church continues to illuminate the past and unite Armenians in faith and heritage today.



Photo: Barlow Der Mugrdechian

Ancient Armenian winery discovered at Areni-1 cave.

The Osher class continued on Monday, October 13.

NATALIE AGAZARIAN
EDITOR

The Armenian language and alphabet occupy a central place in Armenian cultural identity, historical continuity, and literary tradition. Rooted in an ancient civilization between Europe and Asia, Armenian culture has evolved through eras of political change, linguistic development, and intellectual achievement.

On Monday, October 13, Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian of the Armenian Studies Program, continued his two-part special lecture series with the Osher Life Long Learning Institute, focusing on the Armenian alphabet and language, which provided general information on Armenia’s cultural history and literary development. He opened his presentation by teaching those in attendance simple phrases in Armenian: Ինչպէս? էս: (How are you?) and Ես լաւ եմ: (I am fine).

Armenia is one of the world’s oldest continuous civilizations, with archaeological evidence such as a 5,000-year-old leather shoe and the world’s oldest known winery discovered in the Areni-1 Cave complex. Ancient maps, including the World Map of Eratosthenes (3rd century BCE), position Armenia near the center of the ancient world, dating back to 95 BCE. The term “Armenia” emerged in the 6th century BCE in Greek and Persian sources, while Armenians traditionally refer to themselves as *Hay* and their homeland as *Hayastan*. The republic’s ongoing cultural roots are present in the development of the modern-day capital of Yerevan and art installations like the 2008 statue of famous Armenian author William Saroyan.

The Armenian alphabet was created in 406AD by the priest and scholar St. Mesrop Mashtots, though the spoken language had been present for at least 4,000 years prior. The original alphabet contained 36 letters, with two additional letters (O, Յ) added in the 12th century. The alphabet was designed not only for communication, but also to support the translation of religious texts, which helped solidify Christian identity in Armenia after its adoption of Christianity in 301 AD.

According to Prof. Der Mugrdechian, the creation of the alphabet initiated the 5th-

century Golden Age, a period of remarkable intellectual and cultural production.

Major achievements of the era included the translation of the Bible from Hebrew and Greek. Notable historians and authors of the era were Agathangelos, Ghazar Parpetsi, Movses Khorenatsi, and Yeghishe. These works played a crucial role in preserving Armenian national memory and religious identity.

Over centuries, geographic separation and foreign influence created distinct dialects. The ancient language, referred to as classical Armenian (*krapar*), is now only used in the Armenian Apostolic church. By the 19th century, two standardized written branches emerged: modern Eastern Armenian and modern Western Armenian. Modern Eastern Armenian was developed in Eastern Armenia under the Russian Empire and is based on the dialect of Tiflis (Tbilisi). It is spoken today in the Republic of Armenia, Iran, Georgia, Russia, and newer diaspora communities.

On the other hand, Modern Western Armenian was developed in Western Armenia under Ottoman rule, and is based on the Constantinople (Istanbul) dialect. It is largely spoken in the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas.

Armenians developed manuscript illuminations that are preserved today in Armenia’s Matenadaran (manuscript library). Notable manuscripts are the King Gagik Gospels and the Mughni Gospels from the 11th century. As Armenian literature evolved, the shift from manuscript to print further transformed intellectual life.

The first Armenian printed book was published in Venice in 1512, followed by the first printed Armenian Bible in Amsterdam in 1666.

During this time, modern Armenian prose and poetry emerged in both the Eastern and Western branches of the language. In Eastern Armenian literature, figures such as Khachatur Abovian, author of *Wounds of Armenia*, the first modern Armenian novel, and Hovhannes Tumanyan, author of Akhtamar and Anoush, played pivotal roles. Western Armenian literature produced equally influential figures, including the romantic poet Bedros Tourian and the symbolist poet Daniel Varoujan, as well as the writer Krikor Zohrab; both Varoujan and Zohrab were killed during the Armenian Genocide.

His Holiness Aram I at Fresno State



Photo: ASP Archive

His Holiness and guests at the Genocide Monument.

CATHOLICOS, FROM PAGE 1

Western Prelacy, including three days in Fresno.

At the Armenian Genocide Monument, His Holiness, accompanied by clergy, prayed and spoke about the importance of recognizing the Armenian Genocide. Students, faculty, and members of the press, were present for the ceremony.

Following the prayer service, the Catholicos was hosted by the Armenian Studies Program at a luncheon attended by close to thirty invited guests. Berberian Coordinator of Armenian Studies Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, gave brief introductory remarks, highlighting the significance of His Holiness' visit to campus.

"I was fortunate enough to be able to visit Lebanon for the first and only time in 2016, and His Holiness welcomed me, and we had a chance to meet at the Bikfaya seminary to discuss His Holiness' work. I also had the opportunity to discuss the activities of the Armenian Studies Program," Prof. Der Mugrdechian said.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian greeted and introduced each of the guests who were present, including Archbishop Kegham Khatcherian, Prelate of the

Western Prelacy; Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian, Prelate of the Eastern Prelacy of the Armenian Church; Archbishop Moushegh Mardirossian; Bishop Dajad Ashekian, Chancellor of the Holy See; Very Rev. Fr. Sarkis Aprahamian, Staff Bearer; Very Rev. Fr. Hovagim Panjarjian, Dean of the Audio-Visual Dept. of the Catholicosate; Very Rev. Fr. Levon Yeghiayan, Vicar General of Jezireh; Very Rev. Fr. Ashod Khatchadourian, Pastor, Holy Trinity Armenian Church; Mr. Stephan Der Bedrosian, Co-Chair Central Executive Council of the Holy See; and Mr. Krikor Mahserejian, Co-Chair Central Executive Council Holy See.

The Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia in Fresno, Mr. Berj Apkarian was a guest at the lunch.

University guests included Dr. Xuanning Fu, Provost; Dr. Honora Chapman, Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, Dr. Sergio La Porta, Interim Dean, Kremen School of Education and Human Development; and Dr. Hagop Ohanessian from the Armenian Studies Program.

Faculty members present were Dr. Vartuhi Tonoyan, Dr. Matthew Jendian, and Dr. Allen Azizian. Representing ASO were

Grigor Terpogosyan, Anahid Valencia, Emily Sahakian, Jordan Mazmanian, Lara Habib, and Harutyun Amirkhanyan.

In his remarks, Dr. David Zakarian stressed the significance of His Holiness' interest in scholarship and in supporting the publication of academic works.

On behalf of Fresno State President Dr. Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Xuanning Fu spoke and presented His Holiness with the university's "President's Medal of Distinction."

"The Medal of Distinction is the highest honor given by the University President to those who have made a significant contribution to the community," Provost Fu said. "You are an exemplar of the mission of the university."

Prof. Der Mugrdechian presented His Holiness with an engraved crystal cube that was made especially for the fortieth anniversary of the Armenian Studies Program.

Special Words from His Holiness to the Diaspora

When it came time for His Holiness to speak, he seemed to command the room. His remarks focused primarily on the importance of Armenian education and women's equality in the church.

"University has been very close to my heart, to my mind, and to my life," His Holiness



His Holiness Aram I receiving the President's Proclamation from Provost Dr. Xuanning Fu, left, and Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian of the Armenian Studies Program.

Photo: ASP Archive

said. "I consider the university to be a source of knowledge and a source of responsibility...."

"I consider Armenian Studies, Armenology, to be a top priority in Armenia, for the Church, and for the Diaspora. In my opinion, Armenian studies are going down in different parts of the world," His Holiness continued. "And that is why you [Fresno State] have a double responsibility at this university, to encourage and strengthen Armenian Studies. I would really challenge and encourage the university authorities here to give high priority for Armenian Studies," he said.

Then, His Holiness reflected on the question of the role of women in the Church. His Holiness recently published a book that speaks about this issue.

He pointed to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, and said God made each of them equal in creation, bestowing upon them equal responsibility and equal punishment.

"Even the women are at the altar [during church services], they participate in the liturgy, except the priestly ministry," His Holiness said.

"And I don't consider that as an obstacle or a problem, but as a challenge, and the Armenian Church, sooner or later, should deal with this challenge responsibly."

In his closing remarks, His Holiness Aram I thanked the Armenian Studies Program and Fresno State for their hospitality and grand reception.

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38th Annual Banquet
 Sunday, March 22, 2026

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Osher, From Page 7

Ultimately, the Armenian alphabet and language are far more than systems of writing and speech—they are enduring pillars of Armenian identity and cultural resilience.

From their ancient Indo-European origins, to the Golden Age of translation and the emergence of modern dialects,

Armenian linguistic traditions reveal centuries of adaptation, creativity, and survival.

Prof. Der Mugrdechian concluded the presentation by teaching more phrases to the attendees, giving them a chance to see, listen, and even repeat a language that dates back thousands of years.

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