

# Community News

## Provocative Talk by Dr. Roberta Ervine On Gregory of Narek Romantic Poems

By Florence Avakian

NEW YORK – The erotic love poem, Song of Songs was the subject of a fascinating and provocative lecture by Dr. Roberta Ervine, on Tuesday evening November 3. It was sponsored by the Krikor and Clara Zohrab Information Center of the Diocese of the Armenian Church (eastern).

The Armenian scholar was introduced by the Zohrab Center Executive Director, the Very Rev. Daniel Findikyan, as “an unparalleled specialist of the Cilician period.” Ervine, he said, has studied for several years in Jerusalem with Archbishop Norayr Bogharian, late curator of manuscripts for Jerusalem’s St. James Monastery, and with the late Bishop Guregh Kapikian, Armenian Overseer of the Status Quo in the Holy Places. While there, she taught Armenian studies at both Jerusalem’s Holy Translators’ Academy, and the Hebrew University. Currently, she is professor of Armenian Studies at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, and concentrates on the history of the Armenians in Jerusalem and medieval Armenian literature and spirituality.

In her talk, Ervine presented her recent English translation from the Armenian of St. Gregory’s commentary in her new book, *The Blessing of Blessings*, and focused on how the monk from Narek urges the reader to “rethink



Dr. Roberta Ervine

how we imagine God, love, sex, and the divine intimacy into which he invites his creatures.” It was the object of intrigue and intense study by the early church fathers East and West, she said, including the great 10th century Armenian mystic, St. Gregory of Narek.

Opening her talk with the poetry of graphic love, she read, “How fair and pleasant you have become, O Lover, delectable maiden! You are stately as a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its branches. Oh, your breasts are like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your throat is like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth. . .”

“This tenth century mystic, St. Gregory of Narek, now declared a doctor of the Church by Rome, is one of the most beloved and revered figures in all of Armenian spiritual and literary history,” she noted. So what place does a piece of love-poetry, “replete with sensual and erotic imagery, have in Scripture. Surprised inquiry is an underlying principle of all Armenian interactions with Scripture.”

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Robert Aram Kaloosdian signing his book

## Armenian Assembly Features Author Robert Aram Kaloosdian at Boston Holiday Reception

ARLINGTON, Mass. – Earlier this month, the New England Regional Council of the Armenian Assembly of America hosted the Annual Holiday Reception featuring a book presentation and signing by Assembly board of trustees vice chairman and counselor Robert Aram Kaloosdian, author of *Tadem My Father’s Village, Extinguished During the 1915 Armenian Genocide* at the Armenian Cultural Foundation.

The program began with opening remarks by Assembly board member Lu Ann Ohanian who welcomed the audience to the event. Following Ohanian, Assembly board president Carolyn Mugar introduced Kaloosdian commending his tireless dedication and work on behalf of the Armenian people.

Kaloosdian’s work, which differs from other Armenian Genocide narratives, serves as a microanalysis of a specific village named *Tadem*. Kaloosdian’s non-fiction book is about real people and events that occurred during the Armenian Genocide throughout the Armenian provinces of eastern Turkey. His work comprises a collective history of eyewitnesses told with extraordinary detail in order to preserve the memory of *Tadem*. This particular village may not have been in a war zone, but its disappearance stands as a testament that religious hatred and racial prejudice can be more destructive than weapons of war.

“Originally I chose *Day Is Done*, as the title of the book, which invokes the lyrics of Taps performed at military funerals. At the very end of my writing I shared the title with my family, and my granddaughter turned to me and said ‘but grandpa, it’s not done.’ She said ‘for me you have made *Tadem* come alive and I will forever know *Tadem*.’ She had a sort of reverse analysis and that was truly inspiring for me,” Kaloosdian said during his presentation.

Assembly board co-chairman Van Krikorian concluded the presentation by acknowledging members and supporters in the audience. He thanked them for their steadfast support and for helping the Assembly advocate on behalf of the Armenian American community.

Following the presentation Kaloosdian provided and signed copies of his books for the guests.



From left, Armenian Assembly Massachusetts State Chair Herman Purutyun, Board Co-Chair Anthony Barsamian, Board President Carolyn Mugar, Board Co-Chair Van Krikorian, and Executive Director Bryan Ardouny, with Assembly vice chairman and counselor Robert Aram Kaloosdian

## Sisters, Educators Honored by AIWA Chicago Chapter

CHICAGO – On Saturday, September 26, the Chicago Affiliate of the Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA) hosted a luncheon at the historic Union League Club to celebrate the accomplishments of Prof. Ann Lousin and Prof. Leona Mirza. The two educators are sisters and lifetime members of AIWA. They have been leaders in their respective professional fields as well as in the Armenian community for many years.

Lousin teaches commercial law and Illinois constitutional law at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. She has served on the staff of the Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, including two years as Parliamentarian of the House. She is a founding member of the Armenian Bar Association and has served it in several capacities, including three years as Chair from 1995 to 1998. Mirza is a professor of mathematics education at North Park University. For several years, she was also the director of the Institute for International and Cultural Studies at the University. Mirza served as the president of the Chicago Chapter of The Armenian General Benevolent Union from 2006 to 2009.

One hundred and fifty people were in attendance to honor the two. Before the commencement of the program, guests enjoyed several musical selections by professional oud player Mark Gavoor. Following welcoming remarks from AIWA Chicago President Greta Doumanian-Harley, Samuel Der-Yeghiayan, a federal judge of the US District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, reflected on the history of the Armenian community and commended the honorees for their achievements. Shortly afterward, Lousin and Mirza each took the stage and spoke fondly about growing up in an Armenian-American family in post-World War II Chicago. They praised their parents’ emphasis on education, which led each of them to pursue graduate studies and subsequently, careers in academia. Before the conclusion of the program, Chicago Affiliate Founder and Advisor Sonya Doumanian presented the honorees with ceramic artwork made by Armenian artisans in Jerusalem.

The luncheon was a tremendous success for the Chicago Affiliate. The luncheon committee members included Greta Doumanian-Harley and Houry Gueyikian (co-chairs), Svetlana Arakelyan, Sonya Doumanian, Shaghig Danielle Galian, Gloria Hachikian, Samantha Kyrkostas, Christina Markarian, Ruzanna Tantushyan, Mariam Tatosian, and Tamar Wasoian. Through its efforts, the committee raised \$5,500 for the Women’s Support Center in Yerevan, Armenia.



From left, Mariam Tatosian, Sonya Doumanian, Houry Gueyikian, Prof. Ann Lousin, Professor Leona Mirza, Greta Doumanian-Harley, Christina Markarian, Gloria Hachikian and Shaghig Danielle Galian