Intermediate Armenian Course Opens Doors to New Worlds from the Comfort of Home

Christine Pambukyan
STAFF WRITER

“Learning Armenian can open up a whole new world for students. I enjoy the process of interacting with students in teaching and in sharing their success as they learn the language,” said Professor Barlow Der Mugrdechian, Berberian Coordinator of the Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State. Every Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30PM to 4:45PM, students in the Armenian 2A Intermediate Armenian course meet to develop their Armenian speaking, reading, and writing skills during the Spring 2021 semester. Due to Professor Der Mugrdechian’s inclusive and practical approach, many find the course exciting.

Armenian-American Sketches Awarded Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies

The late Aris Sevag, the main translator of the book.

Dr. Joseph Bohigian discussed his recent doctoral composition, “The Water Has Found Its Crack.”

Revolutionaries: Armenians and the Connected Revolutions in Russia, Iran, and Ottoman Worlds (University of California Press) and Dr. Lou Ann Matossian, Dr. Vartan Matiossian, and the late Aris Sevag for the translation of Bedros Keljik’s Armenian-American Sketches (The Armenian Studies Series of the Press at California State University, Fresno). The 2020 Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize winning volume, “The Water Has Found Its Crack.” This story embodies the need for practical approaches to help those in need.
that in exposing non-Armenians to Armenian Studies you see this enrichment of the Valley life. You see appreciation of this important part of our community as well and then at the same time you also forge strong connections with each other,” added Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval.

In addition, Interim President Sandoval-Jiménez has strengthened ties with the Armenian culture by visiting Armenia in 2019. “It was a trip of discovery really,” Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval stated. “I learned a lot. I remember being at the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan and just seeing and feel the history and the pain and suffering, and at the same time the resilience and the hope of the people.”

The Interim President’s goals for Fresno State in the near future include re-populating the campus, increasing four-year graduation rates, building Fresno State-local industry partnerships, and to elevate Fresno State’s University brand and to showcase how proud we are of our premiere University. Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval’s advice for students at Fresno State this year is to “try to see the forest” because “the pandemic has forced us to look at the tree right in front of you” and it will eventually be over. “Students need to know how to bounce back and to seek out help from the many services available for students,” affirmed Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval. “No one should feel that they are alone.”

Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval is looking forward to eventually having students back onto campus. “This pandemic has really prevented us from getting together and from celebrating who we are as a community,” said Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval. “A university is more than a job. I see it as a mission more than a job.”

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The Artsakh War of 2020 and Armenia Subject of a Conversation with Political Analyst Eric Hacopian

Dr. Gürsel Discusses Research on Ottoman Armenian Emigrants Through “Portraits of Unbelonging”

CARINA TOKATIAN STAFF WRITER

The French philosopher Roland Barthes once wrote, “When we define the photograph as motionless images, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not emerge, do not leave: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies.”

Ironically, as Dr. Zeynep Devrim Gürsel highlights, the Ottoman Empire’s use of photographs as an instrument of the permanent emigration of many Armenians presents a paradox to Barthes’ statement; migration is rendered in the stillness of the photograph.

On the evening of Thursday, February 25, the Armenian Studies Program sponsored a virtual lecture presented on Zoom and YouTube by media anthropologist Dr. Zeynep Devrim Gürsel. The topic of her lecture was “Portraits of Unbelonging: Photography, the Ottoman State and Armenian Emigration.”

Dr. Gürsel is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers University. She has previously authored Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the Age of Digital Circulation and directed the 2009 documentary Coffee Futures.

It was after a frustrating research day that Dr. Gürsel initially took interest in photographs of Armenian families who emigrated from the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecit II. After seeing a couple of these portraits, she recalled, “I just was mesmerized by the photographs, and I couldn’t stop thinking about them.”

She wondered who the photograph belonged to or who might appreciate them. “I felt compelled to bring them into the present day and take them out of the state archives in Istanbul and into Armenian communities,” she stated. Knowing little about Armenian history at the time, she credited Alice Kolostrosian, the mother of a dear friend, for helping her initiate the project. “Alice was extremely supportive and within hours she had made key introductions to several people,” she recalled. She added that “her living room has become my home base in Armenia, and she remains a very important touchstone every step of the way in this project.”

At the time when the photographs were taken under the Sultan’s leadership, there was much political turmoil in the Ottoman Empire. Greece and Bulgaria had become independent nations and the influx of Muslims from the Caucasus and the Balkans affected the political landscape of the region. “It was a time when individuals were choosing from being considered and considering themselves as subjects to becoming citizens,” Dr. Gürsel noted. She added that this especially served as an intriguing moment to examine photography “since even when they depict types or groups, photographs always index individuals.”

Over all, Dr. Gürsel managed to collect 109 photos from Ottoman State archives in Istanbul. These came from various files such as the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Affairs folders. Other photos were stand-alone archives. Each one depicts a variety of individuals—men, women, family elders, children, infants, urban elites, peasants, and the like. The flip side of each photograph contains individual’s names, ages, always the fathers’ names, and the home villages of the pictured. Some even noted ties the photograph’s individuals had to those who had migrated before them.

Dr. Gürsel emphasized the fact that these are “certainly not portrait portraits to commemorate a moment of togetherness.” Rather they served as “a form of exclusion.” The Armenians who posed for these pictures had renounced their Ottoman nationality and promised to never return to the Ottoman Empire.

As she noted, “the operative temporality in these photographs is not so much about what has been, but what must never be again.” Displaying a photograph taken in Bitlis, Dr. Gürsel explained how the use of the phrase, “portrait of unbelonging” is meant to convey that the photo “captures the process of making this family into immigrants and unmaking them as Ottoman nationals.”

From 1896 to 1908, these photos were required of Armenians wishing to leave the Ottoman Empire. “Their use as evidence of unbelonging” is meant to show that the photo “captures the process of making this family into immigrants and unmaking them as Ottoman nationals.”

In total, about 5,000 individuals emigrated to America under this process, submitting more than 1,500 portraits to Constantinople.

The regulations made no distinction between the various Armenians who were to go through this process whether they were Apostolic, Catholic, or Protestant. Even Assyrians who were leaving in order to marry Armenians already in America had to undergo this process of renouncing their nationality if they desired to leave. However, the regulations applied only to Armenians as Dr. Gürsel stated that Lebanese Christians were required to do the exact opposite. They were to pledge to keep their Ottoman nationality in order to travel.

Equating the photographs...
Prof. James Russell Discusses His New Book on the Western Armenian Poet Misak Medzarents

Dr. James Russell

CARINA TOKATIAN
STAFF WRITER

“Small peoples have a right to survive, with our languages, our heritage, and our poetry, too: we contribute our verse to the great play of human life on God’s earth,” Dr. James Russell quoted


Prof. Russell’s research primarily focuses on Ancient Near Eastern, Iranian, and Armenian studies. When asked what piqued his interest in this field, Prof. Russell traced his curiosity to the year 1969 when he visited Yerevan in the course of a summer high school study trip in the Soviet Union. It was at that time that he became fascinated with Armenian literature, alphabet, manuscripts, and food of the Armenian people.

“It was a romantic obsession that led to my becoming a student of ancient and modern Armenian literature and teaching that involved the other cultures of the region with which Armenians interacted over millennia, principally Iran,” recalled Prof. Russell.

Since then, Prof. Russell has kept close attention to the Armenian literature of the Classical, medieval, and modern periods, from Pre-Christian mythology and folk epics such as David of Sasan to the Soviet Armenian poet Yeghishe Charents. However, when he learned that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had classified the Western Armenian language as endangered, Prof. Russell felt a moral obligation to devote greater attention to Western Armenian literature. He produced the first translation and commentary, in any language, of Bedros Tourian’s complete lyric poems and other works in his book *Bosphorus Nights*.

It was because of a wedging that Prof. Russell was first introduced to the Western Armenian bard, Misak Medzarents.

Misak Medzarents: the first translator of Medzarents’ poems for the ceremony. “It is not, in my opinion, one of Medzarents’ best poems, but it is well crafted and got me hooked, and soon after, I found the really good stuff,” he acknowledged. Consequently, this began Prof. Russell’s years-long labor towards the translation of all of Medzarents’ poetry.

“Misak Medzarents was born on January 18, 1886 in the village of Pingiar near Akin in the Armenian highlands. Prof. Russell explained that the young poet soon joined ‘Medzarents, like many Armenians, “moved because of the circumstances of security and the necessity of a livelihood to the great cosmopolitan capital, Constantinople.’ In Constantinople, Medzarents became acquainted with Armenian historical and religious writing, including texts in Classical (Armenian). He also became actively engaged with the Armenian community and political life of Armenians there during his teenage years. Although his birth name was Misak Medzadian, the poet chose the names ‘Medzarents’ and ‘Dzidzian’ (which means ‘Rainbow’) as pen names.

“The core of his work is a happy childhood full of mystical, supernatural feelings: ‘The sunlis is so beautiful that Medzarents is cheerful, even luminous,’ remarked Prof. Russell. In contrast to other poets, Medzarents’ work highlighted Medzarents’ warm and friendly voice. “There is always the image of the sun breaking through the clouds and the raindrops turning to crystal,” he said admiringly.

A notable characteristic that distinguishes Medzarents’ writing is the rich and broad vocabulary he employs throughout his works. “The poet uses the same locales and the same song of Valah, of the revels of King Arshak II in the fourth century AD, of medieval hymns called sharanaks, of his mother’s lullabies and the songs of plowmen, and of the folklore of his native Village Pingiar,” said Prof. Russell. Embedding themes from all those sources, he equated Medzarents’ writing to a “polyphonic symphony heard as one travels in a time machine.”

Just like his language, the breadth of Medzarents’ content is extensive. Prof. Russell noted that Medzarents “writes about sunrise, village fields, hearing a song, home, his mother’s prayers, spirits who live in the water, reveries when he’s sitting alone at night dreaming of feasts and dances and third generation sins, also hunger, poverty, cruelty, the Armenians’ struggle for freedom, and, of course, revolution.”

“Towards the end of his life, however, Medzarents adopted a ‘new, sharper, bleaker style’ reminding Prof. Russell of the works of such as the Russian bard Vladimir Mayakovsky or the young Charents.”

Prof. Russell noted that Medzarents’ “poems were published in his lifetime and then follows with a chronological arrangement of his works. Arranging the poems in the same order as the Critical Armenian poems and Medzarents’s works. Arranging the poems in the same order as the Critical Armenian poet and Medzarents’s work are a ‘new, sharper, bleaker style’ that reminded Prof. Russell of writers such as Vladimir Mayakovsky or the young Charents.

“Prof. Russell’s annotations and translations of Medzarents’ work into the context of world poetry,” Prof. Der Mugrdechian noted. “Armenian poetry is part of the world poetry, Medzarents is a noteworthy poet, whose work is now accessible to a larger audience.”

“The finish the book on Medzarents, Prof. Russell headed to Jerusalem on a sabbatical in order to discover a research department that overlooked the village of Ein Kerem, where his relatives live, to complete the book. Prof. Russell explained that Medzarents really could come to be, only in a part of the world near and like his own, the Middle East,” stated Prof. Russell. But it was not only the climate and atmosphere of Jerusalem that Prof. Russell found appealing. He felt he was helping to resurrect a poet who needed to be known to the world. He had edited, translated, and published the entire works of Medzarents from a cache of manuscripts that Charents buried before his arrest in 1937 by the Soviet secret police.

Years later, Prof. Russell discovered that one of his own and the other discovery was published in Yerevan in 1983. The book, titled *Towards the End of His Life*, was an unforgettable experience for Prof. Russell. “It was always a delight to learn more about Armenian architecture, culture, and history, it was nice to see many of the things I had studied in person. The trip was the perfect capstone experience for my Armenian Studies studies.”

“Did you value most from your experiences in the Armenian Studies Program?” Prof. Russell inquired. “It was the most valuable part of the Program. The Armenian Studies Program at Fresno State does an exceptional job at bringing together people of all backgrounds to celebrate Armenian history and culture. As a result, I decided to pursue the Minor!”

Prof. Russell believed that “each reader has no specific agenda. Instead, has no specific agenda. Instead, the book may inspire readers to consider the book’s themes.”

When asked what he would say to the guest speakers and lecturers! It was always a delight to learn more about Armenian and Armenians’ history from different points of view. Not only were these events interesting, but they enriched my experience with the Minor.

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

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Dr. Shemmassian Present His New Book

The Armenians of Musa Dagh for Fresno State

Dr. Shemmassian, director of the Armenian Studies Program at the California State University, Northridge, while discussing his newest publication, The Armenians of Musa Dagh: From Obscurity to Genocide Resistance and Fame 1840-1915, began with an overview of the connections and celebrations of Armenian historians. He also gave general background about Musa Dagh through conversations between the adults in his family. When he wrote his master’s thesis about the connection between the homeland and the Armenians in Lebanon and Syria, he also began to collect information about Musa Dagh. Dr. Shemmassian wrote in his book, The Armenians of Musa Dagh, that the region “...was a general background of Musa Dagh. It includes the origins of the name ‘Musa Dagh,’ the names and origins of the villages, statistics about the population and weather of the regions, geographical descriptions, and information about the neighbors of the region.”

Dr. Shemmassian’s father is from immigration to the United States; and heavy taxation at their home, Dr. Shemmassian began with an overview of his connections to Musa Dagh and his research. Because he was born and raised in Lebanon, he only knew about Musa Dagh through the records of the region made up of six Armenian villages.

On Saturday, February 6, 2021, Dr. Shemmassian discussed his new book, The Armenians of Musa Dagh, through a virtual presentation on Zoom. In his discussion, Dr. Shemmassian described his experiences writing the book, what he learned, and the contents within the five hundred and fifty-five pages. The Armenians of Musa Dagh was published as volume 11 in the Armenians Series of The Press at California State University, Fresno. Dr. Shemmassian began with an overview of his connections to Musa Dagh and his research. Because he was born and raised in Lebanon, he only knew about Musa Dagh through the records of the region made up of six Armenian villages.

In 1891, and how they gave rise to disputes between the three denominations, confessional disagreements, and education in the region. Then, the fourth chapter discusses the strides made in塞科·巴格纳里亚, Catholic, and Protestant Armenians of Musa Dagh. All of the schools in the region were elementary schools, so scholars left for higher education to Europe, central Turkey, and Lebanon.

The fifth chapter describes the revolution movement in Musa Dagh through the records of the French Armenia, Antioch representatives the A.R.F. Federation, and the Hunchak Party. The sixth chapter describes the massacres of Musa Dagh that occurred around the time of the Adana Massacres in the late 19th century. They were able to resist, but those working for the Ottoman Turkish landlords were massacred. The chapter also mentions the relief movement due to famine, disease, and due to disputes between the three denominations, confessional disagreements, and education in the region. Then, the fourth chapter discusses the strides made in塞科·巴格纳里亚, Catholic, and Protestant Armenians of Musa Dagh. All of the schools in the region were elementary schools, so scholars left for higher education to Europe, central Turkey, and Lebanon.

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Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) Holds Its 46th Annual Membership Meeting January 16

Staff Report

On January 16, 2021, the Society for Armenian Studies (SAS) held its 46th Annual Membership Meeting on Zoom. Most attendees were present, including the Executive Council, were present at the meeting, which was open to all members of SAS.

The SAS President Dr. Bedross Der Matossian began the meeting by reviewing some of SAS accomplishments. He noted that the SAS Podcast interviewed over 45 guests for its first season, and is available on platforms like Apple Podcast, Spotify, and Google Play. He highlighted the SAS Research and Travel Grants program, which has so far supported 15 graduate students, including the first two recipients of the new SAS Grant on Race. As part of the newly launched Society for Armenian Studies Publication Series, Der Matossian presented the second volume on The First Republic of Armenia (1918-1920) on Its Centenary: Politics, Gender, and Diplomacy, (2020) published by the Press at California State University, Fresno.

One of the notable achievements of SAS was that the prestigious publishing house Brill is now publishing the Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies (JSAS). Dr. Tamar M. Boyadjian was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the new JSAS, and has been working to expand the scope of the Journal to show the depth and breadth of Armenian Studies as an interdisciplinary field. Entries for the Society for Armenian Studies (e-SAS), the online platform for shorter scholarly pieces on topics related to Armenian Studies, continues to publish pieces by both established and junior scholars. In light of the pandemic, the SAS also hosted and co-hosted numerous Zoom lectures, conferences, and symposia by concentrating on different aspects of Armenian Studies.

After reviewing the accomplishments to this point, Dr. Der Matossian mapped out the “Three-Year Strategic Plan of the SAS” which will concentrate on three areas: 1) strengthening SAS ties with educational institutions in Armenia and Artsakh; 2) mentoring SAS graduate students; and 3) disseminating knowledge about Armenian Studies throughout the world.

In order to strengthen ties with Armenia and Artsakh, Der Matossian began by concentrating on educational institutions in Armenia and Artsakh; concentrate on documenting and promoting the cultural heritage of Artsakh; and to encourage students from Armenia to become members of SAS and to benefit from its scholarship as well as expertise. This will be accomplished by creating a program to sponsor 5 SAS students for $10 per year. In its second area of mentorship for graduate students, SAS will organize workshops for graduate students; discuss alternative paths to careers; and provide a platform for graduate students and junior faculty members (mostly from Armenia) to present their work and receive critical feedback. For the last area regarding dissemination of knowledge about the field, SAS decided to continue with its Podcast Series, Zoom Lecture Series, E-SAS, and JSAS.

After Der Matossian’s presentation, SAS Treasurer Prof. Barlow Der Mugrdechian, the SAS Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Tamar M. Boyadjian; and the Editor of e-SAS, Dr. Dzovinar Denderian provided their reports, following which the floor was opened to questions from the larger membership community.

A productive conversation followed about topics including the sponsorship of panels at major conferences, membership of scholars in Armenia, and work related to the preservation of cultural heritage in Artsakh.

The SAS, founded in 1974, is the international professional association representing scholars and teachers in the field of Armenian Studies.

The aim of the SAS is to promote the study of Armenian culture and society, including history, language, literature, and social, political, and economic questions.

If you are interested in contributing to a three-year strategic plan of SAS please contact Prof. Bedross Der Matossian at bdermatosian26@ unl.edu.

ARMEINIAN CLASS,

**First Page 1**

As a在外国人 in general, “I enjoy this class because it is very practical and has a nice balance of grammar, reading, writing, and listening.” says one student. “I have always wanted to be able to converse with a fellow Armenian as it is what I really like because it makes me feel like I can apply what have learned in class.”

Some enjoy the conversations they experience in class. “I appreciate the time we spend discussing something specific because it gives me a wonderful challenge to try to listen to a conversation, repeat what I heard, and to attempt to understand it in my head,” explained Angela Soghomian, a sophomore majoring in chemistry and Minoring in Armenian.

Others enjoy reading stories. For instance, when asked what was the hardest part of the course is, Olivia Soghomian, a math major, replied “The readings.” Although she enjoyed reading about complex stories, the act of translation itself is what she really likes. “It is challenging because it makes me think about how to apply what we’ve learned in class.”

The eleven students come to class with many different backgrounds in Armenian. During his thirty-six years of teaching, “there has always been a good mix of students in the language course,” said Professor Der Mugrdechian. “We have many non-Armenians who are interested in learning the language for a variety of reasons.”

For example, some take the course to improve their speaking skills. “I took Armenian courses to improve my speaking abilities,” says an arménien, who is a majoring in Armenian, as well as read and write; and I decided to take 2A to improve my speaking,” said Kara Studer, a history major and Minoring in Armenian Studies.

Others wish to improve their reading and writing abilities. “I have always wanted to be able to speak the Armenian language better and to sharpen my reading and writing skills,” said Brad, a student majoring in History and Minoring in Armenian Studies.

When asked if there were any challenges that were present during the class, they were asked about the following aspects of the course: “It has been challenging to teach the language course online. It slows the process of conversation between students and students and how to put and interact as much as a face-to-face class. The advantage is you can record a class or parts of classes so students can go back and review,” explained Prof. Der Mugrdechian.

Some students find comfort in taking an online class. “Through taking this class online, I feel more comfortable with speaking and understanding Armenian; however, I do miss the environment of an in-person Armenian language class,” said anotherarménien.

Others hope for in-person courses to begin soon. “I wish the class was in-person. I feel like we would learn more. It is a challenging course but it’s not hard for me because I enjoy every minute of it,” concluded Dervin Vartanian, a Senior majoring in business management and Minoring in Armenian Studies.

Most of the students in the course had taken Professor Der Mugrdechian’s Armenian 1A and 1B courses prior to the pandemic and were getting to learn more Armenian with their friends.

“My favorite part about this class is that I am taking it with people that I have met through the Armenian Studies Program and that have become my close friends.”

**See ARMENIAN CLASS PAGE 7**
Thank You Annual Fund Donors

March 2021

Dear Dr. Bohigian,

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for your dedication to Armenian Studies and your commitment to preserving and promoting Armenian culture and identity. Your work has been a source of inspiration and a guiding light for many students and scholars alike.

As a student of Armenian Studies, I have benefited greatly from the courses you have taught, and I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from you. Your classes have challenged me to think critically about the complexities of Armenian history and culture, and I have gained a deeper appreciation for the resilience and determination of the Armenian people.

I am particularly impressed by your scholarship and your ability to engage with current events and issues affecting the Armenian community. Your research and publications have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Armenian experience, and I admire your commitment to disseminating knowledge about the Armenian Genocide.

Your efforts have not gone unnoticed, and I am honored to be a part of the Armenian Studies community. I look forward to continuing to learn from you and to contribute to the important work you do.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
Kılıçdağı explained, “it was not that they wanted them to leave; it was that they did not want them to return publicized.” Therefore, the police and even many successful Armenian photographers captured these photos and required them at ports if Armenians were to board any ships. “The passports issued to these Ottoman Armenians are unique in that they permit travel but prohibit return,” she mentioned.

In the second half of her lecture, Dr. Kılıçdağı stated how she sought to capture the “double-sided history of migration.” Comparing her project to the photographs, she explained how the project faces “two directions: the Ottoman past in which the photograph was produced and circulated and an American future in which the lives of the subjects in the photographs unfolded.” With this in mind, she shared how the project “meant taking copies of the photographs out of the archive and into the world, out of Ottoman bureaucracy and into the life experiences of migrants and their families.”

In total, Dr. Kılıçdağı managed to collect migration information for 62 families by searching through ship manifests, tickets, arrivals on Ellis Island, etc. Thanks to the tedious Ottoman interception of documents, she was also able trace letters of Armenian-American immigrants corresponding with other Armenians in the Ottoman Empire such as Cercis Gürjian who humorously describes Fresno in a letter: “this place has become Turkey.” In addition to her collection of documents, Dr. Kılıçdağı has been afforded the opportunity to meet with living descendants of fourteen families whom she has traced. One such family is Hosrof Kevorkian’s, who moved to Fresno and established the Valley Fruit Co. As Dr. Kılıçdağı stated in her conclusion, “while the Ottoman State’s instrumental view of these photographs anticipated a very particular future intended to be prevented by these very portraits, I believe the trajectory of these photographs and that of the subjects within them is more radically open.”

Dr. Kılıçdağı wanted his students to learn two main things from the course: to have a good understanding of the Genocide occurred, and to fully understand the Armenian and Genocide. The class ended with the students considering how to incorporate both long term and short-term events to get a good perspective about ethno-religious conflicts, democratization, and conflicts, democratization, and tensions of transition from empires to nation states,” said Dr. Kılıçdağı.

“I hope that students adopted a perspective about the Genocide occurred, and to fully understand the role of Armenians living there. There is a great fear that Armenians would revolt. Therefore, the police and even many successful Armenian photographers captured these photos and required them at ports if Armenians were to board any ships. “The passports issued to these Ottoman Armenians are unique in that they permit travel but prohibit return,” she mentioned.

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