

# Armenian Jewellers Foundation

Geneva, Switzerland

Advancing the Heritage of Armenians in Jewellery

Geneva, May 2015



## AJF & St. Petersburg's Museum of Ethnography Inaugurate TREASURES OF WESTERN ARMENIA Catalogue & Exhibit

After almost a century, Alexander Miller's collection of artifacts from Western Armenia from 1916 was exhibited and presented as an album-catalogue to the public in his hometown Saint Petersburg during an official ceremony held at the Museum of Ethnography on April 27, 2015.

High-level officials from both countries attended the event, as well as a host of AJF patrons, academics, and special invitees. Among them was Ms. Olga Kazanskaya, the Vice Governor of the Saint Petersburg Region and other officials and legislators. From Armenia, Mr. Vigen Sargsyan, the Chief of Staff of Armenia's President and Chief Coordinator of Events Dedicated to the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide headed the delegation. AJF was represented by Chairman Mr. Pierre Akkelian, Trustee and President of the Armenian Jewellers Association Mr. Gagik Gevorgyan, Regional Director Ms. Aza Babayan and Gold Patron Mr. Karen Mkrtchyan, who is also the head of the local Armenian community, which co-organized the events together with AJF and the Museum. This initiative was duly covered by the media in [Saint Petersburg](#) and [Yerevan](#).

According to Mr. Vigen Sargsyan: "Cultural revival was an important aspect for the survival of the Armenian people after the Genocide. This became possible thanks to those who, during the tumultuous years, were able to collect and safeguard exactly what the perpetrators were trying to deprive Armenians from. Professor Miller, whom we find at the origins of this collection, played a serious role in maintaining that cultural heritage that the crime of Genocide aimed to eliminate."

The Treasures of Western Armenia presents, for the first time, the collection that Professor Miller and his fellow ethnographers at the Russian Museum of Ethnography in St. Petersburg recovered from Western Armenia. The Imperial Academy's Expedition of 1916 intended to salvage a piece of history in view of the catastrophe that was befalling the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. The Expedition's team meticulously documented the daily lives of ordinary Armenians, especially in the region of Van, through their material culture. This collection, which was literally stored away for almost 100 years, now affords us a kaleidoscopic view of the cultural heritage of the indigenous people of Western Armenia, who developed the crafts of their civilization over several millennia.

This first AJF academic publication is already earning high praise from the academic community. According to historian and genocide scholar George N. Shirinian, who is also the Executive Director of the Zoryan Institute and the International Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies: "There is very little information available in English on the distinctive and rich material culture of Western Armenia. This beautifully illustrated book provides a rare glimpse into the costume, jewellery and artifacts of Armenian daily life and provides a link to the lost Armenian cultural heritage, destroyed by the genocide of 1915."

The opening ceremonies in Saint Petersburg were the culmination of two years of meticulous collaboration between AJF's dedicated team of publishers and the Museum's curators. The initiative is a special tribute to the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on behalf of the worldwide Armenian jewellery community. It was made possible through the generous donations of AJF's Heritage Society patrons.

Copies of the catalogue will be available in select cities soon.

Visit AJF's Facebook page for the following stories



- 1) Media Coverage of the Treasures of Western Armenia Inauguration Event: Praise from the Academic Community.
- 2) Treasures of Western Armenia: AJF's Chairman's Speech during the Inauguration Ceremony, St. Petersburg, April 27, 2015.
- 3) Treasures of Western Armenia Published: Inauguration of the Catalogue & Exhibit Scheduled for April 27, 2015, in Saint Petersburg.
- 4) Treasures of Western Armenia Catalogue and Exhibit Unveiled: Invitation to the Inauguration Event to be Held in St. Petersburg on April 27, 2015.
- 5) Photo Reportage: Photos from the Printing Press.



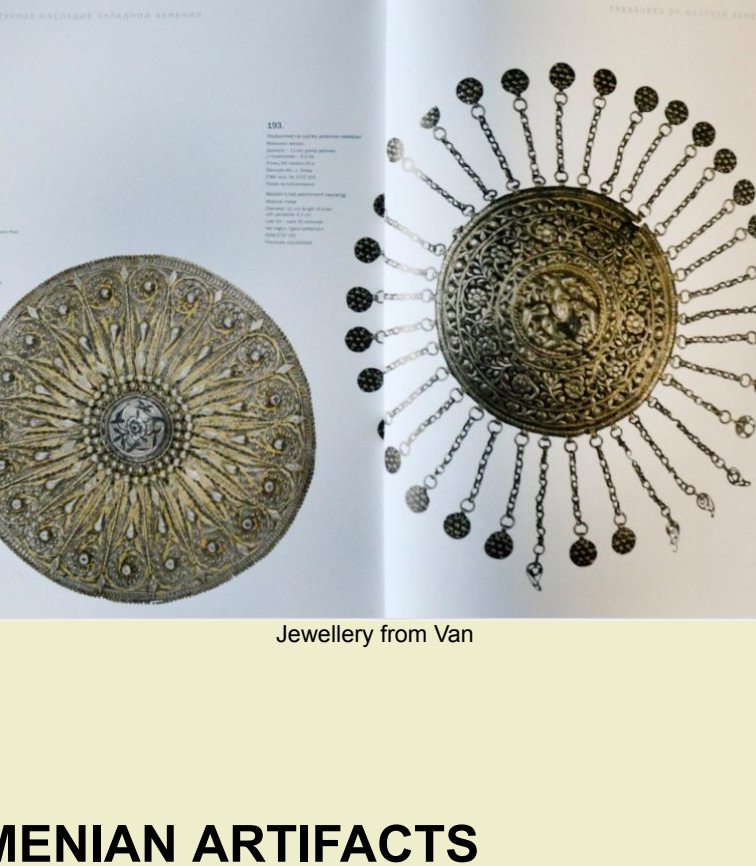
Pierre Akkelian, Museum Curator Lusine Ghasyan, Aza Babayan, Gagik Gevorgyan



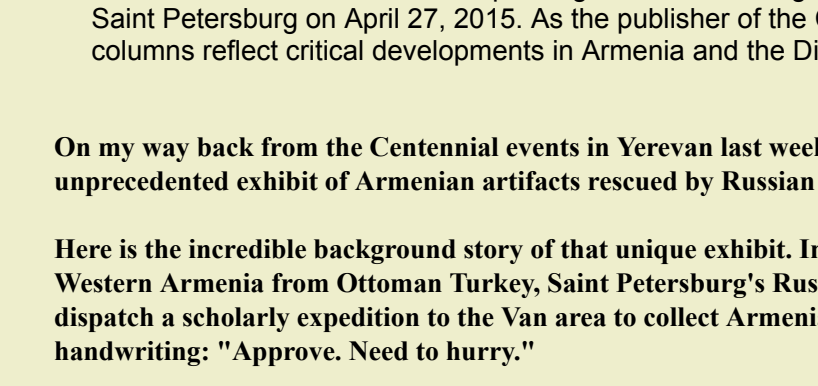
Pierre Akkelian, Aza Babayan, Gagik Gevorgyan



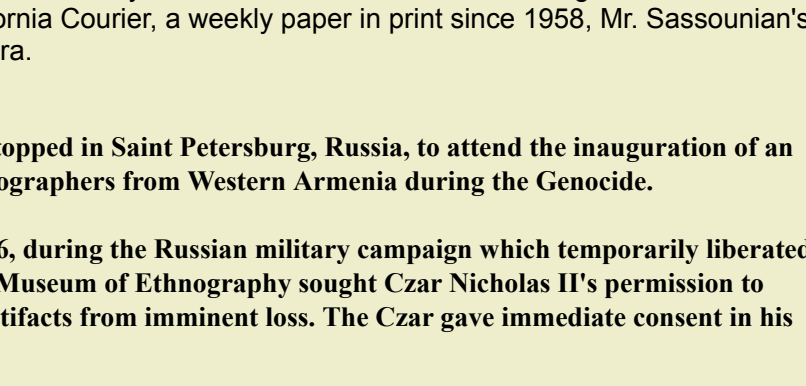
Miller Artifacts on Exhibit at Museum of Ethnography



Treasures of Western Armenia Catalogue



Pierre Akkelian, Karen Mkrtchyan



Jewellery from Van

## MUSEUM EXHIBITS ARMENIAN ARTIFACTS A CENTURY AFTER RESCUE BY RUSSIANS

The following article by renowned Diasporan columnist Harut Sassounian appeared in the recent issue of the California Courier. Mr. Sassounian was one of the special guests at the inauguration ceremony of the Treasures of Armenia catalogue and exhibit in Saint Petersburg on April 27, 2015. As the publisher of the California Courier, a weekly paper in print since 1958, Mr. Sassounian's columns reflect critical developments in Armenia and the Diaspora.

On my way back from the Centennial events in Yerevan last week, I stopped in Saint Petersburg, Russia, to attend the inauguration of an unprecedented exhibit of Armenian artifacts rescued by Russian ethnographers from Western Armenia during the Genocide.

Here is the incredible background story of that unique exhibit. In 1916, during the Russian military campaign which temporarily liberated Western Armenia from Ottoman Turkey, Saint Petersburg's Russian Museum of Ethnography sought Czar Nicholas II's permission to dispatch a scholarly expedition to the Van area to collect Armenian artifacts from imminent loss. The Czar gave immediate consent in his handwriting: "Approve. Need to hurry."

A small team of ethnographers led by Alexander Miller arrived in Van on June 10, 1916, after a lengthy and perilous journey. During their two-week stay, they managed to purchase from local inhabitants a total of 513 objects: 396 Armenian, 110 Assyrian, 5 Kurdish, and 2 Turkish. The artifacts included traditional Armenian costumes, jewelry, and carpets from the City of Van, the towns of Alar, Bitlis, Moks, Mush, Shatak, and neighboring villages. During their visit, the scholars took 60 photographs of natural landscapes, historical monuments, buildings, and some residents. All of these materials were hauled back to Saint Petersburg under the protection of the Russian military.

Surprisingly, these painstakingly-collected cultural objects remained in the Russian museum's basement for 100 years and were never displayed! No one seemed to remember their existence, until two years ago, when Armenia's Consul General Vardan Hakopyan in Saint Petersburg learned about these artifacts and informed the authorities in Armenia, local community leaders, and the Armenian Jewelry Association.

After extensive joint efforts between the Armenian Jewellers Foundation and the Russian Museum of Ethnography, the items that were kept in storage for a century were finally put on display in Saint Petersburg last week. The Jewellers Foundation and the Russian Museum published an impressive catalog titled, "Treasures of Western Armenia," which showcased the artifacts collected from the region of Van in 1916, before its capture and genocidal destruction by Ottoman Turkish forces.

The exhibit was officially opened on April 27, 2015, at the Russian Museum of Ethnography. It was attended by Vigen Sargsyan, the Armenian President's Chief of Staff, Olga Kazanskaya, Vice Governor of Saint Petersburg, Vladimir Grusman, Director of Russian Museum of Ethnography, Pierre Akkelian, Chairman of Armenian Jewellers Foundation, Gagik Gevorgyan, President of Armenian Jewelry Association, and Karen Mkrtchyan, the Armenian community leader of Saint Petersburg.

Not surprisingly, after it became known that the Museum of Ethnography had in its possession valuable artifacts from the Van region, the Consulate of Turkey in Saint Petersburg contacted the Museum claiming that these items are the property of the Turkish Republic and sought their return. The Museum's leadership rejected the Turkish request as the objects were purchased from their owners in 1916.

It is ironic that Turkish diplomats had the audacity to request these Armenian artifacts, after having killed their owners, burned their homes, and stolen their possessions! One would hope that the Turkish government would be foolish enough to go ahead and file a lawsuit against the Russian Museum, trying to claim these items. Such a lawsuit would further publicize Turkish responsibility for the Armenian Genocide, the looting of Armenian cultural objects, and occupation of their ancestral homeland!

One hundred years later, another expedition should be dispatched to Turkish museums and libraries to locate and recover all Armenian artifacts, manuscripts and other valuable items plundered during the Genocide. Lawsuits should be filed against all Turkish institutions holding such Armenian materials. If local Turkish courts reject the demand, Armenians should then appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in order to recover these long lost and precious fragments of Armenian cultural heritage. Such a legal effort would be yet another means of seeking restitution for the massive Genocide-era losses suffered by Armenians a century ago!

The Russian Museum's remarkable exhibit should go on tour to Armenian communities around the world: Athens, Beirut, Berlin, Boston, Buenos Aires, London, Los Angeles, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Paris, Tehran, Toronto, San Francisco, San Paulo, Sydney, Yerevan and many other cities. Let the world see a small sampling of the vast quantities of valuable cultural artifacts that the Armenian nation lost during the Genocide in addition to the 1.5 million human souls.



Zorab Istamboulian, Gagik Gevorgyan, Pierre Akkelian, Armine Istamboulian, Harut Sassounian



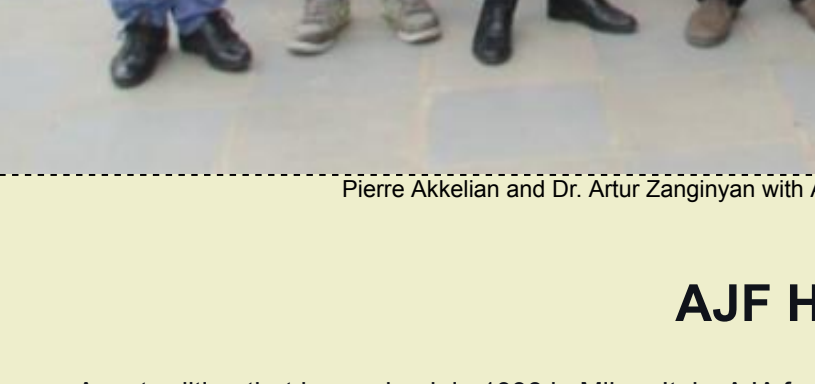
Museum of Ethnography, 1916

## AJF AT THE APRIL 24TH GENOCIDE CENTENNIAL EVENTS IN ARMENIA

As Armenians worldwide marked the 100th anniversary of the Genocide around the world, AJF attended commemoration services to mark the Centennial in Armenia's capital, Yerevan. The ceremonies were attended by world leaders such as France's Francois Holland, Russia's Vladimir Putin, as well as Armenia's top leadership and church heads. AJF was formally represented through its Chairman Pierre Akkelian, Trustee and President of the Armenian Jewellers Association Mr. Gagik Gevorgyan and Regional Director Aza Babayan. A number of AJF patrons also participated in the events.

The first copies of the Treasures of Western Armenia publication, which was entirely produced in Armenia, was released on April 24 and distributed to key visiting VIPs. Official delegations, such as the Saint Petersburg Government's representatives, who continued their visits to Yerevan into the month of May, were given copies of the AJF publication.

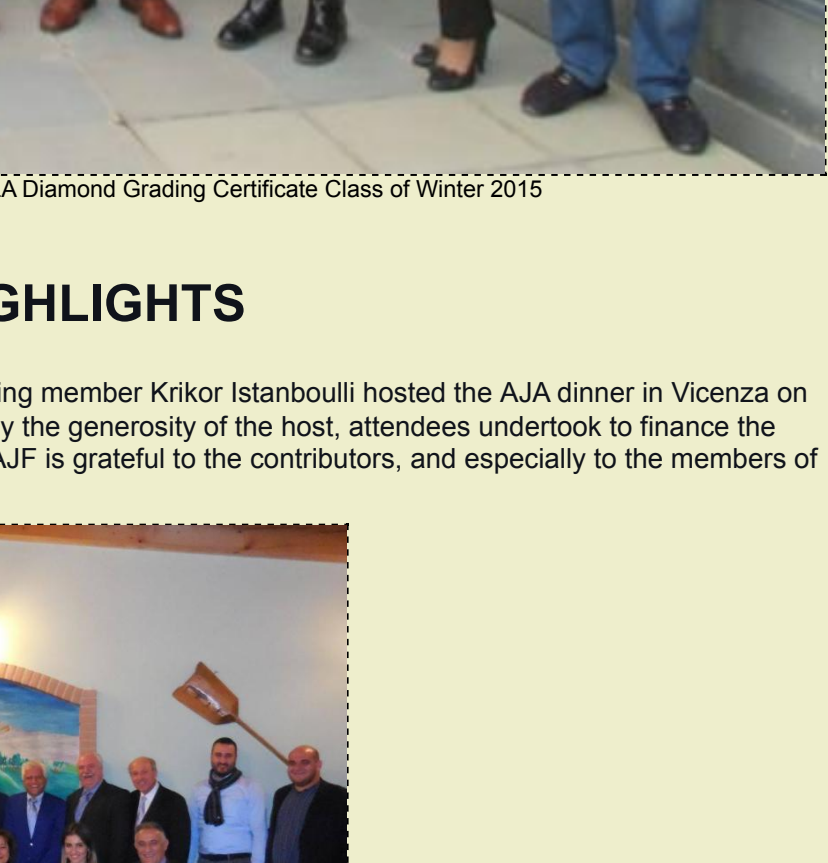
Commemorative events continued with AJF's co-hosted ceremonies with the Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg with the participation of high government officials from Armenia. Prior to the inauguration ceremony, from March 3 to 8, the Director of the Museum of Ethnography, Professor Vladimir Grusman, visited Armenia to hold meetings and oversee progress made with the publication. He was accompanied by AJF's Regional Director Ms. Aza Babayan. Professor Grusman met the Minister of Culture Hasmik Poghosyan and other high officials to discuss the events in Saint Petersburg and future promotion of the exhibit and publication in other cities including Yerevan. The Director visited various museums and agreed to preliminary plans to host the Miller exhibit in Yerevan in September 2015 (see media coverage [here](#) and [here](#).)



Pierre Akkelian and Yervant Zoryan, President of Armenian Virtual College at AGBU, at Armenian Genocide Centennial Forum



Aza Babayan and Prof. Vladimir Grusman



Armenian soldiers stand guard at Tsitsernakaberd in Yerevan

## AJF's SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM 2015 Progress Report

AJF's scholarship students are making serious progress according to the Director of the Armenian Gemological Academy and Laboratory (AGLA) Dr. Artur Zanginyan. They have already completed their theoretical program and are now undergoing hands-on training in diamond grading. AJF's five scholarship students who come from various communities are:

- 1) Hagop Khaloyan, a 23-year-old silversmith apprentice, a recent expatriate from Syria, a graduate of the Armenian high school of Latakia.
- 2) Hayk Khanjyan, a 27-year-old diamond setting apprentice from Javakhi (Georgia), a graduate of the Abul village high school.
- 3) Tatevik Sargsyan, a 19-year-old university student from Araksakh, who studies at the European Regional Academy.
- 4) Haykaz Harutyunyan, a 22-year-old son of an azatarmark from a border village in Tavush, a graduate of the Agricuirty College.
- 5) Ara Musheghyan, a 35-year-old researcher at the Armenian Science Academy from Yerevan, he is the grandson of famous numismatics (study of antique coins) pioneer Khachatour Musheghyan and an expert of old artifacts.

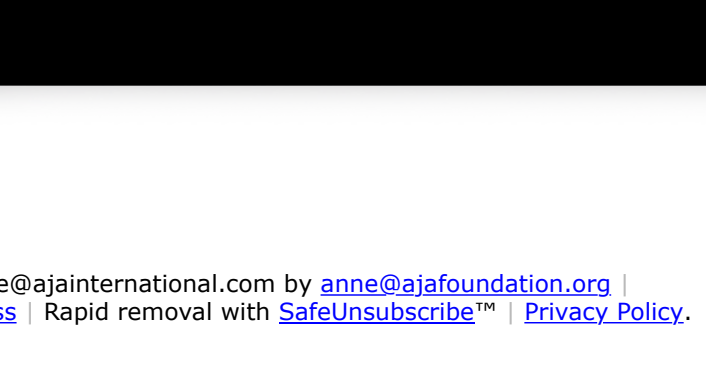
AJF Chairman Pierre Akkelian visited AGLA on April 21, 2015 in Yerevan. He said: "In 2014, AJF has been providing scholarships to five deserving students per semester at AGLA. During my recent visit to AGLA, I had a very memorable meeting with our students. Hearing them say that our initiative has been "a life altering initiative" makes it a worthwhile endeavor for our Foundation."



Pierre Akkelian and Dr. Artur Zanginyan with AGLA Diamond Grading Certificate Class of Winter 2015

## AJF HIGHLIGHTS

As a tradition that began back in 1998 in Milan, Italy, AJA invited member Piero Istamboulian hosted the AJA dinner in Geneva on January 25, 2015. In appreciation of the hospitality and moving by the generosity of the host, attendees extended to finance the tuition of one AJF scholarship student at the AGLA in Armenia. AJF is grateful to the contributors, and especially to the members of the Istambouli family for their hospitality and ardent support.



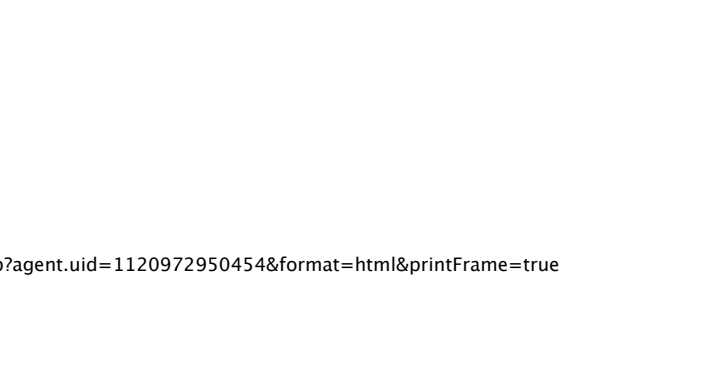
Victor Oro 2015

On the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Canadian Jewellers Association has decided to fund a special scholarship in the jewellery sector through AJF in the amount of \$2500. CJA has also contributed to AJF's efforts in 2014. Mr. David Ritter, President of CJA (Canadian Jewellers Association) had personally presented the donation to AJF during an AJA Canada gathering.



David Ritter presenting check to Pierre Akkelian with AJA Montreal Chairman Leo Yappari and former Chairman Habib Malo

On April 27, 2015, AJF's Hrach Kaspar held a meeting with Ms. Odile Civitello, GG, FGA, CAP who is the Director of the Ecole de Gemmologie de Montreal (EGM), and Ms. Valerie Bombardier, General Manager at EGM, to discuss AJF's future scholarships programs. EGM is the only gemological academy in Quebec and provides full certificate training courses in collaboration with GIA and the Gemological Association of Great Britain.



Ms. Odile Civitello, Valerie Bombardier, and Hrach Kaspar

AJF's website has recently undergone a complete overhaul and is now hosted at a new web address: [www.ajf.foundation](http://www.ajf.foundation). Together with AJF's Facebook page, the new website will provide current news and more resources for those interested in accessing information on Armenian jewellery history. Thus, the online publications section will be able to host numerous titles and future publications by the AJF team.

**Armenian Jewellers Foundation**  
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## Be Part of AJF

Join our Patrons Club and own your unique Franck Muller Armenian watch today. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to support AJF's mission and own a unique timepiece, made one-of-a-kind since the engraved of your choosing will not be duplicated.

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The Armenian Jewellers Foundation (AJF) was created to advance the heritage of Armenians in jewellery. AJF's mission is to undertake historical research, document present-day success stories and ensure the transfer of knowledge to a new generation of professionals. The foundation counts among its trustee members some of the most reputable industry leaders. AJF is based in Geneva, Switzerland.

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