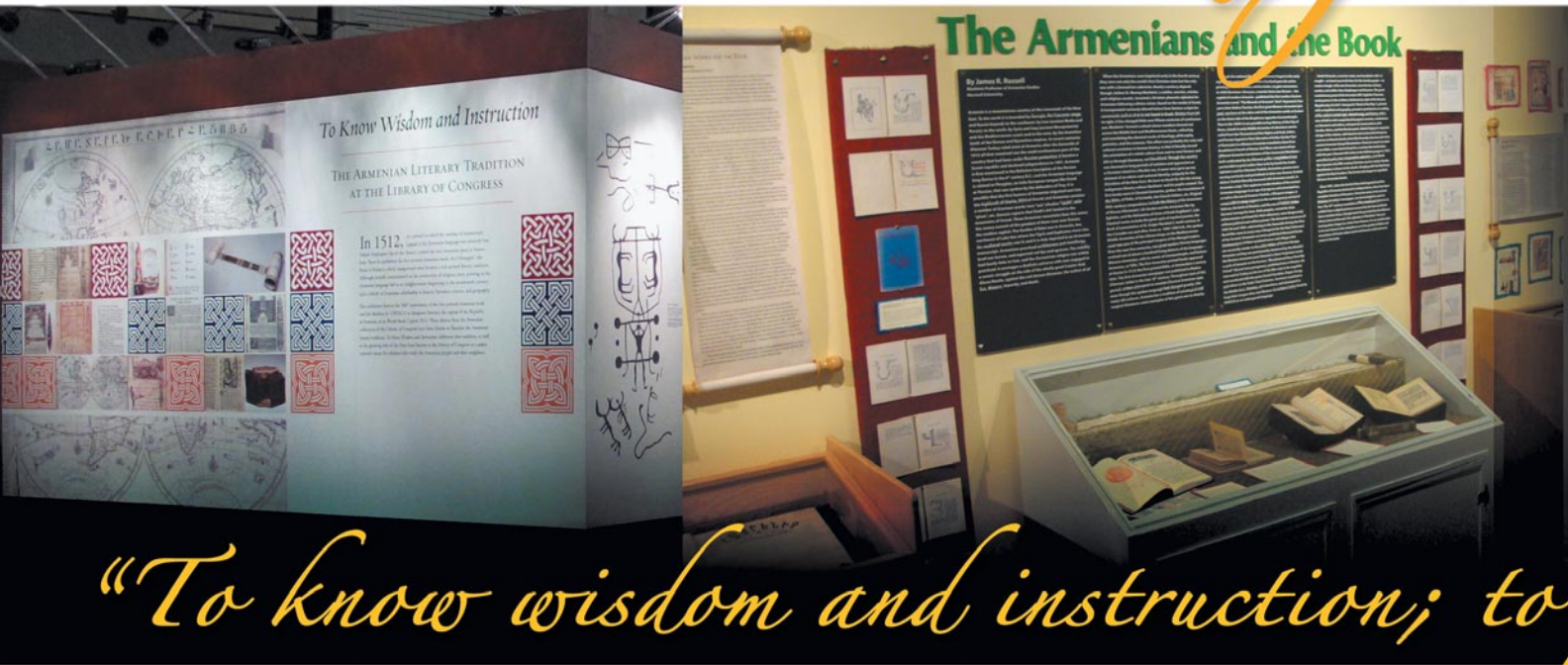


CELEBRATING 500 *Years*



“To know wisdom and instruction; to

BY LILLY TOROSYAN

These were the first words translated into Armenian upon the creation of the Armenian alphabet in the early 5th century by St. Mesrob Mashdots. This year marks UNESCO’s selection of Yerevan as the World Book Capital of 2012, corresponding with the 500th anniversary of the first printed book in Armenian. The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. has inaugurated an exhibition—which runs from April 19 to September 26—that features 76 items from Armenian print throughout the centuries.

Curator Dr. Levon Avdoyan authored the 100-page illustrated catalogue titled “To Know Wisdom and Instruction: 500 Years of Armenian Printing,” which describes the items on display at the Library of Congress. He stresses that although the celebration of the anniversary is important, its main goal is to illustrate the ancient literary tradition of the

Armenian people. “We did not plan a beautiful exhibit, although there is plenty of beauty in it. We designed the exhibition to educate in a non-didactic way about all aspects of that tradition—including its musical extension.” The presentation, he added, “was fashioned to showcase the growth of the Armenian-language collections from some 7,000 items in 1992 to an estimated 45,000 today.”

The exhibition at the Library of Congress, through its various books, poems, and maps, represents large elements of Armenian history and culture since the 14th century. Avdoyan’s dedication to the exhibition has been instrumental in both its inception and continuation over the past several months. Two smaller exhibitions in the Greater Boston area also celebrated the 500th anniversary of Armenian printing this year.

Harvard University, with the assistance of several Armenian organizations such

as the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) and the Armenian Cultural Foundation (ACF), held its own exhibit in April featuring the first Armenian printed book, *Urbatagirk* (“The Book of Friday”) by Jacob the Sinner. The director of NAASR, Marc Mamigonian, considers the exhibition both celebratory and educational. “The primary mission of the exhibition was to educate Harvard students who might otherwise be unaware of Armenian history and culture. Thus, the exhibition covered a lot of ground in a relatively succinct manner. I think the celebratory aspect of the exhibition is implied—we did not set out to make this a ‘hooray for the Armenians’ exhibition, but the texts and materials included testify



rs OF ARMENIAN PRINTING



perceive the words of understanding”

to a book culture of which Armenians can be proud.”

As the principle organizer of the event, Prof. James Russell of Harvard University reached out to Armenian groups in the area, as well as his colleagues at Boston University and Tufts for cooperation. This milestone is an opportunity for Armenians and non-Armenians to appreciate the antiquity and perseverance of the Armenian alphabet, he says.



On top: A montage of the exhibits at the Library of Congress, ALMA, and NAASR

On left: Items from the Library of Congress exhibit

“The Armenian alphabet was essential to the survival of the Armenian language, culture, and tradition. I think this story of cultural survival against unbelievable odds should be of interest to any person aware that cultural diversity is as vital as biodiversity, not only to the quality of life, but to life itself,” notes Russell, who holds the Mashtots Chair in Armenian Studies. He is very pleased with the popularity of the Harvard exhibit, and hopes for similar presentations that raise interest in the culture of Armenian print.

Shortly after the conclusion of the exhibit at Harvard, another opened at the Armenian Library and Museum of America (ALMA) in Watertown, featuring a larger collection of books on display, which will be shown through November 30. This exhibition focuses on similar aspects of the occasion, such as the creation of the Armenian alphabet, and the subsequent development of Armenian printing over the centuries. Many questions are addressed about Armenian history and the legacy of the manuscripts.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a day-long symposium at ALMA on Sat., Sept. 15, featuring several guest lecturers. □

