

Anahit Harutiunian, *The Age of Notable Women* (Yerevan: Spiritual Armenia, 2005), 142 pp.

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There is growing scholarly interest in the nascent field of Armenian women's history and literature. Recent research by a small group of scholars has produced several works in English about Armenian women's writing, Armenian women's educational organizations, and Armenian women's journals in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century.

I have been interested in Anahit Harutiunian's work since I read an article by her entitled Հայ Կանաւնց Շարժումը 19-րդ Դարի Սկզբին published in 1999. *The Age of Notable Women* by Anahit Harutiunian has a slightly different pedigree than other works on Armenian women's history in that the author is a member of the Armenian Association of Women with University Education NGO in Yerevan and her impetus for writing *The Age of Notable Women* is based on her stated desire to acquaint young women with the history of Armenian women's roles in the public sphere and to demonstrate to the public in the Republic of Armenia that a history of Armenian women's civic activism existed in Armenian circles prior to the present day. The author questions the lack of a role for Armenia's women in solving the problems affecting the country today.

While I have no quarrel with the author's goals, or her legitimate question, and it is certainly true that Armenian women entered the public sphere and engaged in civic activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, at times Harutiunian's desire to defend women's civic participation in the present-day Republic of Armenia leads to tension between the demands of scholarship and the demands of current political legitimacy. This is most obvious in the Epilogue with her insistence that Armenian women entered the public sphere in a condition of "absolute harmony between the sexes" and "without a struggle" (p. 126). Here Harutiunian downplays the opposition nineteenth-century Armenian women encountered from certain Armenian intellectuals, for example Krikor Zohrab and Stepan Voskan, in order to strengthen her argument that present-day Armenian society should be as accommodating as men in the past. This stance also leads her to ignore the ways in which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Armenian women tailored their writing and organizational goals to make them more palatable to the Armenian public in order to win acceptance for women's entry into the public sphere.

Harutiunian is on firmer ground when she is narrating the multiple stories of the foundation and goals of Armenian women's organizations in Western and Eastern Armenia. Her inclusion of a chapter on women's organizing in Armenian Diaspora communities, including Russia, Iran and France, from the late nineteenth-

century to the 1920s is a welcome inclusion and acknowledges the multiplicity of Armenian experience at the turn of the twentieth century.

The chapters of *The Age of Notable Women* are divided into geographical areas, and each chapter narrates the establishment of the various local women's charitable and educational organizations and includes sidebars of the biographies of prominent women involved in the establishment of these organizations. Harutiunian includes footnotes when she discusses the organizations; however, it is unfortunate that she does not include these for biographical information too, as she appears to have uncovered relatively unknown information in the case of several of the women. When discussing women's status in Armenian history, Harutiunian brings up several interesting points, particularly her advocacy of consideration of regional difference when discussing women's status, and her suggestion that the life-stage of a woman affected her social and familial status. (p. 17)

Her chapter on women in Eastern Armenia is particularly strong and is the result of original archival research Harutiunian has done. She has read the bulletins and minutes and publications from various women's organizations and has contributed to our knowledge of the founding of these organizations, the personalities involved, and the goals and the inner workings of these organizations. She also traces, where the data exists, the scope and longevity of the organization's activities, which is an important consideration when evaluating the success of these women's organizations.

The book is available in Armenian and has been translated into English by Vladimir Osipov. After reading copies of both versions, I would advocate that the English version include in the footnotes the transliterated name of the organization's original (i.e. Armenian) name as I found I had to refer back to the Armenian-language version to verify exactly which organization was being discussed.

*The Age of Notable Women* contains a number of rare pictures of the women involved, the schools, the children helped, and the covers of journals, all contributing to the visual appeal of this book. Overall, I recommend *The Age of Notable Women* as a good introduction to the multiple activities of Armenian women's organizations in Western and Eastern Armenia and in the Armenian Diaspora in the latter half of the nineteenth-century and early-twentieth century.