

# ARMENIAN LEGENDS & POEMS

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## ARMENIAN Poetry & Legends

COMPILED & ILLUSTRATED  
by  
ZABELLE C. BOYAJIAN



TIGRANES THE GREAT  
KING OF ARMENIA

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE RIGHT HON.  
VISCOUNT BRYCE, O.M.

Category: [Opinions](#)



Prof. Khatchatur I. Pilikian, London UK

### **Zabelle Boyajian and Her Armenian Legends & Poems of 1916, 1958 and 2009**



She was the "Splendid Armenian Woman", the "Never-to-be-forgotten Zabelle Boyajian". With these and similar phrases some of the major Armenian intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century, such as Arshag Chobanian and Avedik Issahakian, expressed their genuine admiration for this multi-talented artist par excellence. Both Chobanian and Issahakian also shared copious correspondence with Boyajian.

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Born in 1872 at Diarbekir (one of the ancient Armenian capitals, Tigranakerd), Zabelle was the daughter of an Armenian Protestant clergyman who became the British Vice-Consul at Diarbekir. Her mother was an Englishwoman, a kinswoman to the poet Samuel Rogers (1763-1855). After losing her father during the genocidal massacres of mid 1890s in Ottoman Turkey, Zabelle continued her education in London, and there she settled till the end of her flamboyant life as a creative and performing artist.

In her eulogy to the poet, painter and playwright Zabelle Boyajian, the noted Armenian writer named Mrs Siran Seza forwarded a heartfelt request to AGBU-- The Armenian General Benevolent Union. Seza asked AGBU to publish Zabelle Boyajian's complete works, graciously arguing that that will honour AGBU's latest project, its Jubilee Programme, which included, among others, publications to promote the Armenian cultural heritage. Seza's eulogy/article appeared in Beirut, Lebanon (Yeridasart Hayouhi=Young Armenian Woman, 1957, no 1-2), just few weeks after Zabelle's death in London, on January 26th 1957.

AGBU did not fully oblige to Seza's request. No publication of Zabelle's complete works ever appeared then and neither thereafter. Even today, more than half a century later, Mrs Seza's perceptive request and genuine wish remain unfulfilled.

But AGBU did embark on a worthy project—the republication of one of Zabelle Boyajian's major works, the Armenian Legends and Poems, just one year after Seza's eulogy. Here is the FOREWORD of that AGBU Jubilee Publication of 1958. Therein we find a judiciously delineated *raison d'être* about the quality of a choice that eventually served as a memorial to Zabelle herself:

ZABELLE BOYAJIAN's Armenian legends and Poems was hailed with enthusiasm when it was first published in 1916. The passing of more than four decades has not diminished its value as a comprehensive chrestomathy of the legends, folklore, and poetry which constitute the permanent treasures of our cultural heritage.

The Armenian general Benevolent Union is fully convinced of the intrinsic value of the book, both for our American-born youth and other English-speaking Armenians, among whom there are unmistakable signs, of an increasing awareness of our historic past, and for scholars and historians who are engaged in research on the art, folklore, and culture of the Armenian people. Therefore, in recognition of the notable service rendered by Miss Boyajian to our art and literature, it is republishing this monumental book as a part of its Jubilee Program.

The late Zabelle Boyajian, painter, poet, and a keen student of historic values, prepared this book during one of the most tragic and agonising periods in our recent history. Wholesale massacres were then destroying helpless and defenceless people by the hundreds of thousands; deportations were uprooting the survivors from their ancestral homeland and scattering them into the Arabian deserts.

But through all these persecutions and ordeals, the Armenian people, once a proud and independent nation, survived and kept alive its Christian faith, its ideal of freedom, its culture, and its spiritual values.

Limitations of space and the scope of the book forced the author to omit some of our famous contemporary poets who lived and created prior to and following the great catastrophe. However, such commissions in no way detract from the value of the volume, and we share the author's prophetic conviction that "Armenian Muses have still many treasures in their keeping which cannot be destroyed."

The book also contains a study of Armenian legends and poetry by Aram Raffi, son of the foremost Armenian novelist. Mr. Raffi's scholarship has provided a valuable addition to Miss Boyajian's work.

We believe that no further justification is needed for the republication of Zabelle Boyajian's Armenian Legends and Poems, which, more than any other of the author's works, will keep her name alive.

#### ARMENIAN GENERAL BEVEVOLENT UNION

Well fifty-one years after AGBUs republication of Zabelle Boyajian's stupendous book in a quasi-facsimile format, including the original colourful illustrations, all reproduced diligently (J.M Dent &

Dons Ltd, Columbia University Press), a contemporary London publisher, ABELA PUBLISHING, dared to tackle a similar task with a panache, hence "resurrect"--publisher's own choice of word-- that same major oeuvre of Miss Boyajian

ABELA accomplished the task but with a difference. Zabelle's Boyajian's Armenian Legends and Poems is now 'resurrected' in a much accessible format than the original of 1916 and the AGBU republication of 1958. Zabelle's Armenian Legends and Poems is now a paperback-- a handy quasi pocket book. But, alas, the illustrations are not 'resurrected' in their original glorious colours. These are now in their black and white dimly presence. Is that the 'price paid' for its accessible format? Who knows!

✘ Strange as it might seem, the only colourful illustration is that of the Armenian national tricolour flag on the front cover. Moreover, the tricolour's presence is 'accompanied' by the reproduction of the Republic of Armenia's coat-of-arms on its penultimate page (275), as if we have in hand a pocket book of 'Tourism in Armenia' and not a book of a poetic promenade through the Armenian cultural heritage that it certainly is. Perhaps both intentions could have been served, and graciously so, if Zabelle Boyajian's book was 'resurrected' to mark an anniversary of the Third Republic of Armenia.

It might be argued though that the philanthropic intention of ABELA PUBLISHING "to help the underprivileged in Armenia" through "a percentage of the net sale of this book" (back cover notes) did jump the queue of all the above considerations, having thus decided to dedicate the paperback "To The Undying Spirit of Armenia" (front-page iii). Then, we might as well say---fair enough and happy 'resurrection' to Zabelle of 1916 in paperback.

*View a video presentation of [Zabelle Boyajian's Art](#) (paintings, illustrations) by prof. K. I. Pilikian*

