

emerges from his account book. Personal thoughts rarely intruded into his careless memoranda; this is no diary or mix of business and private life so common in Florentine and other accounts from this period. Dyer sees Heritage as a bland conformist to the received wisdom of his time. Seldom does Heritage record anything like the personal musings in the emerging genre of commonplace books, and he leaves not a single letter like the famous Paston letters to illuminate his world. Once Heritage listed seven advantages in life coupled with their opposites, so we learn that he saw the differences between bondage and liberty, cunning and ignorance. Dyer finds in the variety and scope of Heritage's businesses ample reasons for believing that this merchant's life did "epitomize the individualistic spirit of his age" (p. 203). For comparisons Dyer seldom looks beyond southern England and never to the continent. Mastering the vast amount of scholarship on the transformation of the early modern English economy, a body of work unsurpassed for Europe and one to which Dyer has amply contributed, requires much effort. Gratitude for a succinct and masterful contribution to this body of learning makes one regret the absence of similar books on the other twenty regions of Europe.

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From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa. *By Sebouh David Aslanian.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. xx + 363 pp. Maps, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$49.95. ISBN: 978-0-520-26687-2.

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Reviewed by Gijbert Oonk

The major contribution of Sebouh David Aslanian's book *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean* lies in the reconstruction of the networks of many Armenian families based on *commenda*, contracts that usually involved an established trader or businessman and a junior agent, and on business correspondence from the seventeenth century onward. The book's main aim is to show how the network was constructed by emphasizing the importance of the "nodal center." In this case, the center was New Julfa, in what is now Iran. From here, Armenian traders operated a network stretching from Amsterdam and London in Western Europe to Manila in Southeast Asia. The author emphasizes the importance of commercial contracts or partnerships to

organize long-distance trade. He shows that Armenian trading networks were able to flourish within the Moghul Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire.

The book fits within the renewed interest in the history of cross-cultural trading networks in the past ten years. Scholars like Avner Greif, Claude Markovits, Rosalie L. Tung, Henry F. L. Chung, and Francesca Trivellato have shown how Jewish, South Asian, and Chinese trading networks emerged over time. These works focus on important issues like the development of trust in early-modern, long-distance trade relations, the circulation of capital and people, and the maintenance of community networks.

The book explores the effects of long-distance trade on the organization of community life. The heart of the argument, especially for business historians, rests in chapters 5, 6, and 7. These chapters address important themes, like the role of the family firm, trust, social capital, networks, and business correspondence and information. The author convincingly argues that the Armenian trading network was a circular society that spanned continents and cultures yet encompassed its own culture, politics, and economy.

In particular, the author emphasizes the importance of the *commenda*. Usually the *commenda* agents started their careers through formal and informal training within the central family networks in Julfa. After some time, master and agent would sign a *commenda* contract and the agent would set off on his journey. The agent was willing to travel great distances and put his master's capital to work in faraway places. How was trust enforced between the two parties? Both parties knew that the agent might have run off with the money, or could have argued that he was unable to resell at a profit. Therefore, the master ensured that it was not in the interest of the agent to cheat by taking care of the agent's family while he was away. The agent was aware that his future and that of his family was in the hands of the master. There was also a centralized court system in Julfa to reinforce the contract. In addition, the agent was required to send merchants' letters to his master. More often than not, the agent, while abroad, would visit important business relations of the master. The author persuasively argues that these formal and informal institutions played a decisive role in strengthening the trading network.

The book engages two sets of historiographies. First, it sets itself within a broader discussion of the origins of the Julfan trade network. The author shows that the deportation of Armenian Julfans between 1603 and 1605 was not part of conscious Ottoman economic policy, as is generally believed, but the outcome of the Savafid-Ottoman war, during which Old Julfa was destroyed. Second, Aslanian argues against the

fashionable concept of a “trading diaspora.” However, he tends to simplify this concept by arguing that it is at best “descriptive and not analytical” (p. 233). I see the strength of the diaspora concept in its emphasis on the role of the nation state and the way it increasingly reached out to its overseas traders, especially in the case of the Indian and Chinese diaspora in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Still, I am in favor of the author’s alternative concept of the circular society for the Armenian business network.

The author argues convincingly against a Eurocentric and state/empire-centered approach that is so dominant in the history of European expansion and the economic histories of emerging nation states, empires, and regions. This perspective from below is reinforced by his extensive use of primary sources collected in seven languages and more than twenty different archives across the globe.

The book is well organized and written. It contains numerous reproductions of primary sources, including business letters, *commenda* contracts, and well-designed maps. The extensive list of archives, primary sources and bibliography may inspire new scholars in the growing field of business network histories. This book is a remarkable study that may set a new standard in the field of emerging and declining trading networks. The author’s painstaking research has resulted in an extraordinary and extremely well-documented contribution.

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Objectifying China, Imagining America: Chinese Commodities in Early America. *By Caroline Frank.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. xiii + 257 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. Paper, \$25.00. ISBN: 978-0-226-26028-0.

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Reviewed by Serena Zabin

Objectifying China, Imagining America is a fascinating and eye-opening account of Chinese imports into early America that offers a worthwhile contribution to the new history of globalization. This account of the extent of the integration of China into early American warehouses and homes is part of a wave of scholarship arguing that the Atlantic world is simply too small an intellectual and spatial category to explain early America and its material world. Following in the footsteps of Alison