This collection of essays, originally presented at a conference on Armenian identity held at UCI, Irvine, spans a period between the ancient and the present and indicates the continuing relevance of the broad and complex concept and study of identity. The essays explore different interpretations and contexts of Armenian identity and demonstrate the multiple ways of approaching it. Thus, the collection as a whole is also a reflection of historical and intellectual development and directions.

EDITED BY H. BERBERIAN & T. DARYAEE

REFLECTIONS OF ARmenian IDENTITY IN HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY
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THE “GREAT SCHISM” OF 1773: VENICE AND THE FOUNDAING OF THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN TRIESTE

Sebouh David Aslanian

In the 1901 bicentenary issue of the Mkhitarist Congregation’s flagship journal *Bazmavep* [Polyhistory], Father Step’an Sarian makes the following obscure allusions to events that shook the island of San Lazzaro during the second half of the eighteenth century, and forever altered its history. He writes, “Thus, dark clouds passed over the arches of San Lazzaro and internal dissent blackened, for a while, its luminous horizons.”1 This exceedingly cryptic and all too fleeting passage is a veiled reference to what may be called the Great Schism of San Lazzaro, an event that gave rise to a splinter order of the Congregation, first in Trieste in 1775, followed, in 1811, by Vienna, when the Congregation was cleaved into two different and often rival, bitterly factional orders. Patriarch Maghakia Ormanian is not alone when he notes the “certain cautiousness” with which Father Sarian, and nearly everyone else who has followed him, has chosen to gloss over the nature of the disagreements and

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented as a paper at the “Confessionalization and Reform: The Mkhitarist Enterprise from Constantinople to Venice, Trieste, and Beyond” conference at UCLA on December 15, 2017. I am thankful to Houri Berberian, Cesare Santus, Marc Nichanian, Merujan Karapetian, Stefania Tutino, Jesse Arlen, Hagop Gulludjian, Bedross Der Mattossian, and Gerard Libaridian for helpful comments. My transcriptions and translations from Italian have benefitted from advice and help provided by Francesca Ricciardelli, Cesare Santus, Zara Pogossian, and Stefania Tutino. All translations unless otherwise specified are my own as are all remaining errors of judgment in reaching my own conclusions. The title of the paper (the Great Schism) should not be confused with the earlier “Le grand schisme” of either the separation of the Orthodox Church from that of Rome in 1054 or the division of the Armenian Church from that of its neighbors during the sixth century (See Nina Garsoian, *L’Église arménienne et le grand schisme d’Orient* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999). I have chosen the adjective “Great” to distinguish this internal separation within the ranks of the Mkhitarist Congregation from several smaller and lesser significant schisms in the 1750s and the middle of the nineteenth century that, unlike the Great Schism of 1773, did not result in a separate order.

circumstances that led to the division of the order. To the extent that they are even familiar with the Congregation’s history, most scholars of Mkhit’arist history have a very imprecise understanding of this schism. At most, they might be aware, as the chronicler cited above, that, indeed, disagreements occurred on San Lazzaro in 1773, leading to the creation of a rival order in Trieste. If they have done their homework, they might even know that this order was later transferred to Vienna, where the congregation subsides to this day. However, their knowledge is limited to these basic facts, and this is largely because, over the last two centuries or so, despite the publication of numerous studies on the Congregation, nearly all by Mkhit’arists, a miasma of silence has fallen on this important chapter of the island’s history.

Relying on previously unconsulted documents stored in the state archives of Venice, Trieste, Rome, and Vienna, as well as other evidence, much of which has remained either unknown or marginal to discussions on the history of the Mkhit’arists, this essay provides a preliminary outline of the history of the Great Schism of 1773. On the basis of a careful assessment of the available evidence, the essay argues that disputes over constitutionalism and representative governance in a monastic setting, and not theological or sectarian differences as Ormanian suggested a hundred years ago, were the leading factors that gave rise to the Great Schism. To this end, the essay begins with a brief overview of the life of Abbot Mkhit’ar and the history of his order in Venice, until his demise in 1749. This is followed by a detailed account of Step’annos Melkonian’s election, in 1750, and the circumstances leading to the Great Schism, a little over two decades later. My discussion here situates the origin of the schism in the context of a domestic spying agency in Venice known as the Inquisitor di Stato, whose shadowy tribunal of three judges played a pivotal role in creating the schism and subsequently storing hundreds of pages of reports on the event in their archives. The third section sheds light on the creation of the Armenian community in the Habsburg port city of Trieste as a direct consequence of the Great Schism and briefly discusses the privileges granted to the Trieste branch of the Mkhit’arists by Empress Maria Theresa in 1775. In the context of studying this little-known 1775 decree, I provide a fresh look at the obscure history of Trieste’s tiny Armenian community during the last quarter of the eighteenth century and argue that, much to the chagrin of the Venetian authorities, the expelled monks from Venice were welcomed with open arms by the Habsburg authorities as a result of Trieste’s active attempts to topple Venice from its pedestal of prestige as the

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2 Maghakia Ormanian, Azgapatum: Hay ughghap’ar ekeghets’vo antsk’erê zkizbên minchev mer orerê harakits azgayin paragarerov patmuats [National History: The events of the Armenian Apostolic Church from the beginning until our days narrated alongside their national circumstances] (Istanbul 1914), 2: 3076-3084 (3077). “այլ թէ ինչ էին այդ տարաձայնութիւնները, բացատրել չեն սիրել, անշուշտ տեսակ մը զգուշաւորութեամբ:” Alexander Yerits’eants’ in his nineteenth century account of the order’s history was among the first to note the silent treatment that the schism received even a hundred years after its occurrence. “…եվսի այս այն էիր լուծել այդ խնդիր, այն մեծապես չեն տեսած, անշուշտ տեսակ մը զգուշաւորութեամբ:” “However, this issue is passed over in silence until now, both by the Mkhit’arists of Venice, as well as those of Vienna.” Yerits’eants’, Venetiki Mkhit’areank’ [The Mkhit’arists of Venice] (Tiflis: Hovhannes Martiroseani Tbaran, 1882), 43-44. I thank Marc Mamigonian for sharing his copy of this book with me.
leading port and emporium in the Eastern Mediterranean. The essay concludes by returning to the thorny question concerning the theological versus other factors behind the genesis of the Great Schism where Ormanian’s arguments are placed in the context of archival and other evidence, which were not available to the former patriarch and formidable scholar.

Abbot Mkhit’ar and the Founding of the Mkhit’arist Order

Mkhit’ar Sebastats’i, as the historian Leo (Arakel Babakhanian) noted over seventy years ago, stands out among his contemporaries not only because he was truly a towering figure in early modern Armenian history but also because, unlike other prominent individuals from the period, his life has been amply and properly documented and written about. 3 There are several biographies of him written by his disciples and, moreover, we have copious epistolary documentation consisting of thousands of letters written to and by him in classical Armenian, Italian, and Latin. 4 These letters, as well as a rare contemporary chronicle of his life and the history of his congregation from its foundation in 1701 to his passing in 1749, enable us to avoid some of the pitfalls of the hagiographic elements inserted into his biography by

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4 Among these, the first and most important one was compiled shortly after his passing in 1749 by his trusted disciple and secretary Matteos Evdokiats’i or Matthew of Tokat, Համառօտութիւն Վարուց Տեառն Տեառն Գերապատիւ Ռաբունապետին Մխիթարայ Մեծի Աբբայի [An Abridgment of the Life of the Lord and Most Preeminent Religious Master the Great Mkhit’ar Abbot], Ms. 494, Mkhit’arist manuscript library Vienna. Father Vahan Inglizian published this 80-folio manuscript in the 1949 issue of Handes Amsorea. It was followed by a lengthier biography by the second Abbot of the order, Step’annos Agonts’ Giwver, Patmut’iwn kenats’ ew varuts’ Team Mkhit’aray Sebastats’woy Rabunapeti ew Abbayi / hörineal Step’annosi Giwvër Agonts’ Arheipiskoposi ew Abbayi [History of the life and times of the Master Mkhit’ar of Sebastea, the Master and Abbot, written by Giwvër Agonts’, Archbishop and Abbot] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1810), and perhaps the most readable of Mkhit’ar biographies, Hovhannes Torosian’s Vark’ Mkhit’aray Abbayi Sebastiay [The life of Abbott Mkhit’ar of Sebastia] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1901). A useful Italian-language biography by the Mkhit’arist monk Minas Nurikhan is available in English translation as The Life and Times (1660-1750) of the Servant of God, Abbot Mechitar founder of the Armenian Mechitarists of Venice (San Lazzaro) written in Italian by Father Minas Nurikhan, trans. Rev. John McQuillan (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1915). Finally, there is Leo’s classic penetrating study “Mkhit’areanner,” as well as the useful account in Ormanian, Azgapatum, vol. 2, 2677-2682; 2697-2698; 2703-2704; 2713-2714; 2761-2766; 2829-2834; 2947-2948; and 2969-2971.
his admirers and disciples.\textsuperscript{5} Taken together, they provide a fairly rich and complex portrait of a man driven by a singular passion and dedication to serve his faith and his people.

Born Manuk Petrosian on 7 February 1676 in the city of Sebastea (today’s Sivas in central Anatolia/Turkey), Mkhit’ar had an early calling as a missionary and ascetic monk. After receiving a rudimentary religious education from a local Armenian parish priest, he was ordained a deacon at the age of fifteen. He soon left home as an apprentice to a traveling legate from the Catholicosate of Ejmiatsin named Ghazar Vardapet who was then passing through Mkhit’ar’s hometown.\textsuperscript{6} His journeys and mobility in pursuit of higher education and a religious calling were not that different from those of other Armenian luminaries of his time. Like his contemporaries, Oscar Yerevants’i and Thomas Vanandets’i, Mkhit’ar was a quintessentially mobile person. He spent a good part of his life as an itinerant young monk in search of religious enlightenment and knowledge. In 1692, he accompanied Ghazar Vardapet and traveled to Tokat, then Erzerum and finally to the Holy See at Ejmiatsin, long famed as the center for Armenian higher learning.\textsuperscript{7} Crestfallen by corruption and widespread ignorance there, the young Mkhit’ar traveled to the monastery of the Holy Virgin, on the island of Lake Sevan. There too, disappointment greeted him. He spent the next twelve years crisscrossing the rugged terrain of Asia Minor, visiting one monastic center after another. One such place was the spiritual complex of Bassen (in the province of Erzerum, in today’s eastern Turkey), where Mkhit’ar stayed for nearly a year and a half.\textsuperscript{8} There, two events changed the course of his life. First, he met a young Armenian missionary by the name of Poghos who had recently graduated from Rome’s celebrated Collegio Urbano. Mkhit’ar’s

\textsuperscript{5} The collection of letters in Classical Armenian is found in a rare published three-volume correspondence, Namakani tsarayin Astutsoy teain Mkhit’aray Abbayi eranashnorh himnadri Mkhit’arean Miabanutean [Letter book of the Servant of God, Abbot Mkhit’ar, the blessed founder of the Mkhit’arist Congregation] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1961). The Italian and Latin letters were published in 1980 and make up the fourth volume of his letters. See Lettere del Servo di Dio Abate Mechitar, Fondatore della Congregazione dei Monaci Armeni Mechitaristi, vol. IV (1705-1749) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1980). For the chronicle see Matteos Evdokiats’i, Համառօտութիւն Վարուց Տեառն Տեառն Գերապատիւ Ռաբունապետին Մխիթարայ Մեծի Աբբայի, [Chronicle of the Sacred Congregation of Armenians following the rules of Saint Anthony Saint Anthony reformed by his Eminence and first Abbot, Abbot Mkhit’ar, wherein is told all things pertaining to this Holy Order, beginning from the first year of the creation of the Order and onward, done by Esteemed Father Matteos Vardapet or doctor of theology]. Unlike the correspondence, this volume remains an unpublished manuscript in the archives on San Lazzaro. None of the studies or biographies listed in the previous footnote measures up to this eyewitness chronicle.

\textsuperscript{6} Matteos Evdokiats’i, Համառօտութիւն Վարուց, folio 10r (Inglizian, 329), Leo, “Mkhit’areanner,” 487-488.
imagination became illuminated by the stories he heard regarding Rome’s libraries brimming with books of learning. In Bassen, Mkhit’ar also learned for the first time of the anti-Catholic persecutions launched by Avetik Evdokiats’i, the firebrand bishop of the nearby city of Erzerum, whose anti-Catholic zeal would later shift the trajectory of Mkhit’ar’s mobility in the direction of Europe. These two factors deepened the young Mkhit’ar’s curiosity regarding Catholicism. He returned home in 1694 but was, once again, on the road in 1695. In the spring of that year, Mkhit’ar finally met up with his destiny on the road to Aleppo, a city with nearly 8,000 Armenians, of whom only 500 were Catholics. He spent three months on the outskirts of the city, boarding with the city’s Jesuits, especially with the missionary Antonius Beauvollier (Antoine Beauvollier). It was under Beauvollier’s influence that Mkhit’ar is said to have been persuaded that what he was seeking could only be found with Rome’s help.

Armed with several letters of recommendation from Beauvollier, testifying to his Catholic faith and missionary zeal, Mkhit’ar boarded a French ship headed for Rome where he wished to continue his religious education. A pestilential fever forced the traveler off the ship in Cyprus, where he endured more difficulties for several months that kept him from reaching Rome. After nearly starving to death, fortune smiled upon him when a stranger paid his ship fare. He disembarked in Seleucia, on the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean and trekked, on foot, back to Aleppo. After recovering his health, he returned home to his family, and in 1696, at the age of twenty, became ordained as a celibate priest, at the church of Surb Nshan, where he first took on the name Mkhit’ar. He quickly attracted suspicion and opposition by the residents of his hometown and was forced into exile. Two years later, he was in the city that would forever transform his life.

As the imperial capital, Istanbul was a bustling and clamorous metropolis, with a large population of nearly 80,000 urban Armenians at the time. Mkhit’ar had traveled

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9 Aleppo’s Armenian population is provided by Monseigneur François Picquet, the French Consul in Aleppo and later the Bishop of Cesaropolis. In a detailed letter to the Catholic missionary order centered in Paris and known as the Missions Étrangères de Paris, Picquet states that there were 8,000 Armenians in Aleppo, of whom 500 were Catholic. “Les Arméniens sont au nombre de 8 mil dont il n’y a que 500 qui sont catholiques.” Monseigneur Picquet, “L’Estat de la Religion Chrestienne et Catholique dans Alep,” Archives de Missions Étrangères de Paris [AMEP], vol. 352, folio 133.

10 Nearly nothing is written about Beauvollier’s influence on Mkhit’ar. His letters on Mkhit’ar’s behalf are preserved and discussed in Agonts’ Patmut’iwn kenats’ ew varuts’, 78-83.

11 Matteos Evdokiats’i, Համառօտութիւն Վարուց, folio 13r-14v (Inglizian, 333), Leo, “Mkhit’areanner,” 489.

12 We do not have the exact population figures for the Armenian community in Istanbul/Constantinople during the early modern period. My figure here is drawn from Raymond H. Kévorkian, “Le livre imprimé en milieu arménien ottoman aux XVIe-XVIIIe siècle,” Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée (September 1999), 173-185 (176). A slightly higher number of 100,000 for around the same period is provided by H. M. Ghazarian, “Mersdavor arevelk’i haykakan gaghtochakhnerĕ: Konstantnupolisi ew zmyurniayi gaghtochakhnerĕ,” [The Armenian diaspora settlements of the Near East: The Diaspora settlements of Constantinople and Smyrna] in Hay Zhoghovrdi Patmut’yun [History of the Armenian People], vol. IV, 202.
there to meet Khachatur Erzrumets’i (known also as Khachatur Arakelian), an ardent Armenian Catholic renowned for his erudition and education as a former alumnus and missionary trained at the Collegio Urbano. When Mkhit’ar failed to win Khachatur over to his proposed plan of establishing a new monastic order for the education of the Armenian youth with Khachatur at its head, he once again took to the road. He traveled East to Erzerum accompanied by his two disciples. He taught at a nearby monastery called Karmir Vank for a while, and, in the spring of 1700, he was back in the imperial metropolis.\(^{13}\)

The twenty-five-year-old missionary found a radically transformed Ottoman capital this time. Unlike its status during the reign of the relatively peaceful Patriarch Melkisedek Suphi (1698-1699), Istanbul was now a seething cauldron of anti-Catholic persecution. Two patriarchs, Yep’rem Ghapants’i (r. 1684-1686, 1694-1698, and 1701-1702) and Avetik Evdokias’i (1702-1703 and 1704-1706), one after the other came to the patriarchal throne with the intent of cleansing the Armenian millet and church of foreign accretions.\(^{14}\) In part, larger forces beyond the purview of these individual actors fueled the renewal of persecution against Istanbul’s 8,000-strong Armenian-Catholic community.\(^{15}\) The period in which these decisive transformations in the sectarian relations between Apostolic and Catholic Armenians were occurring is called the age of “confessionalism” or “confessionalization.”\(^{16}\) From the shores of the Rhine and the Danube in the heart of the Habsburg empire in Europe, to the Bosphorus and Zayandeh Rud in the neighboring Ottoman and Safavid Empires in West Asia, state authorities and their clerical elite were hard at work “imposing order,

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\(^{13}\) Matteos Evdokias’i, Համառօտութիւն Վարուց, folio 18r-19v (Inglizian, 338), Leo, “Mkhit’areanner,” 490, Torossian, Vark’ Mkhit’ara, 119.

\(^{14}\) For a reliable account of the Patriarchate and its holders at this time, see the republication of Hrant Asatour’s, Konstantnupolso hayerê ew irents’ patriarknerê (Istanbul: Armenian Patriarchate, 2011). See also the authoritative list of Patriarchs in the appendix of Ormanian, Azgapatum, vol. 3.


discipline, and religious uniformity on the population from above.” As far as Eastern Christians, in general, and Mkhit’ar, in particular, were concerned, the most important bastion and symbol of the era of confessionalization in Europe was the establishment, in 1622, of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (henceforth *De Propaganda Fide*), whose *Collegio Urbano*, founded in 1627 and its specifically Armenian college (*Collegio Armeno*) opened in 1660 in Rome, matriculated a generation of very well read but aggressively proselytizing Catholic Armenian missionaries from the East. The creation of new kinds of “social discipline” by state authorities and hardening of confessional distinctions between Catholics and Protestants in Western and Central Europe had their parallels and counterparts elsewhere in the early modern world. In Safavid Iran, the era of confessionalization is most famously represented by the official conversion of the Safavid state into Twelver Shi’ism, the religion of the dynasty’s founder, Shah Ismail I (r. 1501-1524).

In the Ottoman realm, confessionalization gave birth to the *Kadizadeli*, a “group of ‘puritan’ preachers whose agitation and calls to religious and moral reform” helped transform the Empire into a Sunni state, all the while systematically rooting out heretical Shi’a influences or threats to Ottoman society.

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17 Marc Forster, “With or Without Confessionalization: Varieties of German Catholicism,” *Journal of Modern History* 1 (1997): 315-347 (315). The view that confessionalization was a top-down process as defined here by Foster has been modified by other scholars in recent years to include processes that are also bottom-up or driven by non-state actors. See Ute Lotz-Heumann, “The Concept of ‘Confessionalization’: A Historiographical Paradigm in Dispute,” *Memoria y Civilización*, 4, (2001): 93-114.


Given this heightened religious atmosphere across the Ottoman realms, it should not come as a surprise that the Armenian patriarchate would also get caught up in this larger wave of religious zeal among the empire’s Muslim authorities. In fact, the two most anti-Catholic Patriarchs of the period were directly assisted by a Kadizadeli and Ottoman şeyhülislam, Seyyid Feyzullah (1638-1703), who was not only the highest Ottoman official in charge of reforming the ulama of the empire but was also a personal “mentor” and “agent” of Ottoman Sultan Mustafa II. Feyzullah was a key agent of confessionalization for the Empire’s Armenian population. Soon after being nominated as şeyhülislam and in the immediate wake of the Venetian conquest of Chios (1694-1695), he helped draft the imperial edict, the Hatt-ı Şerif, making interactions between Armenians (and Greeks) with Catholic missionaries a punishable offense. The alim also promoted candidates to the Patriarchal throne who would pursue anti-Catholic policies at the behest of the Ottoman state. Thus with his support, Yeprem of Ghap’an ascended the patriarchal seat, for the third time, in 1701, not only driving his predecessor Melchisedek away but also having him arrested and thrown to the galleys on grounds of secretly collaborating with Armenian Catholics and the Propaganda’s missionaries operating openly in the imperial capital. Given the heightened state of affairs during the era of confessionalization where confessional and political loyalties were fused as one, Catholic Armenians (referred to as “Franks”) were now widely represented by Yeprem as enemies of the Ottoman state and agents for the European powers by whose very hands Sultan Mustafa was defeated and forced to sign the humiliating Peace of Karlowitz (1699).

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21 For the historical context of the Armenian Catholic community in Istanbul during this time, see Cesare Santus, “La Comunità Armena di Constantinopoli all’inizio del XVIII Secolo: Scontro e tentativi di accordi Interconfessionali,” Rassegna degli Armenisti Italiani, XVII (2016): 51-59. See also idem. Trasgressioni necessarie. Communnicatio in sacris, coesistenza e conflitti tra le comunità cristiane orientali (Levante e Impero ottomano, XVII-XVIII secolo) (Rome: Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises de Rome et d’Athènes, 2018, forthcoming), chap. 6, and “The Şeyhülislam, the Patriarch and the Ambassador: A Case of Entangled Confessionalization (1692-1703),” paper presented at “Entangled Confessionalizations” conference at Central European University, Budapest, June 1-3, 2018. I thank both authors for permission to cite their excellent studies.

22 Suraiya Faroqhi, “An Ulama Grandee and his Household,” The Journal of Ottoman Studies (1989): 199-208 (200) and Stanford J. Shaw, The History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, volume 1: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 223. My thoughts here are influenced by conversations with my graduate student Daniel Ohanian who also kindly provided me the article by Faroqhi.

23 On the role of the Hatt-ı Şerif, see Anna Ohanjanyan, “Gevorg Mxlayim Ōllı: An Overlooked Agent of Confessionalization,” paper presented at “Entangled Confessionalizations” conference at Central European University, Budapest, June 1-3, 2018. See also Santus, “The Şeyhülislam, the Patriarch and the Ambassador.”
Mkhit'ar was preaching at the Armenian church of Surb Gevork (Saint George) in Pera or Galata, on the European side of the capital, when Yeprem (then, only a bishop of Edirne) launched his first wave of persecutions against Catholic Armenians. Early in 1701, the bishop managed to secure the assistance of the şeyhülislam Feyzullah in obtaining control of the Patriarchate from Melkisedek and, with the help of Feyzullah and Sultan Mustafa, obtained an imperial edict for the persecution of the empire’s Armenian Catholics and the arrest of their most prominent preachers in the imperial capital.24 Along with at least two other missionaries, including Khachatur Arakelian Erzrumets’i and Sargis Tokhatets’i, Mkhit’ar was also singled out in the imperial edict.25 He immediately took cover at the Capuchin Mission in Galata, in the same compound as the French ambassador’s residence, and, therefore, came under French diplomatic protection. There “on the eighth day of September [1701], having summoned all the student monks to him, he assembled them and with them began to deliberate as to which part of the world it would be possible for them to go and establish in a safe place a habitation [for their new congregation].”26 Mkhit’ar had originally thought of the mountains of Lebanon but soon settled on the town of Modon (Methoni) on account of its low cost of living, its proximity to Armenian-populated centers in the Ottoman Empire, as well as its relative safety from the Ottoman authorities, since it was located in the Venetian-controlled Peloponnese. Mkhit’ar took refuge there, in early 1703, shortly after a new round of persecutions was launched by Yeprem’s successor, Avetik Evdokiats’i, who turned out to be more violent than the patriarch.

24 Matteos Evdokiats’i, Ժամանագրութիւն սրբազան կարգի միաձանցն Հայոց [Chronicle of the Sacred Congregation of Armenians belonging to the Sacred Order of... folio 39.
25 Ibid. For Sargis Evdokiats’i’s involvement in the edict, see Grigoris Galemkearian, Kensagrut’iwnner Erku Hay Patriark’neru ev tasn episkoposneru ev zhamanakin hay kat’oghikeank’ [Biographies of two Armenian Patriarchs and ten bishops and of Armenian Catholics of the period] (Vienna: Mkhitarist Press, 1915), 85-86.
26 Ibid., folio 45. “Ապա յամսեանն սեպտեմբերի յաւուրն ութերորդի, զամենայն աշակերտեալ միաբանսն առիւր կոչեալ ՝անդէն ժողովէր, խորհիլ նոքոք հանդերձ, թէ յոր կողմն աշխարհիս մարթ իցէ արդեօք երթալ եւ զապահով տեղի ինչ բնակելոլոյ հաստատել։”
he replaced.\(^{27}\) With fifteen disciples, Mkhit'ar built his congregation on Modon and even drafted a constitution for his new order in 1705. Scarcely had the building of the convent been completed, however, when war broke out. In 1715, as Ottoman forces sieged Modon, Mkhit'ar boarded a ship, once again, and traveled with his disciples to Venice armed with letters of recommendation to high officials from the Venetian governor of Modon who was a friend and admirer of Mkhit'ar. Two years later, the Venetian Senate granted Mkhit'ar and his flock the Island of San Lazzaro (a former leper colony in the Middle Ages), in the Venetian lagoon, as their permanent residence.

For the next three decades, Mkhit'ar set to work with his disciples to transform San Lazzaro into a laboratory where each of the main tenets of his congregation were put to practice. With financial patronage from Armenian merchants and other patrons, he completed the renovations on the ancient chapel on the island and built the grounds for his monks’ living spaces, library, and refectory. He then continued with fulfilling his order’s mission. First and foremost, he received young “novices” from different parts of Asia Minor, but predominantly from well-known families in Istanbul, and after rigorous vetting and discipline, he trained them as missionaries and scholars who were expected to travel to the East to preach the Catholic faith to Armenians. Despite the outbreak of libelous attacks on Mkhit’ar and his flock for either not being sufficiently Catholic (as was the case in 1705 and, again, in 1718, when he had to send representatives or visit Rome himself to clear himself of charges\(^{28}\)) or of being apostates from the Apostolic Armenian Church, Mkhit’ar maintained an “ecumenical” view wherein he did not see any contradiction between being an Armenian, in terms of collective “national” identity, and a Catholic. Mkhit’ar best summed up this philosophy, which had guided him during his many years as a wandering preacher, in his 1733 publication of the Holy Scriptures in Venice. In the colophon of this work, he writes,

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\text{...though I love my nation and my labors on account of its benefit, my heart will never come loose from the orthodox faith of the Church of Rome. And conversely, though I am entirely subjected and will subject myself in faithfulness to the throne of Rome for which our father Saint Gregory the Illuminator is an example for me, my love and my striving to labor for the benefit of my nation (though it may scorn me because of such faithfulness [to the church of Rome] will never slacken. Also, if it happens that I shall be despised or condemned by everyone, or by some people, because of such things that I may have said, then I embrace them willingly. For I expect nothing from my nation and from each reader of these scriptures in return}
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\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) These allegations are discussed in a printed pamphlet Mkhit’ar prepared for his visit to Rome in 1718. See Eccelentissimi e Reverendissimi Signori and Sommario degli Attestati presentato nell’anno MDCCXVIII agli Eccelentissimi e Reverendissimi Principe [Cardinals] della Congregazione de Propaganda Fide Dai Monaci Armeni di S. Antonio Abate fondati in Modone, e Residenti in Venezia (Roma, MDCCXXVIII), in Manuscripta Italica quart. 68, Jaggielionian University Library, Cracow, folio 3v-34r. To the best of my knowledge, scholars of the Mkhit’arists have not utilized this source before.
for my work. Rather, I desire and wish only this, that you benefit from it and shall receive the curing medicine for your souls from these Holy Scriptures...29

In addition to the evangelizing and missionary elements of his congregation’s objectives, Mkhit’ar also devoted his life and the energies of his disciples into rescuing and reforming the Armenian literary heritage. To this end, he transformed San Lazzaro into a “nimble and tireless workshop... into a small miniature Armenia, a homeland of books.”30 Mkhit’ar and his successors sent out missionaries to Armenian-populated regions in the East, not only to evangelize and preach, but also to “rescue” ancient Armenian manuscripts from inaccessible monastic centers and to preserve and study them back in San Lazzaro. On the basis of this project of “totalizing” archives of the past, Mkhit’ar and his followers set out to reform the modern Armenian literary canon through their publishing mission.31

When Mkhit’ar passed away, in 1749, his disciples appointed one of his earliest and most trusted followers, Father Eghia Matirosian (1665-1757), as an interim caretaker or locum tenens, until elections could be held to nominate an official successor.32

29 Abbot Mkhit’ar, Astuatsashunj Girk’ Hnots’ ew Norots’ Ktakaranats’ [The Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments] (Venice: Antonio Bortoli, 1733), 1279. “Զի թէպէտ սիրեմ զազգն իմ, եւ զաշխատիլն վասն օգտի նորա, բայց այնու սիրոյ եւ հիդ ին իրենիսպասանեն պատածորեն, զարնիկ գրիխի կերտարակը զումութ ի երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբեք երբ
A Coup d’État on an Island?

More than twenty years had passed during which the Abbot general ruled his cloistered family with a pacific calm when a secret conspiracy began to disturb the monastic tranquility of such a sacred enclosure and to alarm the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Venice.33

On 6 April 1750, almost a whole year following Mkhit’ar’s death, one of his disciples, Step’annos Melkonian, was appointed as the Congregation’s second Abbot. Melkonian was away in his native Istanbul and had been immediately recalled to Venice while Mkhit’ar was still on his deathbed. The choice of appointing him was partly based on the monks’ widely held belief that he was the one chosen by Mkhit’ar to succeed him. Soon after assuming his position, the thirty-three-year-old new Abbot aroused discontent among some members of his flock. At issue were his authoritarian personality, his inability to compromise with those over whom he ruled and his miserly habits as far as managing the Congregation’s funds and looking after the needs of his fellow monks was concerned.34

Initially, Melkonian’s appointment does not seem to have been for life or even for a specifically defined tenure. Even the scope of his powers was not spelled out, but we can only speculate on this, since so little is known about the island’s constitution at the time. What we know with more certainty, as we shall see later, is that, sometime in the 1750s, well

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34 In his authoritative four-volume Patmut’iwn Muratean ew Haikazean Varzharanats’ ew Mkhit’arean Abbayits’ (The History of the Muratean and Haikazean Colleges and of the Lives of the Abbots) published in 1866, the Mkhit’arist monk and scholar Sargis T’eodorean places blame for the schism on the island squarely on Melkonian and his personality. In volume four of this work, T’eodorian argues that on account of Melkonian’s “miserly ways and insensitive habits, dissent and misfortune fell on the Congregation and caused harm to our nation.” Հայրենիքի մայրերից, եւ անհետություն զավթուցի, զավթուց աշխատողների փոփոխությունը եւ նույնքույթուն փոխանցվելակից եւ նույնքույթ ազգային զարգացմանը:” (4: 570)
into his tenure, Melkonian seems to have felt the need for establishing a (new?) constitution and getting it ratified by the De Propaganda Fide. This constitution appears to have been finally drawn up in the early 1760s, following which, on 4 December 1762, Pope Clemente XIII appointed Melkonian to lifetime tenure. This appointment, as well as the unexpected bequest of a substantial fortune of 100,000 piasters to the congregation in 1764 by two Catholic Armenian merchants, who passed away unexpectedly in Calcutta (India), brought simmering opposition to Melkonian to a boil.

According to a nineteenth century Mkhit’arist monk Sargis T’eodorian, the priors on San Lazzaro had come to a common agreement that the money from India would serve two principal goals. First, it would be devoted to build separate living quarters on the island for the care of the older and more infirm monks who had long been suffering under penurious conditions. Second, the monks believed that the bequest would be spent towards “the establishment of a school for the education of the youth of the Armenian nation from among whom only those who had a calling for the priesthood would be recruited into the congregation, while the rest would be repatriated to their homeland to serve as enlighteners for the nation.” When Melkonian refused to honor these arrangements

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35 Giuseppe Cappelletti in his Storia del Cristianesimo (209), published in 1847, appears to have been the first to note this. See also Hovhanness Zavrian, “Mkhit’arian Miabanut’ean Bazhanumĕ” [The Separation of the Mkhit’arist Congregation], Hayrenik Amsagir, No. 3 (1932), 135-136.

36 The inheritance money was for a hundred thousand pieces of eight or silver piasters. The brothers Zaccaria and Joseph Shahriman/Sceriman, scions of one of the wealthiest families from New Julfa and ardent supporters of the congregation, bequeathed it to the order. For the history of this bequest from India and of its wealthy donors, see Sebouh David Aslanian, “Reader Response and the Circulation of Mkhit’arist Books Across the Armenian Communities of the Early Modern Indian Ocean,” Journal for the Society of Armenian Studies, 22 (2013): 58-94 (81-89).

37 Patmut’iwn Muratean ew Haikazean Varzharanats’, 4: 571. ”Խորհին այնժամ միաբանքն առհասարակ եւ որոշեն հաւանութեամբ տանել նախ ծերոց եւ հիւանդաց, արանձին բնակարան մի շինել, ի տածողութիւն հանգստեան ծերոց, և յապաքինութիւն ցաւոց հիւանդաց։ Երկրորդ՝ դպրոց մի հասարակաց հաստատել ի դաստիարակութիւն մանկանց ազգին Հայոց, և ընդունիլ ի նոցանէ ի կրօն միաբանութեան զնոսա միայն, որք կոչումն ունէին. իսկ մնացեալսն դարձուցանել ի հայրենիս իւրեանց, ի լուսաւորութիւն ազգին։“
and, instead, gave the fortune on an interest-bearing loan to a local Armenian merchant, Marchese Giovanni di Serpos (Յովհաննէս Սերբոսեան), the disgruntled monks took action. Thirty-nine-year-old Minas Gasparian of Artvin, who is reckoned to have been the mastermind, and the younger Astuatsatur Babikian (Deodato Babik) of New Julfa, headed the charge against the Abbot. In 1772, they called for a general assembly of the monks, formally known as a “chapter” or “capitolo” and later forced Melkonian to put his policies and his lifetime appointment to a popular vote. When the latter refused, knowing full well that a majority of ten out of nineteen monks on the island wished him to step down, the monks forcibly relieved Melkonian of his duties. Shortly afterwards, they announced to the others that Mkhit’ar’s successor was no longer in power and even went so far as to place him under house arrest.\(^38\) In a previously unconsulted first-person narrative to which we will return in the concluding section of this essay, Abbot Melkonian provides the following graphic description of what happened in a letter to the Cardinals of the De Propaganda Fide:

Thus, notwithstanding [what was said above], in middle of the night, having closed the gates of the monastery and with the keys in their hands, ten of the younger monks assembled and invited all the others to join but could only persuade four others to join them. And thus holed up in the so-called chapter [capitolo] following various confused and incoherent speeches and debates among themselves, they proposed my deposition and put it to a vote. With twelve votes, so they said, they had me deposed. Then they came in full force into my room, and entering in they locked the door, taking the key from the lock. Then after giving me notice of their decree of having deposed me from my office, and of not recognizing me anymore as their superior, they ordered me to vacate my room, leaving all the insignia of my authority behind. I said to them that I have higher superiors than them on whom I depend, and without their order I do not recognize their chapter as legitimate. They replied that I absolutely had to obey and go out... so I left the chamber, but before leaving they made me leave all the keys in my office, and all alone I was left to retire to a room assigned by them where they brought me no more than just a bed. Then, they went to dinner and in the refectory they announced that I had been deposed and that in the meantime a deputy friar had been appointed until the election of new Abbot. They also told me that for one or two days neither I nor any of the monks who opposed them should leave the monastery, and go

\(^38\) The first and to date most serious study of the events on the island is Carlo L. Curiel, “La Fondazione della Colonia Armena in Trieste,” in Archeografo Triestino, 1929-1930, 339-379. This was followed by Hovhanness Zavrian, “Mkhit’arian Miabanut’ean Bazhanumé” [The Separation of the Mkhit’arist Congregation], Hayrenik Amsagir, No. 2 (1931), 97-109, No. 3 (1932) pp. 133-146. Neither study seems to have attracted much attention. My account below partly relies on these excellent studies but supplements them whenever possible by directly consulting the Inquisitori di Stato folders in busta 876 and 538.
to Venice, and therefore kept the doors of the monastery closed, and the keys in their power.  

This brazen move opened the way for the unprecedented interference into the island’s internal affairs of the secular authorities from the mainland led by the shadowy body known as the Inquisitori di Stato. Created in 1539 by the Council of Ten to “safeguard the secrecy of state affairs” and initially called the “Inquisitors against the disclosure of Secrets,” the Inquisitori di Stato was a secretive body made up of a Supreme Tribunal of three magistrates and, at least, one officer in Venice known as the “footman of the Heads” (fante de cai), whose job it was to execute the Tribunal’s decisions, as well as collect and report information. The Inquisitori’s jurisdiction and activities covered many areas of life in Venice ranging from state security to domestic and foreign espionage. As one scholar has recently put it, “nothing and nobody escaped the ears and eyes of their spies. Their confidenti were ubiquitous... and reported on anyone and anything that could pose a threat.” Gamblers, prostitutes, impostors, troublemakers, ambassadors, and foreign spies, all these fell under...
the watchful and seemingly omnipresent gaze of the Inquisitori. Even Armenian priests did not escape their attention.

Not surprisingly, soon after the removal of Abbot Melkonian, rumor of these events drifted across the lagoon and came to the attention of the Inquisitori’s Supreme Tribunal, as well as of the Patriarch of Venice, neither of which easily brooked dissent in their realm. According to a report submitted to the Tribunal on 20 March 1773 by its most dreaded fante de cai, Cristofolo de Cristofoli, who represented the Inquisitors during this period, a small contingent of Venetian forces, accompanied by Cristofoli, landed on the island and immediately arrested the culprits, restoring Melkonian to power.43 In addition to Gasparian and Babikian, Cristofoli listed the following eight other monks by name in his report: P. Gomidas Uschiudarluogh (Հայր Կոմիտաս Իւսկիւտարլի), P. Luca di Simone (Հայր Ղուկաս Սիմոնեան), P. Antonio Ucicardas (Հայր Անտոն Իւչքարտաշեան), P. Davide Ucicardas (Հայր Դավիդ Իւչքարտաշեան), P. Luca di Simone (Հայր Պետրոս Մարտիկենց), P. Nicoło Pusa (Նիկողայոս Բուզայեան, 1739-1803), P. Stefano Aconz (Հայր Ստեփաննոս Կիւվեր Ագոնց, 1740-1824), and P. Paolo Meher (Պողոս Մեհերեան, 1729-1814).44 All ten had plotted Melkonian’s downfall and were given several days to rethink their actions and repent. During that time, the island remained under total lockdown as Venetian forces cut off communications with the mainland.45

Christofoli paid another visit to San Lazzaro on 25 March to inform the Abbot of Patriarch Giovanni Bragadin’s planned visit on 13 April. He wasted no time in carrying out the Patriarch’s orders of relieving Deodato Babikian, then a lecturer of philosophy on the island, and Step’annos Agonts’, the superior of the novices joining the Congregation, of their duties.46 He also learned during this visit that eight of the ten monks behind the conspiracy

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43 Report of Cristofolo de Cristofoli, 16 March 1773 in Inq. di Stato, b. 876. The papers in this folder are unpaginated and can be located by date.

44 Ibid. For additional information on these monks, including the Armenian originals of their names, dates of birth, and death wherever available, I have relied on Anonym. “Mkhit’arean amboghj hark’,” [All the Fathers of the Mkhit’arists] Bazmavep (1901): 216-226. It is interesting to note that the compiler of this list appears to have intentionally left out dates of death for those members who went over to the Trieste side and remained there.


46 Agonts’ was an early coconspirator in the coup to overthrow Melkonian but decided to break ranks with Gasparian and Babikian and switched sides to being one of Melkonian’s most loyal followers. He replaced Melkonian in 1800 as the congregation’s third abbot and crowned his intellectual achievements by authoring a trailblazing multivolume work titled Geography of the Four Parts of the World (Աշխարհագրութիւն չորից մասանց աշխարհի) as well as the first published biography of Abbot Mkhit’ar, The History of the Life and Times of the Lord Mkhit’ar of Sebastea, Religious Master and Abbot (Պատմութիւն Կենաց եւ Վարուց Տեառն Մխիթարայ Սեբաստացիոյ Րաբունապետի եւ Աբբայի), published in 1810 on the island.
to topple Melkonian, including Agonts', had caved in and repented. Gasparian and Babikian, on the other hand, were steadfast in their conviction. At this point, the Inquisitor's footman promptly ordered the eight remorseful coup plotters to give a full account of their actions to Patriarch Bragadin, which they agreed to do orally and in person. He also succeeded in securing the agreement of the monks to “hand over peacefully four pistols and a sword, which they told me were used to protect their monastery.”

Once the situation on the island had been pacified, none other than the Patriarch of Venice himself paid a ceremonial visit to San Lazzaro. Giuseppe Cappelletti, in his now-forgotten volume from 1840, *Storia del Cristianesimo*, describes the events best:

The 13th of April finally arrived. It was the third day of the feast of Easter: in a public and solemn form, the patriarch went on his established visit, accompanied by his cortège and with the footman [i.e., Cristofoli] provided to him by the tribunal of the inquisitors of state. The Patriarch was welcomed as befitting his dignity. He celebrated the holy mass inside the church, administered the holy Eucharist to all professed clergy, novices, and laymen. After the local and royal visit, he turned to the personal visits. He began by requesting from each one [of the monks] the profession of faith and the promise of obedience to his commands, then pronounced a solemn decree by which he suspended from any sacred ministry all and each of the rebellious and seditious monks who had dared to attempt so much against their rightful superior, and threatened them with even more serious canonical penalties, even by means of the secular authorities if in the future they refused to render to the same Abbot their due obedience. Following such a decree, the guilty ones threw themselves at the feet of the patriarch, displaying signs of repentance, begging forgiveness for their enormous error, and uttering words of respect and submission to the Abbot. With this they were freed from being suspended from clerical services. However, the threat of suspension was not fully lifted; on the contrary the culprits were more strictly inculcated with

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“And, thus, once I reminded all of them of their dutiful and respectful obedience towards their leader, I ordered them to adhere to the public commands and for the sake of the public good, peacefully they handed over four pistols and a sword which they told me were used to protect their monastery. For this reason, two pistols were already in the same convent and two were given for the same purpose by Signore Serpos. In addition, there was also an arquebus, which they also said, was given for safekeeping by a foreigner. All of this I report to you in conformity to your venerable orders. 1773, 27 March.”
the obligation to obey their superiors and warned of the prohibition of further seditious gatherings.48

The fate of the two recalcitrant ringleaders, who presumably had demurred from offering the Patriarch his wished-for “promise of obedience to his commands,” was sealed more than a full month after the Patriarch’s visit. Once again, it was left to Cristofoli to impose stern discipline. On the evening of 16 May, a patriarchal secretary (curtore) and the Inquisitor’s footman arrived at the monastery and, in the presence of seniors of the congregation, had the two above-mentioned monks summoned. Cristofoli then ordered the two to return and place in the hands of the Abbot the letters of recommendation (lettere credenziali) they had violently taken from him as well as “all the seditious correspondence with the individuals of the Monastery and also with some other persons from the outside.”49

According to Cappelletti, Father Minas obeyed this command, but Babik refused to do so “pretending not to understand the orders with vain excuses.”50 He was finally subdued, and it was discovered that two Armenians outside of the congregation had also played a role in

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48 Cappelletti in his Storia del Cristianesimo, 211-212. “Giunse alla fine il di 13 Aprile: era la terza festa di Pasqua. In forma pubblica e solenne si portò il patriarca alla visita decretata; lo accompagnava la sua corte; il tribunale dell’inquisitori di stato lo aveva sussidiato altresì del suo fante. Fu accolto come alla sua dignità convenivasi; entro in chiesa, celebrò il santo sacrifizio, amministrò la santa Eucaristia a tutti i cherici profesi, ai novizi, ai laici. Fatta la visita locale e reale, passò alla personale. Cominciò coll’esigere da ciascheduno la professione di fede e la promessa di obbedienza ai suoi comandi. Quindi pronunziò solenne decreto con cui sospese da qualunque sacro ministero tutti e ciascheduno dei monaci ribelli e sediziosi, che avevano osato attentare cotanto contro il loro legittimo superiore, e li minacciò di ancor più gravi pene canoniche, anche per mezzo del braccio secolare ove in avvenire avessero ricusato di prestare al medesimo abate la dovuta obbedienza. In seguito di siffatto decreto vennero i colpevoli ai piedi del patriarca, monstrando segni di pentimento, implorando dell’ enorme lor fallo, e proferendo parole di rispetto e di sommisione all’abate. Con ciò ottennero d’essere scolti dalla sospensione; ma non fu tolto, anzi fu loro viepiù strettamente inculcato l’obbligo dell’obbedienza al loro superiore e la proibizione di ulteriori combriccole sediziose.”

49 Cappelletti, Storia del Cristianesimo, 212. “Quindi il fante del tribunale intimò loro il supremo ordine di restituire e depositare nelle mani dell’abate stesso le lettere credenziali, che a lui violentemente avevano carpito, nonché tutti li scritti di sediziosa corrispondenza cogli individui del monastero e con qualunque altra persona del di fuori.”

50 Ibid. “Ubbidi a questo comando il padre Minas, ma il Babik se ne ricusava or fingendo di non intendere ora cercando sottrarsi con vane scuse. Vi fu alla fine costretto, e si scoprì, che alla loro scandalosa congiura avevano preso parte anche due armeni estranei alla congregazione, il prete Michele di Murat e il secolare conte Zaccaria Sceriman.”
their scandalous conspiracy: the priest Michele di Murat (see below) and the secular count Zaccaria Sceriman.\textsuperscript{51}

The patriarchal representative then gave the Abbot two decrees from the patriarch, ordering the summary expulsion of the two subversive monks. Gasparian and Babikian were therein “declared reckless, seditious, suspended from church services, demoted from the rank of monks, and condemned to dress in the habit of secular Armenian priests.”\textsuperscript{52} The respective decrees of suspension (\textit{sospensione a Divinis}) were even given to each of them, and the patriarchal punishment was carried out. Afterwards, gondolas arranged to transport the two convicts were instructed to wait while they went to their rooms to gather every scrap of paper containing writings that were deposited in a sealed chest (\textit{in un baule suggellato}) and handed over to the Abbot.\textsuperscript{53} These papers, it seems, were subsequently placed in the State Archives of Venice where they are still preserved.\textsuperscript{54} Once the paperwork of the seditious monks was confiscated, Cristofoli himself accompanied the perpetrators to the threshold of exile. The first to be banished was Deodato Babikian, who was taken by the

\textsuperscript{51} Count Zaccaria Sceriman (also spelled Seriman) was a well-known literary figure in Venice and a member of the Julfan Armenian family of diamond merchants who had settled down in Venice in 1698 but had branches residing in Iran, the Russian Empire, as well as India. It was two brothers of this family’s branch in Calcutta who had left the large bequest to the Mkhit’arists in 1764 (see above). For the family’s history, including its family tree, see Sebouh David Aslanian, \textit{From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 149-158 and Sebouh D. Aslanian and Houri Berberian, “The Sceriman/Shahrimanian family of Julfa,” \textit{Encyclopedea Iranica} (2009). For Zaccaria’s life, but without any mention of his involvement in the 1773 events in San Lazzaro, see D. Maxwell White, \textit{Zaccaria Seriman: The Viaggi di Enrico Wanton, a Contribution to the Study of the Enlightenment in Italy} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961).

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. “Ivi ciascuno di essi nel decreto, che lo riguardava, era dichiarato temerario, sedizioso, sospeso dal sacro ministero, degradato dalla condizione di monaco, e condannato a vestire l’abito di prete armeno secolare.”

\textsuperscript{53} Report of Cristfolo Cristofali, May 16, 1773, Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “…indi essendo loro stata intimata dal curator Patriarcale la sospensione a Divinis, e fatti spogliare delle Divise da Monaci, furono condotti uno per volta in separata Gondola e quivi fermaronsi sino a che ritornato alle loro rispettive stanze raccolsero ogni carta continentie scrittura che portava in un baulle suggellato consegnai all’Abate.”

\textsuperscript{54} I discovered these confiscated materials at the Archivio di Stato di Venezia in 2005. They are stored in two separate boxes in ASV, Miscellanea di Atti Diversi, Manoscritti, filza No. 106-I and 106-II. They contain about twenty of Gasparian’s private letters with his father in Kotorjur in the vilayet of Erzerum, dating back to 1753, as well as manuscript drafts of an Armenian Dictionary and a theological treatise. Yet they do not seem to include any correspondence with the two mainland co-conspirators mentioned by Cappelletti. The letters of Ter Hovsep’ Gasparian, Minas Gasparian’s father, to his son, spanning from 1753 to 1769, are in the first box in an envelope titled “Le Lettere dirette da Don Giuseppe Gasparian al P. Minas (Mechitarista?)”
footman straight to a boat that was to transfer him to Trieste.\textsuperscript{55} Father Minas Gasparian was taken to Trento, and both were ordered by supreme decree to perpetual exile from the city of Venice and from all the domains of the Serene Republic.

Almost two weeks later, Cristofoli returned to the island to finalize the Patriarch’s decision of forgiving the eight repentant monks and allowing them back into the order. His report of 2 June 1773 describes his visit to San Lazzaro on Saturday, 29 May.

I the undersigned footman of the Supreme Tribunal report that on Saturday 29 of the last May I went to the island of the San Lazzaro degli Armeni where I summoned the Abbot and made known to him the order that I had from your most excellencies, namely of immediately freeing the eight monks well-known to him. Once everybody [meaning the eight monks] came before him and myself, I explained to them the will of your excellencies of graciously granting them the restoration of their liberty on the assertions of their father Abbot regarding the repentance of their errors, hoping that they would continuously confirm their obedience and due respect towards their Superior. At which expression, they immediately threw themselves before him and confirmed their profound submission together with an extraordinary happiness.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} Report of Cristfolo Cristofali, May 16, 1773, Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “e ritornato poscia alle Gondole notai prima sopra questa, in cui si trovava il P. Diodato Babigh, e mi feci condurre alla Barca stabilita per Trieste intimando al di lei Padrone chiamato Tommaso Lizza di trasportar detto Padre a Trieste, e intimando pure al Padre istesso di non più trasferirvi negli stati del Dominio veneto per comando Supremo di V.V. E.E.”

\textsuperscript{56} Report of Cristofolo de Cristofoli, June 2, 1773 in Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “Riferisco io sottoscritto fante di codesto Supremo Tribunale come Sabato 29 Maggio decorso mi trasferii all’ Isola di S. Lazaro degli Armeni, ove fatto chiamare l’Abate feci a lui noto il Comando che avevo di V.V. E.E. cioè di rimettere nella prima Libertà gli otto Religiosi ad esso ben noti; per lo che intervenuti tutti alla presenza di lui e di me significai loro la volontà dell’E.E. V.V. di concedergli benignamente ripristinazione in libertà sulle asserzioni del loro Padre Abate riguardo al ravvedimento degli incorsi errori, sperando che sempre più confirmarebbono in essi l’obbedienza, ed il rispetto dovuto verso il lor Superiore. Alle quali espressioni si prostrarono innanzi a lui, e diedero contrassegni sul fatto di profonda rassegnazione insieme e straordinaria allegrezza.”
The very next day, the footman took care of one more unresolved business, namely the matter of the Armenian priest on the mainland, Don. Michiel Murat (Հայր Միքայէլ Մուրատեան). It had become clear from the correspondence seized from the “seditious” monks the week before that Murat was complicit in the conspiracy to unseat Melkonian from the start. On account of this, the Tribunal had resolved to exile the monk for life from “Venice and the domains of the Republic” and had given him “between three and eight days” to leave Venetian territory, risking “the penalty of death if he ever returned.” This set the stage for the Trieste chapter of the Mkhit`arists’ history.

Trieste and Giacomo Casanova

Situated astride the intersection of Latin, Germanic, and Slavic worlds and ideally located to take command of the maritime trade of the Eastern Mediterranean, the region of Trieste (formerly the Venetian territory of Tergestum) had come under the rule of the Habsburg dynasty in 1382. For much of its early history, the city was an unimportant fishing village on the northern armpit of the Adriatic Sea. In the early eighteenth century, it experienced a rapid transformation. Under the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI of Austria, Trieste, along with Fiume (Rijeka), was transformed in 1719 into a “free port,” at a time when Venice’s grip as the regional maritime economic power in the Eastern Mediterranean was loosening. Eager to supplant the former Queen of the Adriatic, Charles VI presided over large-scale infrastructural reforms that improved the transportation and maritime networks of Trieste and made the city into an ideal hub and early modern duty-free port, with incentives

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57 Not much is known about Michiel Murat. According to Sahak Djemjemian, Murat was born in Istanbul in 1729 and ordained a priest on San Lazzaro in 1752. Along with a fellow monk, Gabriel Bedrosian, he was expelled from the island two years after being ordained, following orders from the De Propaganda Fide, the Venetian authorities, and, of course, Abbot Melkonian himself. Sahak Djemjemian, Hovhannes Patkerahan: Namakani (1695-1758) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1988), 264 n. 245. It appears that there were several priests expelled from San Lazzaro during the first decade of Melkonian’s tenure.


“The following day, on Sunday, I personally found the priest Don. Michiel Murat of the Armenian nation and ordered him that by the command of your excellencies, he had to leave Venice and the domains of the Republic between three and eight days under penalty of death if he ever returned and therefore everything was carried out in obedience to the commands of your most excellencies.” 1773, June 2.


60 Ibid., 2.
meant to lure commercially savvy “minority” communities. Trieste also became one of the nodes for the Ostend Company, the Habsburg counterpart to the other European East India Companies, and was made into the “seat of an emergent Austrian navy.” In addition to making the city into a kind of “tax-free zone,” the emperor extended religious toleration to non-Catholic communities such as Sephardic Jews, Orthodox Christians (including Greeks and Serbs) as well as Lutheran Germans whose numbers had risen to 46 in 1756. The results were impressive. From a small town of barely 5,000 citizens at the start of the eighteenth century, Trieste’s population grew by a remarkable fivefold by century’s end.

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The desire to oust Venice from its place as a famed commercial emporium knew few bounds for the Habsburgs. They granted privilege upon privilege to entice to their tax-free haven trading communities with important services to offer. In 1742, Greek Orthodox merchants first began to frequent the city, and six years later they were sizeable enough to have their own church. That same year, Trieste saw the arrival of Orthodox Slavs from Bosnia and Dalmatia.65 As Lois C. Dubin’s impressive study of the Habsburg port’s Jewish community has illustrated, by the mid-eighteenth century, several hundred Jews (mostly Sephardim and by far the city’s largest and most notable minority) had moved to the Habsburg port.66 By contrast, until the late 1760s, not a single Armenian was registered as domiciled there.67

In 1769, the Habsburg court in Vienna undertook efforts to remedy this situation. A Catholic Armenian priest named Giovanni Ariman68 (Յովհաննէս Արիման) first arrived in Venice in 1743, but was among the Armenians in Varadin (Transylvania) for a while before heading to Lvov and finally returning to Vienna. See Ghevond Tahyean, *Mayr Divan Mkhit’arean Venetko i Surb Ghazar, 1707-1773: Tsakmanē ukhtis minjev i bazhanumn Triesta* [Grand Archive of the Mkhit’arists of Venice in San Lazzaro, 1707-1773: From the Origin of this Order until the separation of Trieste] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1930), 238-239. Two or so years later, he was permanently set up in Trieste as the city’s parish priest for the few local Armenian Catholic residents. For his arrival in Rome in 1743, see Djemjemian, *Hovhannes Patkerahan: Namakani*, 110-111.

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66 For the changing figures of the city’s Jewish community, see Dubin, 21.
67 There is, however, an isolated tombstone of an unknown Catholic Armenian priest, Martino Carabeth, buried in one of the city’s cathedrals in 1756. See Anna Krekic and Michela Messina, *Armeni a Trieste tra Settecento e Novecento: L’impronta di Una Nazione* (Trieste: Civico Museo del Castello di Sann Giusto, 2008), 11.
68 Giovanni Ariman is an obscure figure in Armenian history. He was born in Kesaria (now Kayseri in Eastern Turkey) and studied under the Armenian Archbishop, Sargis Saraffian, the primate of Ankara. He seems to have been in search of gainful employment as priest at the Armenian church of the Holy Spirit (*Surb Hogi*) in Amsterdam in the late 1730s and early 1740s, because, in 1743, a Catholic Armenian confidant of Abbot Mkhit’ar in Rome, Hovannes Patkerahan, informed the Abbot that Ariman had just arrived in Rome from Amsterdam with the intent of giving an official profession of the Catholic faith and eventually travelling to Venice to meet Mkhit’ar and become a member of his order. Hovhannes then recalls how Ariman created discord in the community there and eventually left. He appears not to have been accepted into the order by Mkhit’ar on account of already being twenty-eight years old. In a letter from Vienna, dated 13 December 1766, we learn that he was among the Armenians in Varadin (Transylvania) for a while before heading to Lvov and finally returning to Vienna. See Ghevond Tahyean, *Mayr Divan Mkhit’arean Venetko i Surb Ghazar, 1707-1773: Tsakmanē ukhtis minjev i bazhanumn Triesta* [Grand Archive of the Mkhit’arists of Venice in San Lazzaro, 1707-1773: From the Origin of this Order until the separation of Trieste] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1930), 238-239. Two or so years later, he was permanently set up in Trieste as the city’s parish priest for the few local Armenian Catholic residents. For his arrival in Rome in 1743, see Djemjemian, *Hovhannes Patkerahan: Namakani*, 110-111."
communicated the first signs of this new policy of establishing a colony of Armenian entrepreneurs in the Habsburg free port in his missive of September 12 of that year to Abbot Melkonian in Venice. “In order to turn this place more populous,” writes Ariman in his letter, “the Empress has established Trieste as a free city. To this end, [the court] considered that if they were to maintain in Trieste an Armenian priest, it would facilitate the settling down of Armenians here, so that those Armenians who wished to reside in this place would not be deterred from doing so on account of the absence of a priest.”

The residence of the above letter-writer in Trieste, in the fall of 1769, is considered to be the start of the Habsburg port’s tiny Armenian community. Starting from that year, a few “co-nationals” did indeed respond to Ariman’s call by applying for naturalization papers, and several even set up residence in the city. The most notable of these was Giorgio Sarraf or Գեոզու Սարաֆեան (originally from Edessa or Urfa), who, beginning in 1770, was the director of Trieste’s Compagnia d’Egitto and acted as the city’s official interpreter.

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69 This letter is reproduced in part in a selection of archival documents from the Mkhit’arist archives. See Ghevond Tahyean, Mayr Divan Mkht’arean Venetko i Surb Ghazar, 1707-1773, 261. “Կայսերուհին ազատ կացոյց զքաղաք Դրիէսդէին կացոյց զքաղաքի առաջանական սրահում, այսպես էլ հայերից կազմված հայրենիքով պատասխանելի է Դրիէսդէ եւ զհայ քահանայ մի, ինչով երաշխավորել կազմել Դրիէսդէ զգացում հայոց զերկու հարիւր ֆիօրինս ելույթ ճշմարտել իրեն հետազոտորի մոտ զիմաստ ատել ահա առաքեաց զիս ի Դրիէսդէ տալով ինձ զերկու հարիւր ֆիօրինս եկամուտ յամին բացի ողորմութենէ պատարագին մինչեւ զերիս ամս. զի տեսանելով, թէ յաճախից իրեն կամ իրեն կամիցին գալ ի Դրիէսդէ ի մէջ այսչափ ժամանակիս, ունիցիմ միշտ զայն երկու հարիւր, կամ ավելի եւս եկամուտն: Արդ տեսանելով Գերյարգելութեան ձերոյ զհաստատիլ սառ զարմմից եւ րդականացված հաշվառման միջոց միջոցք գալասպանութեան առաջից է Դրիէսդէ իրեն` նիս կահանանոց իր զգացում իրեն` զառաջում հադեսում ծանուցանելու ուղից ի զգացում իրեն` զառաջում հադեսում ծանուցանելու ուղից ի իր զգացում ներս ի տեսանելու ազատ` իր զգացում ներս ի տեսանելու ազատ` իր զգացում ներս ի տեսանելու ազատ` իր զգացում.”

I thank Merujan Karapetyan for this reference.

Mr. Sarum appears to have resided in Trieste for only one year. He moved to Venice the following year and, in short order, relocated with his sons to India, where many years later, as we shall see, one of his sons, Samuel, became a great benefactor for the Mkhit’arist Congregation. In that same year, Trieste welcomed as its latest naturalized Armenian Joannes Ter Raphael Babikian (Giovanni di Raffael), the brother of Deodato Babikian, one of two “seditious” monks exiled from Venice and later for Oriental languages.

71 Not much is known about Sarraf or Saraff. For scattered references, see Curiel, “La Fondazione della Colonia Armena in Trieste,” 346, 348 and especially 370, fn. 33. Sarraf passed on suddenly at age 63, in 1782, and was buried at the Mkhit’arist Church in Trieste. A manuscript containing the births, baptisms, and deaths in Trieste between 1775 and 1809 and preserved in the Mkhit’arist monastery in Vienna (Ms. 454, folios 35 r-36v) has the following entry regarding this merchant: Յամի տեարն 1782. Դեկտեմբեր 29.

72 C.R.S. Intendenza Commerciale per il Litorale in Trieste, b. 594, folio 269 and Tullia Catalan, “Cenni sulla presenza armena a Trieste tra fine Settecento e primo Ottocento” in Storia economica e sociale di Trieste, vol. 1 a cura di Roberto Finze e Giovanni Panjek, 604. "...stabilito in questo porto franco con animo morandi per intraprendere il solito mio carriere di Commercio."

settled in Trieste. Mr. Ter Rafael, or Padre Rafael as he was known in London and Calcutta, was a Julfan merchant of considerable renown and wealth. He had resided in Bengal and Surat in the East Indies for twenty-four years and was embroiled in a high-stakes and historic trial in London that nearly brought down the English East India Company.74 After winning his trial in 1771, he had chosen to settle down with his family in Venice, where his younger brother Deodato was an up-and-coming Mkhit’arist priest. His decision, in October of 1773, to abandon Venice and seek residency in Trieste should not come as a surprise, given the expulsion of his brother in May of that year. In the eyes of many, it was also a harbinger of things to come, at least, as far as Trieste’s relationship with Venice was concerned. Slowly, a nucleus of a tiny mercantile community was forming in the Adriatic port, thus making the Habsburg authorities ever more eager to lure to their growing city Armenian merchants from neighboring ports of Venice, as well as Istanbul and Izmir. The timing of Babikian and Gasparian’s exile from Venice and their later arrival in Trieste aligned with this important turning point in Trieste’s relationship with both Venice and Armenian merchants.

Babikian arrived in Trieste on May 19, a few days after embarking on a ship departing Venice for Trieste. His fellow monk Gasparian, who presumably had found out about his co-conspirator’s destination and travelled there directly from Trento, soon, on June 9, 1773, joined him. Only two weeks after their arrival, the defrocked monks received support from Trieste’s two leading Armenians, the priest Ariman and the influential and wealthy businessman, Saraff. Through them and accompanied by supporting affidavits testifying to their good credentials as bona fide Catholic priests sent to them by Mkhit’arist missionaries.

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74 Shortly after meeting him for the first time on 16 September 1777, governor Karl Graf Zinzendorf wrote in his diary that “In the afternoon, Ricci brought over the Armenian Babich, who resided for 24 years in the East Indies and has won a lawsuit in London against the East India Company, and who has an English air about him. His trial is written about in the political history of Bengal.” "Après-midi, Ricci m’amena l’Arménien Babich qui a vécu 24 ans aux Indes Orientales, qui a gagné à Londres un procès contre la Compagnie des Indes, qui a l’air tout anglois. De son procès il est parlé dans l’histoire civile du Bengale.” Karl Graf Zinzendorf, **Europäische Aufklärung Zwischen Wien und Triest. Die Tagebücher des Gouverneurs Karl Graf Zinzendorf, 1776-1782**, vol. 2 (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2009), 1777, 39. The trial in question occurred before Parliament in London and involved four Armenian business partners, or gomasthas, of William Bolts, the Dutch merchant and investor in the English East India Company. They were summarily arrested and tortured in Faizabad (Bengal), where they were trading, by the English governor of Bengal, Harry Verelst, in 1767. Two of the four Armenians made history by traveling to London in 1769, at the behest and with the coordination of their senior partner, Bolts, and filed a highly sensational lawsuit against the Company and its governor, which they won in 1777. The case was heard before parliamentary sessions and became celebrated through many books on the Company’s reputation for corruption. It acted as a pretext for the limitations imposed on the Company by Parliamentary intervention. For a reliable account of the case, see Willem G. J. Kuiters, “Law and Empire: The Armenians Contra Verelst, 1769-1777,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 28: 2 (200): 1-22, and ibidem, *The British In Bengal, 1756-1773: A Society in transition seen trough the biography of a Rebel: William Bolts (1739-1808).* The book, “political history of Bengal,” mentioned by Zinzendorf is most likely William Bolts’s famous work published only two years earlier under the title *Considerations on India Affairs, Part II: Containing a complete vindication of the author from the malicious and groundless charges of Mr. Verelst.*
in Elizavetpol in Transylvania with whom they had maintained a traffic of letters, the two presented their case to the port city’s Chamber of Commerce:

We the undersigned testify as the truth to whom it may concern that Fathers Minas Casparian and Deodato Babich are well known to us as being people of exemplary conduct and also of hailing from a wealthy family of merchants. We also testify that we know a congregation of pious monks of the Armenian nation have gathered and built a convent in Venice where they attract novices of Armenians from the East and where they have built a school and where they print various books in the Armenian language, and that from this convent missionaries travel to the East to convert the heretical Armenian nation to the Roman Catholic religion. Both in Venice and the East, these monks lived off the gifts and donation left to them by many Armenian nationals in such a manner that the monastery became celebrated (insigne) only thanks to the wealth bequeathed to them from the East. And given that humble congregations could be established wherever, they [the two monks] have made their desire to establish a similar congregation in this free port known to the religious authorities. And not lacking in neither knowledge of the Armenian and Latin languages nor the riches of their wealthy relatives, as we have noted, they have requested this very attestation and we, for the simple truth without any ulterior motives have made them the present certificate written in our own hand. Trieste 22 July 1773.

Giovanni Ariman
Armenian priest
Giorgio Saraff
Imperial Interpreter


Giovanni Ariman
curato Armeno
Giorgio Saraff
Interprete Cesare”
It is unclear whether the authorities in Venice anticipated that with an official sospensione a Divinis from the Patriarch, the monks would be deprived of their only source of livelihood, namely preaching or engaging in religious work of any sort. What is certain, however, is that, much to their chagrin, news arrived from the Venetian consul in Trieste, Marco Monti, that Babikian and Gasparian had not only joined forces in Trieste and were thriving but were slowly beginning to attract to Trieste the crème de la crème of Venice’s Armenians. Moreover, they were also secretly communicating with sympathizers back at the convent in San Lazzaro as well as with the latter’s monastic branch in Transylvania. That this was in fact happening is conveyed in an alarming letter to the Tribunal of the Inquisition from none other than Abbot Melkonian, sometime probably in the summer or fall of 1774.

As a matter of fact, the above-noted two expellees have not only tried to separate from this place some Armenian families who have settled in this city along with their funds and trades that are advantageous to the state [of Venice], but they are also attempting to seduce even the resident monks of Venice to detach themselves from the body of this community and to unite with them to reinforce their faction. They have carried this out by means of a suspected secret correspondence through which they have successfully lured Padre Davide Ucicardas [Հայր Դաւիթ Իւչքատաշեան]. The latter, being sent by me to Constantinople after a convenient request he made to me, arbitrarily went against the duties of his obedience and disembarked in Trieste to join with them.  

The priest mentioned here, Davide Ucicardas, appears to have been an ingenious inventor and is credited with casting printing matrices and punches for Armenian letters with which the Trieste faction was able to set up its own press in 1775. He was able to leave San Lazzaro after being covertly contacted by a certain Hakopjan di Hermet, a Julfan physician in Venice who was then the trusted medical doctor for the monks and, as such, had relatively unrestricted access to the island, despite a communication embargo in place after the coup. Hermet’s insistence to the Abbot that Ucicardas needed to change climate

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76 Undated letter of Stefano Melchiore (Step’annos Melkonian) to the Tribunal of the Inquisition (most likely written in the later part of 1774). ASV Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “Di fatto i suddetti due espulsi oltre distaccamento che tentano di fare di alcune Famiglie Armene stabilite in questa Capitale co i loro fondi e commerci vantaggiosi allo stato; cercano sedurre anche i Monaci qui dimoranti e distaccandoli dal corpo di questa Comunità, unirli seco loro a rinforzo della loro fazione: Siccome è riuscito ad essi per via di secreto carteggio (di cui si ha probabile sospetto) adescar il P. Davide Ucicardàs, il quale essendo stato da me per le sue importune spedito per Costantinopoli andò arbitrariamente, e contro doveri della sua obbedienza a sbarcar in Trieste, e collegarsi con loro.”

without delay in order to be cured from his (feigned) illness persuaded Melkonian to allow
the priest to board a ship to his native Istanbul.

The surreptitious traffic of secret letters continued undetected after Davide Ucicardas’s
near-literal jumping ship, in October of 1773. Two more defectors from San Lazzaro
succeeded to join their brethren in the Habsburg port the following year. The catalyst for
their departure was, once again, a member of the same family of Julfan physicians and, in
this case, the Basra- or Julfa-born Petros Hermetian or Pietro Hermet who, like his father
Hakob, had free access to the island as a medical doctor.78 During the summer and fall of
1773, both Melkonian, as well as the authorities on the mainland, appear to have been in
a state of crisis. Venice’s attraction to Armenian merchants as a cosmopolitan seaport was
hanging in the balance. One spy report after another, drifting in from Trieste, underlined the
danger posed by the two exiled Armenian monks. An anonymous report, sent from Trieste
on 25 November of 1773, warned the Tribunal of the “great destruction” (“la gran rovina”)
that Babikian and Gasparian were causing to Venice, as well as San Lazzaro, noting how
Giorgio Sarraf was assisting them in every possible way. The author of the report emphasized
how he was moved by his “zeal for the public good and for justice to notify [the following
goings on] to your Excellencies so that you may put a stop to such harm that by the day
grows bigger and threatens the welfare of the above-mentioned convent and also of the
Armenian nation whose life depends on the subsistence of the Armenian fathers in that
city.”79 Among the dangers listed in his report are the slow but worrisome departure of well-
to-do Armenian families (such as that of Joannes Ter Rafael) from Venice and other ports
in the Levant to the Habsburg port and the reluctance of Armenian merchants to bequeath
funds to Melkonian and his flock.80 The outcome of the reports prompted the Tribunal to
appeal to Venice’s consul, Monti, for assistance. In the spring of 1774, the latter hatched an
unlikely plot to bring the work of these obstreperous preachers to an end. He suggested

78 Melkonian explains this, in his letter to the Inquisitors. See undated letter of Stefano Melchiore, ASV
Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “E al presente due altri Monaci di questo Monastero il P. Antonio Ucicardàs, e ’l P.
Nicolò Pusa, ravveduti già de loro passati trascorsi, ed acquietati, mossi dalla fama della nuova impresa
de sudetti espulsi, e forse anche eccitati nel segreto abboccamento tenuto con un tal Pietro di Giona, de
cui con ragionevol fondamento si può sospettare d’esser stato da colà specialmente incaricato per tal
oggetto o con lettere o con verbal commissione si cambiarono in un tratto, e sollecitarono instantemente
a disfarsi da questa Comunità, e andarsene come si presume a Trieste: benché dal canto mio non
lasci intanto di adoperare con essi tutti i Religiosi e caritatevoli mezzi per distorli dalla loro precipitosa
risoluzione, e forse ravveduti si rimetteranno a miglior via.”

79 Anonymous report sent from Trieste on 25 November of 1773, ASV Inq. di Stato, b. 876. “...son in obbligo
per il zelo, di ben Publico, e di giustizia, avvisar la vostra Eccellenza per mettere argine a tanto male
giornalmente dilatato alla rovina del sopraddetto convento, ed anche della nazione Armena la di cui vita
dipende quasi dalla sussistenza de sudetti Padri Armeni di cotesta città.”

80 Ibid. “E di più moltissime famiglie Armene vengono a Venezia per l’amor de Padri Armeni di S. Lazaro,
quando dunque sentiranno il guaio della loro discordia cagionata da questi due Padri, aborrirano da
venire, e piuttosto quelle che sono venute si tentavano tornar a dietro.”
to the Inquisitori that they hire as a spy a Venetian adventurer who had recently arrived in Trieste, after spending twenty years doing the “Grand Tour” across European capitals while in exile from his native Venice. This adventurer was none other than the internationally renowned womanizer, adventurer, and man of letters, Giacomo Casanova. According to one nineteenth-century commentator, it “seemed to the Consul that Casanova who had free access to the house of Saraf could take back the Armenians to San Lazzaro, unburdening the Republic of great anxiety.”

Since his infamous escape from the Piombi prison in 1756, Casanova had, on several occasions, tried to ingratiate himself with the Venetian authorities by offering to put his services as a “secret agent” and mole at their disposal in exchange for a general pardon for himself, allowing him to return to his city of birth. For instance, while residing in London, in November of 1763, he volunteered to work as an informant for the Venetian ambassador there but with no concrete results. When the opportunity arose to work for the Inquisitori in Trieste, in the fall of 1774, he readily accepted. The result was that he wrote a steady stream of reports to his spymasters that have survived in the Venetian state archives and provide a rare window into the activities of the renegade monks in Trieste. Casanova also devoted the last chapter of his twelve-volume French autobiography, *L’histoire de ma vie* (*The History of My Life*), to his time as an infiltrator, paying visits and befriending Trieste’s newly arrived monks, who, unbeknownst to authorities in Venice, were in the process of purchasing a large villa and convent and, with the technical support of Davide Ucicardas, were preparing to establish their own printing press—something that even their mother convent would not have till at least 1789. In

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chapter ten of volume twelve of his memoirs, Casanova informs his readers that the Tribunal of the Inquisitori had given Consul Monti a hundred silver ducats to be offered to him “to encourage me...that I could hope for everything from the clemency of the Tribunal if I could resolve the great problem of the Armenians, of which the Consul could give me the details.”

He then provides the relevant background, adding that having failed in their objective of making the expelled monks “return to Venice” by “direct means, that is, through the action of their Abbot,” the State Inquisitors, according to Casanova, had taken recourse to “secret means to raise obstacles to them in Trieste which would discourage them from remaining there.” This is how the last major adventure of his eventful life, his final “secret mission,” was hatched. Casanova warmed up to the monks “by striking up an acquaintance with them on the pretext of going to see their Armenian types, which they had already had cast, and a stock of precious stones and minerals which had come to them from Constantinople.” He succeeded in winning over their trust in only a week. It did not take too long for him, however, to realize that this mission was futile. The monks spurned his friendly recommendations of begging the Abbot’s forgiveness and returning to the bosom of their order in Venice. On the contrary, they became more adamant and explained to him that they might consider reconciliation if the Abbot were to “recover the four hundred thousand ducati which he had entrusted to the Marchese Serpos at four per cent interest.” In addition, the monks also demanded that Abbot Melkonian institute certain reforms to the governance of the monastery, a topic on which Casanova does not elaborate. In any event, this last part proved impossible to resolve, thus leaving Casanova’s mission a dismal failure.

Perhaps the most useful takeaway from Casanova’s account of the genesis of the Trieste order is the lucidity with which he addresses the real stakes of the intrigue. The Habsburgs not only acceded to Gasparian’s and Babikian’s request for asylum at once “but also granted them privileges,” Casanova writes. The Venetian philanderer and bon vivant makes it abundantly clear his History of My Life that, as far as the Habsburgs were concerned, it was “a matter of ousting Venice from her place in this branch of commerce [the printing of Armenian books] and giving it to Austria.” The documentation on these monks preserved in the State Archives in Vienna makes it evident that the principal reason as to why these two expellees had little trouble in acquiring a captive audience with the Habsburg court in Vienna and its representatives in Trieste, such as the city’s governor (the famed count Karl Zinzendorf), was the allure of commerce, not only of printing but also of long-distance trade with the East in which Armenians in the Mediterranean basin had long established a reputation as being necessary go-betweens. In a petition addressed to the Chamber of Commerce, in October of 1773, the monks detail the reasons for their expulsion from the Monastery of San Lazzaro, to which we will turn later, and then make a solid case for why

85 Ibid., 200.
86 Ibid., 201.
87 Ibid., 200.
their settlement in the Habsburg port city would be beneficial to the Austrian authorities:

Two [priests] in particular moved to this free port with the idea of taking with them their rich families, partly residing in Venice and partly still in the East. In this manner, [they believed] it would be easy for those who are here to recall their wealthy families to settle down in this free port and that this would be more so the case given that the Armenian nation loves having its priests at hand [wherever it is settled]. In a manner similar to how the congregation was created in Venice, the monks thought it would be possible to do the same here.88

This petition had its desired effect. In 1775, Empress Maria Theresa issued a special edict granting singular privileges to Babikian, Gasparian, and two others, who had since jumped ship from Venice, recognizing them all as Austrian subjects and allowing them to build a new branch of the Mkhit'arist Congregation.89 The most important privileges in this 53-article edict, issued on 30 May 1775, concern the right of the fledgling congregation to run its own press (articles 24 to 30), to enjoy a thirty-year monopoly of printing and selling books in the Armenian language, to freely practice their Uniate Catholic faith, and to operate a school for the children of their nation.90 Interestingly reminiscent of the East India Company’s 1688 “Treaty with the Armenian Nation,” the edict also granted Armenian merchants the privilege of being full Austrian subjects, of owning and leasing ships in the maritime trade of Trieste.
and of flying the imperial Austrian colors (articles 40 to 48).

The edict appears to have been issued with the anticipation that the ranks of Armenian merchants in Trieste would quickly swell and “great multitudes” of Armenians would settle down in the Adriatic port. In this connection, article 50 makes the provision to allow the Armenian nation in Trieste to run its affairs in accordance to its own constitution, to elect a “governor or secular head,” and to have representation on the city’s Chamber of Commerce.

The upshot of these privileges was to be a boon for the new branch of the congregation and a dismal letdown to the Hapsburgs. Instead of seeing multitudes arriving to its shores, or of attracting many Armenian families from neighboring Venice, only a total of thirty to forty Armenians set up shop in the Adriatic port. The long-sought-for printing press began operating the same year as Maria Theresa’s edict. It churned out considerable number of books, many addressed to readers in the Ottoman capital and written in Armeno-Turkish, the vernacular language most accessible to the greatest number of Armenian readers in Asia Minor. Clearly the monks were expecting to turn a quick profit through their publishing enterprise, and that is why perhaps they began to cater also to the new secular readership across the port cities of the early modern Armenian diaspora, offering them books on creative and novel topics and unfamiliar histories. As early as 1783, they also started to

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92 AT-OeStA/FHKA NHK Kommerz Lit Akten 724, folio 94v. Article 50 states: “Dopocché si saranno moltiplicati li stabilimenti in Trieste delle famiglie armene al segno, che costituischino un Corpo Nazionale, li conferiamo ora per allora la facoltà di eleggere sotto il Presidio di un Consigliere della Nostra Intendenza Commerciale un Governatore, o Capo secolare, e due Assistenti o Deputati...”

93 Catalan in her archivally grounded study provides a figure of between 26 and 39 Armenian residents in Trieste around the time of Maria Theresa’s edict “Nel 1776 risultavano immigrati in città 39 armeni, e l’anno seguente se ne contavano 26.” Catalan, “Cenni sulla presenza armena a Trieste,” 606. In contrast, and without citing any sources, H.S.G. in “T’riesti hay gakht’aakanut’iwnê,” Handes Amsorea (February, 1889): 22-23 (22), claims an amplified figure of 25 to 30 Armenian families or 100 to 150 individuals by the end of the century.

accept for publication works of translation from European languages, such as the two-volume *Vipasanut’iwn Ameriko* (1784), the *History of America*, recently published in London by the Scottish Enlightenment figure William Robertson and specially commissioned for publication by none other than Joannes Ter Rafael Babikian whose life we have touched on above. The Trieste fathers also published the translations from various languages, including English, French, and Italian by the Julfan merchant Marcara Shahrimanian. These bold new works of literature written or translated by the new merchant, “nouveau literate,” class counted among their titles Pétis de la Crois’s *Histoire du Grand Jenghizchan* of 1710, published as *The History of Genghis Khan the Great, the first Emperor of the Former Moghuls and Tatars. Comprising of Four Letters* (Trieste, 1788), and Louis le Comte’s (1655–1728) popular *Lettres sur les Cérémonies de la Chine* published in Trieste in 1783.95

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95 These merchant-writers, who were on the whole not formally trained like the church-educated erudite scribes or vardapets (archimandrites) who dominated the profession of writing in Armenian society, were the Armenian counterparts to the eighteenth century writers in the world of Islam that Dana Sajdi describes as belonging to “nouveau literacy.” The latter were authors of “unusual backgrounds” who during the eighteenth century had entered “into the space that had historically been arrogated to the ‘ulama,’ the people who know.” Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 6. The title of Louis le Comte’s work is Թուղթք զչինաց or Թուղթք պատուական Հօր լուդովիկոսի Քօմթեանց շուրջ զորպիսու[թեամ]բ երկրին Սինէացվոց, որ է Չին, կամ Չինումաչին.
However, neither these publications nor their hopes of earning income by running a grammar school for the youth of Armenian merchants in Istanbul appears to have paid off. Facing an impending financial crisis, Babikian and Gasparian had no choice but to fall back on support from Armenian merchants. In 1785, they sent a delegation of two monks, Fathers Nikoghayos Puzayan and Poghos Mēhērian (both in the group of ten who joined Gasparian and Babikian’s plot to overthrow Melkonian in 1773 but had only later managed to join them in Trieste) to India in search of a generous endowment. This mission is mostly important in history not because of the money it raised for the fledgling congregation but because it led indirectly to the establishment of the most important institution associated with the name of the Mkhit’arist Congregation, namely the *Collegio Armeno Moorat-Raphael* established by money given by Eduard Raphael Gharameants’ and later Samuel Mkrtich Mooratian, the first of whom was contacted by Puzayan and Mēhērian in 1785 and left a large endowment to the Trieste monks as anticipated. This money was predicated on the classical Armenian translation of Charles Rollin’s *Histoire romaine depuis la fondation de Rome jusqu’à la bataille d’Actium, c’est à dire jusqu’à la fin de la République* (Roman history from the foundation of Rome to the battle of Actium, that is, until the end of the Republic), which Eduard Raphael had entrusted to the monks in Trieste in exchange for a promise of endowment for a college established and managed by the Trieste monks. The monks, in particular Minas Gasparian who had undertaken the task of translation, accepted the initial money but reneged on their promise. Eventually, a considerable fortune was bequeathed to Puzayan and Mherian by Eduard Raphael in his will of 1791, but the money ultimately found its way back to Melkonian and the Mkhit’arists in San Lazzaro, when Mēhērian and Puzayan decided to jump ship again, this time back to their mother convent in Venice.

In the midst of these financial difficulties, Babikian and Gasparian also sent one of their representatives (Father Anania Jambazian, 1732-1803) to Istanbul to raise money there for the struggling order. Jambazian took out huge loans in the Ottoman capital by

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96 Their journey to India is told in a recently published travelogue written by Mēhērian. See *Patmut’iwn Varuts’ Hayr Poghos Vardapeti Mēhērian Sharagreal ยวรมะ 1811, Venetik, 1 Vans Srbhyn Ghazaru* [History of the Life of Vardapet Poghos Mēhērian, written by himself in 1811, Venice, at the Monastery of Saint Lazarus], edited by Gevorg Ter Vardanian, part 3, *Bazmavep*, 2007, 8-130.

97 For Raphael’s will and its provisions on establishing a college in Europe, see “Last will and testament of Edward Raphael, Esq. of Madras, 1792,” in British Library, India Office Records (IOR) “Madras Wills,” L/AG/34/29, #125, folio 49. The most authoritative account of the history of the Raphael and Muratian wills and how the money ended up going from the Trieste faction back to Venice is Sargsis Teodorian’s magisterial and authoritative, *Patmut’iwn Muratian ew Haykazian Varzharanats’ ew Mkhit’arian Abbayits’* (Paris, 1866) 4 vols. See also the more accessible but derivative account in Barsegh V. Sargisian, *Erkhariwrma Mey krt’akan gortsuneut’iwn Venetkoy Mkhit’arean Miabanut’ean* [Bicentenary of the Educational Enterprise of the Mkhit’arist Congregation of Venice] (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1936), especially chapters 8 and 10. I have also covered the story in detail in my unpublished essay, “Silver, Missionaries, and Print: A Global Microhistory of Early Modern Networks of Circulation and the Armenian Translation of Charles Rollin’s *History of Rome.*”
issuing promissory notes payable in Trieste to certain families from the capital’s wealthy Armenian community. The order used the money to purchase real estate in the city including grounds for their school. However, it defaulted in its payments and, facing a growing number of creditors, even tried briefly, through Jambazian himself, to enter talks with Melkonian’s successor as Abbot, the Transylvanian Abbot Step’annos Agonts’, to negotiate for reunification with the mother convent on condition that the Venice branch step in and pay back the Trieste faction’s debts in Constantinople. This overture, which must have represented a low point in Babikian’s life, was spurned. After Jambazian passed away in Constantinople, in 1803, things worsened for Babikian and his dwindling congregation because many of the Trieste faction’s creditors, who had till then remained silent or patient, requested a return on their loans.98 The lenders sued the monks in the courts but were blocked by the authorities in Vienna, who shielded their Mkhit’arist subjects. Things further deteriorated when Trieste, once again, came under Napoleon’s jurisdiction in 1809 and was ceded to his empire following the Treaty of Schönbrunn signed in that same year. Unable to be protected by their Habsburg patrons and earlier turned away by the mother convent and with their real estate confiscated and auctioned off for a fraction of its real value by the city authorities, Babikian and a new collaborator named Father Aristakes Azarian (Gasparian had presumably passed on by then) were forced to desert the Adriatic port to seek asylum in imperial Vienna.99 On 5 December of 1810, Babikian (by then an old man) and Azarian received from Emperor Francis I of Austria an abandoned Capuchin monastery in Vienna, at the same spot where the order exists today.100 Babikian, till then the de facto leader of the new congregation in Trieste, was only formally nominated Abbot of the new order in 1803. He thus became the first Abbot of the Vienna branch, even while the dynamism of leading the Vienna branch from the brink of bankruptcy to financial security and even the lap of luxury was now in the hands of the younger Azarian. Under the latter’s guidance, the new order was soon graced with imperial support for the establishment of a printing press. Once again, special privileges from the Habsburg court (including a thirty-year monopoly over the printing of religious prayer books or missals in Latin and German used throughout the empire) paved way for the order to thrive and blossom.101

Not long after the creation of the Vienna branch of the order, it had become apparent to all but a few that the Great Schism of 1773 had led the two branches of the Mkhit’arist Congregation not only to diverge geographically and culturally (with Venice being firmly in the Italian sphere of cultural influence while the Viennese one moved in the orbit of German culture) but also theologically. Following Babikian’s death in 1826, and with

98 My information in this section draws heavily from Zavrian, “Mkhit’arian Miabanut’e’an Bazhanumě,” 72-78 and T’eodorean, Patmut’iwn Muratean ew Haikazean Varzharanats’ vo. 4, 575-581.
101 Zavrian, “Mkhit’arian Miabanut’e’an Bazhanumě,” 76.
Abbot Azarian at the helm, the Viennese Mkhit’arists soon began to accuse their Venetian counterparts of being “schismatics” and not genuine Catholics. The acrimony between the two factions had reached such new heights that some at the time believed Azarian to have been personally behind the shutting down, under the orders of the censors in Rome, of the printing press in San Lazzaro for three years in 1814, right around the time that Azarian had established his profitable press in Vienna. This sectarian infighting between the two factions, culminating in outright religious feuds in Constantinople, Smyrna, and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the nineteenth century, compels us to turn, in our concluding section, to a central question with which we began this essay, namely what role did theological and other factors play in giving rise to the Great Schism of San Lazzaro?

**Theology or Despotism? The Genesis of the Great Schism Reconsidered**

The complex question of what drove the Great Schism of 1773, thus bifurcating the Mkhit’arist Congregation, has been approached from several different and, at times, irreconcilable perspectives. Generally speaking, two sets of views, or “schools” of thought, have emerged over the last century. Each is represented by a formidable giant of twentieth-century Armenology, namely Patriarch Maghakia Ormanian, on the one hand, and the Mkhit’arist scholar from the Vienna branch, Father Nerses Akinian, on the other. Before offering a critical assessment of their respective positions, it is necessary first to provide a brief stocktaking. In his 1911 survey essay on the history of the Vienna branch of the congregation, Akinian addresses the schism almost in passing and describes the events and their causes as he sees them.

Shortly after his election, Melkonian undertook to alter the canons established by the blessed founder [i.e., Mkhit’ar]; however, with these new changes of his, he gave rise to discontent among the most senior members of the congregation. For seven years, he pursued in vain to get the constitution he established ratified in Rome until the discontent that grew day by day compelled the members of the congregation to call for a general assembly on 25 May 1772, where the Abbot [Melkonian] was himself invited (while still not established as such by Rome) and where the restoration and preservation [verahastut’iwn ew pahpanut’iwn] of the old constitution was demanded. However, since it was not possible to arrive at an agreement, Melkonian was brought down, and it was decided to hold elections for a new Abbot. But before a new session could be convened, Melkonian appealed to external intervention and with the involvement of the archbishop of the city, he attempted to compel the subordination and loyalty to his will of his subjects. Two archimandrites, fathers Astuats’atur [Deodato] Babikian and Minas Gasparian, who stood firm on the resolutions of the assembly, were escorted by a contingent of troops and taken out of the country and managed to come ashore in Trieste...
where the bishop of Trieste and the municipality graced them with all the [relevant] facilities.\(^{103}\)

Akinian’s argument above that the constitution and its breach by Melkonian were at the heart of the troubles that befell San Lazzaro is sound enough to compel us to ask if, indeed, the island actually had a constitution to begin with, or whether, as Ormanian has insinuated, it was ruled by Mkhit’ar largely “on the basis of personal authority.”\(^{104}\) We know from one of Mkhit’ar’s biographers, Hovhannes Torossian, that as early as 1705 Mkhit’ar had drafted a set of rules or a constitution for his newfound order which was based on the

\(^{103}\) Akinian, “Aknark mĕ viennayi Mkhit’arean miabanut’ean hariwrameay gortsuneut’ean vray, 1811-1911,” Handes Amsorea (1911): 4. Emphasis added. “Մելքոնեան իր ընտրութենէն քիչ ետքը ձեռնամուխ կ՚ըլլայ երանաշնորհ հիմնադրին սփոփոխել. սակայն իւր այս կարգերը նորաձևել սահմանադրութեան բայց որովհետև կարելի չ՚ըլլար համաձայնութիւն մը գոյացընե, Մելքոնեանը վար կ՚առնուի եւ կ՚որոշուի նոր Աբբայի ընտրութեան ձեռնարկել. բայց դէռ նոր նիստը չբացուած՝ Մելքոնեան կը դիմէ արտաքին ուժի եւ քաղաքին Արքեպիսկոպոսի միջամտութեան. կը փորձէ զինուորական զօրութեամբ ստիպել իւր հպատակներն ի հնազանդութիւն իւր կամաց. Երկու միաբաններ—Հ. Աստուածատուր Վ. Բաբիկեան եւ Հ. Մինաս Վ. Գասպարեան—որոնք ժողովոյն որոշմանց վրայ հաստատուն կը մնան, զինուորական ուղեկից գնդով արտասահման կը հանուին։ Ասոնք կը յաջողին Տրիեստ ցամաք ելել։ Սակայն ի Սուրբ Ղազար այսու խաղաղութիւնը չի վերահաստատուիր. երկու միաբաններու կրած անցքը տեսնելով Մխիթարի դեռ կենդանի աշակերտներն եւ ուրիշ միաբաններ, ինքնակամ կը հետեւին աքսորեալներուն՝ Կ. Պոլիս երթալու պատրուակավ ի Դրիեստ ցամաք ելլելով։ 1773 Մայիս 19ին կը հավաքուին ի մի, երբ կը յիշեն երիցագոյններէն ոմանք թէ Մխիթարի ծրագրին մէջ կար Տրիեստ վանատուն մը բանալ, եւ կ՚որոշեն միաբան այս միտքը իրագործել։ Առ այս նաեւ Տրիեստի եպիսկոպոսն եւ քաղաքապետութիւնը կը շնորհեն իրենց ամեն դիւրութիւն”.

\(^{104}\) Ormanian, Azgapatum, vol. 3, §2108, 3077. “Այլ թէ ինչ էին Մխիթարի կարգերը եւ ի՞նչ Մելքոնեանի նորաձևերութիւնները պիտի չկարենանք ճշդել, որոշ տեղեկութիւններ չգտնելով. Միայն յայտնի կը տեսնուի թէ Մխիթարի կարգերը հաստատուն եւ որոշ հիմերու վրայ դրուած չեն եղեր, եւ միայն իւր անձնական հեղինակութեամբ յառաջացեր է իւր ձեռնարկը.”

However, as to what Mkhit’ar’s canons were and what the reforms of Melkonian, we are unable to clarify on account of not obtaining a certain type of documentation. The only thing that is clear is that the canons of Mkhit’ar did not seem to be placed on firm foundations and his endeavors were pursued on the basis of personal authority.”
canons of Saint Anthony the Abbot, an Egyptian third century C.E. monk, who is widely revered as the founder of Christian monasticism. Referring to how, in 1705, Mkhit’ar sent two of his most trusted disciples, Father Eghia and Father Hovhannes, to Rome to present the constitution he had drafted for his new order, Torossian writes, "He gave them a brief constitution which he had created by drawing from the canons and life of Saint Anthony, as well as from the advices of other spiritual fathers..."105

This constitution, whatever it may have looked like, does not seem to have been approved by the Cardinals for reasons that Torossian attributes to the libelous attacks against Mkhit’ar, then made by his detractors who were legion in Istanbul. Years later, Mkhit’ar was persuaded by the Holy See to choose a constitution from one among three monastic orders that were then recognized by Rome: Saint Basil, Saint Augustine, or Saint Benedict. He chose the last one, and the new constitution he drafted was finally ratified by Rome, in 1712.106 Interestingly, as Matteos Evdokiats’i notes in his *Chronicle* of the island, it was only after the approval of this constitution that Mkhit’ar came to be called Abbot: “before this, he was called preeminent father and, sometimes, the director.”107 The evidence presented above demonstrates that the Mkhit’arist congregation, contrary to Ormanian’s assertion, did indeed have a firm constitution during Mkhit’ar’s tenure as Abbot and that this constitution was recognized by Rome as early as 1712. The evidence also reinforces Akinian’s suggestion that, sometime after coming to power in 1750 (and probably around 1755), Melkonian decided to introduce significant alterations to

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105 Hovhannes V. Torosian, *Vark’ Mkhit’aray Abbayi Sebastats’voy [The Life of Abbot Mkhit’ar or Sebasea]* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1901), 188. "...տուաւ անոնց ձեոքը համառօտ սահմանագրութիւնը զոր յօրիներ էր քաղելով Ս. Անտոն Աբբայի վարքէն եւ կանոններէն ուրիշ հոգևոր հարց խրատներէն." 106 Matteos Evdokiats’i, Հայոց Արծաքանց Հայրենիքի գրավոր տարրերի վերաբերյալ Հերուցական Հայոց ... [Chronicle of the Sacred Congregation of Armenian Monks...], folio 161. "Դեր տրողի նա փոխարեն պահպանեց, երբեմն երկու քարիքի տոնում, թե այն նուավ ու մարտական ուղի թաք ու փորձառություն գծել են տարբեր ուղերդական տեսաներին, որ դեր կարելի են հայտնի եւ կարևոր հարցերը պատրաստի, թե ինչպէս կարէն եւ կարդիա սեփականատերը, եւ ինքնաբերդը եւ բոլոր ընդհանուր զարգացման արդյունքը: "For as we have retold above, the Holy Congregation informed us that it was not possible to add a new canon to the canons of the Holy Fathers that existed in the Catholic church from ancient times and that it was necessary to choose from among those approved by the Holy See. [And accordingly] our congregation chose the canons of our holy father Benedict.” The standard work on Monasticism is C.H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, second edition (London and New York: Longman, 1989). See chapter two on the order of Saint Benedict.

107 Ibid. 161. "Դեր տրողի նա փոխարեն պահպանեց, թե այն նուավ ու կարճատերը պատրաստի, թե ինչպէս կարէն եւ կարդիա սեփականատերը, թե ինքնաբերդը եւ բոլոր ընդհանուր զարգացման արդյունքը: "As we wrote above, after our congregation accepted the canons of the constitution approved by the Holy Pope, Mkhit’ar the master who was the leader of our order was called Abbot. Before this, he was called his preeminence and sometimes the director."
this original constitution, and he did so without consulting with his fellow monks (as was the
custom during Mkhit’ar’s rule), and that this brazen act was among the important catalysts
that drove Babikian and Gasparian headlong towards the Great Schism. This is surely the
most important insight to be gained from Akinian’s account to which we shall return later.
On the face of it, this seems like a reasonable account of what caused discontent leading
eventually to a schism, even if, at the time, Akinian appeared to lack any documentation for
it. As we will see in more detail below, this is a view that is supported by the ample evidence
from the archives and is also backed up by Casanova’s account discussed earlier. At least one
formidable scholar, however, has turned this argument on its head and rejected its import.

In a crucial section titled “The Cause of the Division,” in volume three of his magisterial
history Azgapatum [National History], Maghakia Ormanian turns his erudition and unrivaled
expertise as a scholar of the Armenian church to the thorny question as to why the event
that we have referred to as the “Great Schism” of San Lazzaro occurred. Here, Ormanian
rejects Akinian’s and Teodorian’s earlier views that “changes to the canons established
by Mkhitar” and Melkonian’s “use of the sum of money raised by the Indian-Armenians”
were the causes of the conflict. “Certainly, however,” he writes “the question of the [future]
direction [ughghut’iwn] [of the Congregation] that was capable of giving rise to such great
consequences was more important than these types of internal, specific, and accidental
factors. Otherwise, we would have to ascribe equally to both sides the stain of being narrow-
minded and shallow.”

In other words, for Ormanian, we must ignore a conflict of personal ambitions between
Melkonian and Gasparian/Babikian, as well as disagreements over the constitution of the
congregation as “accidental” or “specific” factors in the Great Schism of 1773 and focus
instead on “deeper” and more consequential factors. These had to do with the rival and
irreconcilable theological positions between the proponents of the two factions that later
became fully manifest in the policies pursued by Azarian and his heirs. Although Ormanian
is never explicit in his reasoning regarding the question of the “cause” (պատճառը) of the
schism or division, he seems to be implying that distinctions between various factors leading
to or causing the “event,” or եղելութիւն, of the Great Schism ought be be kept in mind.

պէտք էր ստուգիւ, բայց հարկ եղած ներքին տեղեկութիւնները չունինք, թէպէտ երերթներն ալ
կրնան նոյն նպատակին նպաստել։ Մխիթարի սահմանած կանոններուն մէջ փոփոխութիւն
մուծանելու խնդիրին հետ, Հնդկահոյոց մէջ հավաքուած գումարի մը կիրառութեան պէտք
կամ կերպն ալ խօսուած է. բայց անշուշտ, այս տեսակ պարագաներէն աւելի, կշիռ ունեցած է
ուղղութեան խնդիը, որ կրցած է այդչափ ծանր հետեւանքի պատճառ ըլլալ։ Ապա թէ ոչ հարկ
կ՚ըլլար երկու կողմերուն վրայ ալ փոքրոգութեան եւ անլրջութեան արատը քսել։” Emphasis
added.
According to this view, the ultimate cause or factor that motivated the founders of the Trieste and Vienna orders to abandon the mother convent was connected to the question of the future direction, or ուղղութիւն, of the Congregation founded by Mkhit’ar. He explains this quite explicitly:

And the question of direction of course consisted of the orientation to be adopted towards the Roman church, on the one hand, and the Armenian one, on the other. These together constituted the crux of the matter at the time. The personal path of Mkhit’ar had its Armenophiliac [hayaser] aspects, even though it was swayed by the enigmatic idea of forming a luminous sense of being Armenian within the Roman church. And if this, too, were the intent of Melkonian, his decision [during the Great Schism] would have been inclined in that direction. Following the division [of the order], that concealed spirit of Mkhit’ar indeed continued in Venice, and Armenian studies received a new impulse there. It is worth noting here that three key and meritorious names, Fathers Vrtanes Askerian, Step’annos Agonts’, and Mikayel Chamchian, all vardapets, stayed on Melkonian’s side. On the contrary, the side that remained with Babikian day-by-day took its loyalty to the Roman Church to extremes and not only did not sustain Armenianness but also by doctrine and teaching, procedure and orientation, even in its liturgical forms and religious garb encouraged the Roman orientation and followed it.109

In other words, for Ormanian, Melkonian’s explicit and subsequent support of Mkhit’ar’s position of not abandoning the Armenian Church and its traditions, but finding an ecumenical solution and reconciling the Armenian tradition represented by its Apostolic Church with the positions of the Church of Rome, was the guiding “spirit” (ոգի) that propelled forward the Great Schism. In this view, Babikian and Gasparian were only advocates of a pro-Roman position that saw the Armenian Church and its positions as nothing short of heretical or schismatic. To be sure, the history of the Vienna branch of the Mkhit’arists is far from being reducible to pro-Roman and anti-Armenian church zeal, and Ormanian is aware

109 Ibid., § 2109, p. 3079-3078. “Իսկ ուղղութեան խնդիրն ալ անշուշտ մէկ կողմէն հռօրեականութեան և մեկ կողմէն հայութեան եւ միւս կողմէն հայութեան եւ տրենիկորիան կիրառել կին, որ հայութեան միակ ընդհակարակ առեղծուածային գաղափարով էին՝ հռորեականութեան մէջ տրենիկ տարածուց կերպով կազմելու դէպի քաղաք։ Մխիթարի անձնական ուղղութեան էին հայասէր կողմն՝ բայց հռօրեականութեան մէջ փայլուն հայութեան մը կազմելու առեղծուածային գաղափարով՝ որ այս առավելապես եղել էր զինական, զինական դրսականաբար հավասարակշռել կողմն պատրաստ կերպի և կատարել ։ Բացիներսին եղել են հրամանները որ տրենիկորիան առեղծուածային ակումբը, իունիոն եւ Պահացված Սահմանարևմտյան, Սահմանարևմտյան Սահման էւ Պահացված Սահմանաբանութեան, Սահմանաբանութեան մեջ շարավորվել էր տրենիկորիան։ Իսկ այս եղել էր այդպես, որ ժառանգ հռորեականութեան արդյունավետ էր զգայունեցնել, որով պահացվածը միապատկեր եւ տրենիկ առանց բարձրակշռել եւ տրենիկորիան իր վրա։"
of this. For nearly a whole century from the Great Schism onwards, Ormanian explains, “the reigning element in the [Trieste/Vienna] branch was entirely an overzealous form of Roman Catholicism, all the while when the branch that stayed with Melkonian was subject to persecutions from the overzealous ones on account of their desires for supporting Armenophilia and intimacy with the ways of the Armenian Church.”

What is interesting to note about the above interpretation is that it does not vitiate Akinian’s claims that alterations to the constitution and lack of transparency in rule (what Casanova identified as Melkonian’s “despotism” or “tyrannical” tendencies) were factors involved in paving the path for the Great Schism. Nor for that matter does Ormanian deny that Melkonian’s misuse of funds coming from India as proposed by Casanova, Teodorian, and later Zavrian played any role in the separation of the two branches. Rather, the argument he advances seems to accept these as “internal,” “specific,” and “accidental,” in short superficial, factors but asserts that the real cause or “spirit” was connected to the theological/ideological positions of the rival factions. Ormanian, of course, is cautious in articulating this view, knowing full well that the requisite “internal information” (presumably in the form of documentation left behind by the actors or a chronicle of the events kept by an eyewitness) was either not available or, if it was, was not at his disposal. It bears remembering here that the third volume of his Azgapatum was written in Istanbul in 1914 with no direct or even indirect access to the archives in Venice, Trieste, Rome, or Vienna. Any admirer of Ormanian will be quick to note that his documentation, in these sections at least, is rather sketchy and thin and consists of a handful of secondary sources, including Akinian and Teodorian. Eschewing earlier explanations and with no additional archival documentation, Ormanian thus privileges deep-seated theological and ideological motives concerning the future “direction of the congregation.” What is one to make of such interpretation, and how does this view stand up to the new documentation not available either to Ormanian or to Akinian but since unearthed and at the disposal of scholars?

In an all-too-obscure essay on the “Separation of the Mkhit’arist Congregation” published in 1932, Hovhannes Zavrian finds Ormanian’s arguments baseless.

It seems to me that Ormanian accepts consequence as cause. It is true that the Mkhit’arists of Vienna, from the very first day of their break, showed themselves to be more fervent Catholics than those in Venice, and perhaps that is how they are today as well. However, there is no basis at all for insisting that such abstract and principled issues were causes for the schism. On the contrary, the separation

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110 Ibid. "Իրավէ որ վերջին ժամանակներու մէջ էր արձակում Սիդանիան, Նիկոս Տերենիան եւ Սիրուան Տերենիան դուրս է եկել Արմենիական դերերում, դեռ ներկայացնում Տերեմանուշներու պատմութեան արձակ, որը որոշ ճիւղերի բները տեսնել է Սուրբ Պապիկեանուն Սրբաթ եւ Մելքոնեանի հետ։ Այսպիսով կարևորագույն էր Ազգային մարտիկը ու Հայասիրութեան մարտիկը, իրավէ որ հայասիրութեան խեղձերը եւ այսպիսով մեծ շահագործութեան հետէարկան։"
happened because of causes that flowed from much more simple and human passions and desires.\footnote{Zavrian, “Mkhít’ar’ian Miabanut’ean Bazhanumé,” 97. “Ինձ թւում է որ Օրմանեանը հետեւանքը ընդունում է որպէս պատճառ։ Ճշմարիտ է, որ Վիեննայի Մխիթարեանները, անջատման հէնց առաջին օրերից սկսած, իրենց ցոյց տուին աւելի ջերմ կաթոլիկներ, քան վենետիկցիները եւ, թերեւս, ընդհակառակը, բաժանումը առաջանացավ շատ ավելի պարզ եւ մարդկային կրքերից։ Եվ պառակտողությունները առաջանացավ։”}

True, Ormanian was more likely projecting backwards the climate of opinion produced by the Catholic-Apostolic sectarian strife that characterized the public sphere of Armenian debate and discussion in the Armenian periodical press of Istanbul, Izmir, and elsewhere for much of the nineteenth century. His interpretation may be seen, in other words, as an instance of what historians refer to as “presentism,” the tendency of anachronistically reading backwards the ideas, values, and assumptions from one’s present as explanatory factors back into the past. Coming of age as a former Catholic turned prominent member and even patriarch of the Armenian church in Istanbul during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is hard not to see Ormanian’s “present” as deeply shaped by the polemics and diatribes for and against the Mkhit’arist Congregation in Venice launched by the libelous book \textit{Il Mechitarista di San Lazzaro} that appeared in Istanbul 1852. This work accused the Venice branch of the Mkhit’arist Congregation as being crypto-heretics all-too-willing to defend the “schismatic” positions of the Armenian Church, while pretending to be Catholics. Some, at the time, believed that members of the Vienna branch of the Mkhit’arists, and Abbot Azarian in particular, were behind the release of this anonymous libel.\footnote{Ibid., 77.} It is likely then that, as Zavrian avers in his 1931 essay, Ormanian was merely projecting backwards, in an anachronistic fashion, theological/ideological differences between the two orders that had emerged \textit{after} the schism into the motivations and intentions of Gasparian and Babikian, in 1773. If this were the case, and theological or sectarian motivations were not the cause of the Great Schism but its consequence, what then are we to make of the cause? Were we to dismiss the lofty-sounding, theological/sectarian concerns over the two rival “directions” of the order Mkhit’ar left behind as the real causes of the rift, would we then be compelled, as Ormanian asserts in the passage quoted earlier, “to ascribe equally to both sides the stain of being narrow-minded and shallow”? Zavrian seems to think so when he concludes, “the separation happened because of causes that flowed from much more simple and human passions and desires.”

Curiously, the scholar looking for “motives” in the Inquisitori di Stato Archives or the State Archives of Vienna and Trieste is likely to conclude, as Ormanian shuddered to think and as Zavrian claimed, that the Great Schism indeed resulted from petty issues involving personality conflicts, “human passions and desires,” as it were. Indeed, the extant
documentation does reinforce this view that a struggle of “big egos” was at play, pitting a young and domineering Melkonian against the “temperamentally volatile” Gasparian and the ever-more ambitious Babikian, who hailed from a wealthy family with connections to India and London. As with virtually everything in human history, the peculiarities of individual agency (including power struggles) were also no doubt involved here. Contrary to Ormanian, however, no evidence exists that theological or sectarian positions played any significant and known role. Is there no other explanation at hand that provides more nuance and complexity to the “human passions” account provided by Zavrian? What light do the archives have to shed on this vexed question? One unlikely source, overlooked by Zavrian, Ormanian, Curiel, and virtually everyone else who has delved into the matter, is quite promising in this respect.

This source is a 14-page report written by Abbot Melkonian on 2 October 1773 and sent to the College of Cardinals, comprising the De Propaganda Fide that we have already quoted from above. In it, Melkonian explains that despite informing the Papal nuncio in Venice from time to time of developments on the island connected to the events of 1773, he will take the opportunity in this report of personally discharging his duty and representing “the origin, progress, and the felicitous conclusion of the affair [the Great Schism] to the profit of our congregation.”

What is stunningly insightful in this report is the candor with which the Abbot addresses the genesis of the conflict, which he attributes overwhelmingly to Gasparian and the “agitated youth” (fomentati giovani) who followed him and began demanding new measures (nuovi provedimenti) regarding the island’s constitution. After reluctantly agreeing to call a chapter, or assembly (capitolo), of the capitular, or senior monks, to discuss these reforms, Melkonian quickly realized the dangerous “threats” that “such an aggression” posed to the security and order of his island. He reports,

In the first congresses, it seemed that the aim of all the capitular monks was to promote the disciplinary rules [within the congregation] with the exact observance of the constitutions, and other regulations, which were believed necessary on the basis of the constitutions for the domestic and internal governance of the same community. However, after some preliminary sessions, Father Minas with his colleagues came little by little to place into question the very validity of the venerable decree from this Sacred Congregation [i.e., the De Propaganda Fide] issued on December 4, 1762.

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113 ASPF, SC. Armeni 17, report of Stefano di Melchiore to the College of Cardinals, 2 October 1773, folio 441. “...vengo personalmente in adempimento del mio dovere a rappresentarne l’origine, il progresso, ed il felice esito della cosa con profitto della nostra Congregazione.”

114 Ibid. “Ne’ primi Congressi sembrava, che la mira di tutti i Capitolari fosse diretta a promuovere la Regolare Disciplina coll’esatta osservanza delle Costituzioni, ed altri Regolamenti, che fossero creduti necessari sulla norma delle Costituzioni medesime per l’interno domestico governo della Comunità, ma dopo alcune preliminari sessioni, a poco venne il P. Minas co suoi Collegati a proporre in questione la validità del venerabile decreto da codesta S. Congregazione emanato a li 4 Dicembre 1762.”
The reference here, of course, is to the *De Propaganda Fide*’s and Pope Clement XIII’s official recognition of Melkonian as the Congregation’s Abbot, and the Papal ratification of the post as a lifetime appointment. It appears that, up till then, Rome had not ratified Melkonian’s initial election as Abbot by the chapter of capitular monks on 9 April 1750, and neither was the length of Melkonian’s tenure spelled out. Moreover, all the circumstantial evidence also points in the direction that Melkonian had altered the monastery’s constitution from the time of its final ratification, in 1712, under Mkhit’ar and submitted the revised version to the Cardinals at the *De Propaganda Fide*, sometime in the mid-1750s, as Akinian suggests. Under Mkhit’ar’s tenure, the Abbot, or “superior” (մեծաւոր), as the holder of the office was also known at the time, was expected to rule for life. It seems unclear whether following Mkhitar’s death his successor was also expected to hold the office for life or for four years. What is clear is that beginning in the late-1750s, when Melkonian began making a formal request to the College of Cardinals for official recognition of his election, he appears to have submitted a new constitution asking for significant expansions to his power as Abbot as well as a lifetime appointment. This had created considerable tension on the island already at the time, as a confidential missive from Istanbul written to the Cardinals on 15 November 1759 by Hakobos Chamchian makes abundantly clear. In this heretofore-unknown letter, the brother of the famous historian outlines all the traits that disqualified Melkonian from holding such an important office (his “contempt for his inferiors,” his will to power, and his unstable temperament being key in his estimate). He also warns the Cardinals that Melkonian’s “intent is to sit permanently as the superior [i.e., Abbot] with *absolute* powers, independent of the councilors” and states that eleven of nineteen monks were sternly opposed to his lifetime appointment and would “exit the congregation” if Melkonian’s tenure

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115 ASPF, Congregazioni Particolare (CP) 127, 95r-96r. I am grateful to Cesare Santus for sharing copies of this precious document with me.

116 Ibid., 95r. “Այս բնակչության մոտ է երկր ոսկեդու, չի ենթույթ մածածություն: որոշ խնդիրների կառավարությունը կառավարվեր խնդիրների կառավարությունը եզրակացրել է. ու չե մեծապարիտան ավելորդ կառավարություն: ու երկրի ներքին քաղաքականությունը որոշ ու երկրի ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսկեդու առաջին ատյունը չի է. այն ոսκ
and powers were extended. At least four had apparently already indicated this in their talks. Interestingly, neither Gasparian’s nor Babikian’s names are included in the list of dissentors whom Chamchian worried would exit the congregation and, thereby, destroy the tiny order Mkhitar had left to his heirs. At any rate, Chamchian’s letter now seems prophetic in its dire warnings that Melkonian’s consolidation of power might destroy the congregation.

For reasons that need to be examined further, the Cardinals ignored Chamchian’s grave concerns. On 4 December 1762, they extended a formal recognition of Melkonian as Abbot for life, a recognition that was simultaneously made by the Pope Clement XIII. This opened the way for Chamchian’s prophecy to unfold. The “agitated youth” led by Gasparian and Babikian, on whom Melkonian blamed the tumult on his island, was only carrying out the dissent and opposition to Melkonian’s drive for absolute power that was already present by the time Chamchian wrote his alarming letter. It appears, thus, that this “youth” did not appreciate being left out of the decision-making process and were pressing to have a place at the table. Their ringleaders, Gasparian and Babikian, succeeded “to win over the majority of the assembled monks [capitoliari] to the belief that the esteemed decree [of December 1762] was apocryphal [not authentic] and without value.” Melkonian vigorously opposed this “bold aggression” (i.e., their decision to question the validity of the 1762 decree from Rome) and was even more astonished when Gasparian and Babikian went further in revealing the real intent and objectives behind their calling for a chapter or assembly:

“Now, I know with certainty that if our superior were to be appointed for lifetime and with absolute powers, nearly all of the eleven persons who do not wish to have the office of the superior be a lifetime appointment, will exit the congregation...”
that would have ensued, so I forcibly opposed myself to this vote and I did not want to consent to any oath whatsoever.^[119]

The evidence provided in this report suggests that what galvanized opposition to Melkonian had nothing or little to do with the future “orientation” of the congregation or even with theological issues, as Ormanian argued a hundred years ago. Neither Melkonian in this report nor any other known eyewitness source, in the immediate aftermath of the Great Schism, attributes the conflict to theological or doctrinal differences among the parties. Such differences, as we have seen, emerged later and are largely early-nineteenth-century phenomena reflecting the sectarian clashes that broke out in Istanbul and Izmir. Rather, the evidence from Melkonian’s report indicates that something other than either theological or sectarian disagreements (as Ormanian contends) or personality conflicts (Zavrian and Teodorian maintain) was at the genesis of the conflict. Constitutionalism, or a struggle for more representative governance, appears to have been at the crux of the Great Schism.

Here, it is important to note that while most monastic orders in the Catholic world had chapters (capitoli) where capitular monks discussed and debated issues important to their congregation, it was generally the rule that superiors or abbots had the final and decisive say in making decisions that were binding on all. The Mkhit’arist order in San Lazzaro was no different in this respect. It followed the Rules of Saint Benedict, which were quite strict and inculcated an “uncompromising doctrine” where “the personality of the abbot was the linchpin of the monastic community.” According to C. H. Lawrence, for instance, the abbot could “appoint and dismiss subordinates, allocate punishments, and direct the relations of the monastery with the outside world as he thinks best.” However, he was “urged by the Rule to take the advice of the brethren before taking policy decisions, but he is not bound by it. Constitutionally then, St. Benedict’s monastery is a paternal autocracy tempered by the obligation to listen to advice.”^[120] In light of the stipulation that abbots were expected and often did take into account the counsel of their brethren, Babikian and Gasparian’s demands were brazen but not entirely out of bounds. At any rate, this was not the novel element in their request. What was new and unusual with their demands (at least as these are articulated in Melkonian’s own words) in 1773 was the individualistic stance, namely the idea that “everyone was to be free to express their own judgment [sentimento] on the propositions brought before the chapter or assembly [capitolo].” This focus on individual

\[^{119}\text{Ibid., folios 442v and 442r. “Vedendo però essi dissiparsi la concepita idea suscitarono più gravi tumulti, ed impegnati sempre più ne divisamenti loro, uscirono con un nuovo progetto, e fu, che in avvenire fosse libero a chiunque dire il proprio sentimento sulle proposizioni, che fossero fatte in Capitolo, e che dopo aver discussa la materia, dovesse porsi alla ballottazione, ed ognuno prima di tutto, ed una volta per sempre prestasse solenne giuramento di ubbidire a ciò, che venisse deciso per voti secreti dalla maggior parte de’ Capitolari. In ciò pur vidi la maligna intenzione, ed i pericoli effetti, che indi ne sarebbero occorsi: ed a questo pure con forza di ragione risolutamente m’opposi né volli accordare, che si facesse giuramento di sorte alcuna.”}\]

\[^{120}\text{Lawrence, Medieval Monasticism, 29.}\]
rights of freedom of expression would strike most observers now or then as being nothing
short of revolutionary. It also raises the question of whether such an idea might have been
a sign of the times, a kind of monastic articulation of a revolutionary way of thinking that
would only make itself evident less than two decades later. Melkonian’s reaction to these
ideas as “malignant” in intention and “pernicious” in consequence would have been quite
natural to his contemporaries, even as they strike us today as commonsensical. How precisely
the monks opposed to Melkonian came up with such notions and whether these ideas had
anything to do with the climate of representative governance that was in the air during the
decade or two before the Great French Revolution is a matter that deserves deeper study.121

Conclusion

Despite its significance to early modern Armenian history and notwithstanding the
large corpus of scholarship devoted to Abbot Mkhit’ar and the monastic order he founded,
the Great Schism of 1773 leading to the bifurcation of the congregation into two, at times,
rival orders remains virtually unstudied and unknown. It occupies a spectral presence on
the margins of Mkhit’arist scholarship and historical memory, almost like a non-event.
Mkhit’arist monks and scholars who have contributed the lion’s share of the writings on
their own history appear to have deliberately avoided this pivotal turning point in their
island’s past. For them, Father Step’an Sarian’s cryptic observation of 1901, quoted at the
outset of this essay, that “dark clouds passed over the arches of San Lazzaro” seems to
have sufficed. Even a scholar as talented as Leo, who has correctly identified the events
of 1773 as constituting nothing less than a “revolution,” has ambiguously referred to their
genesis as “internal opposition” and “disorder.”122 For Mkhit’arist monks, the obfuscation
and silence that have fallen on this issue are no doubt symptoms of a cautious policy of
avoiding a painful chapter of their order’s rich history. This may be motivated by a desire not
to open old wounds and openly discuss an episode that might appear to some as potentially
embarrassing. For scholars outside the congregation, unfamiliarity with and inaccessibility
of the archival sources surely would figure among the important reasons why the Great
Schism has, until now, remained relegated to obscurity. The result is that only a handful of
studies, often by scholars who are outliers to Mkhit’arist history, have broached the topic.
Their works, however, have been long forgotten and sidelined.

Relying on previously unknown or little-used archival documentation stored in the state
archives of Venice, Trieste, Vienna, and Rome, as well as the memoirs and correspondence of
Casanova, this essay has critically reconstructed the events that led to the Great Schism of
1773. My microhistorical study has illuminated two larger issues that are of vital importance
to scholars interested in early modern Armenian history. First, the Great Schism, as I have
argued above, sheds important light on the previously shadowy and unstudied history of

121 The role of constitutional governance in monastic orders is not covered in Francis Oakley’s The
Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300-1870 (Oxford: Oxford University

122 Leo, “Mkhit’areanner,” 521 and 510. See Also Yerits’eants’, Venetiki Mkhit’areank’, 42-44.
the Armenian diaspora of Trieste during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In this connection, I have argued that the Habsburg authorities were motivated to grant privileges to their Armenian subjects, including the expelled monks, as a result of mercantile factors connected to the development of their free port at the expense of neighboring ports such as Venice. Second, my close reading of the events of 1773 also sheds light on the identity of the Mkhit’arist congregation and the breakdown of authority following the election of Mkhit’ar’s successor Abbot Step’annos Melkonian. To this end, in the course of examining the genesis of the Great Schism, I have argued that the core issues that led to the separation of the order into two branches had little, if anything, to do with theological factors or different religious world views as Ormanian had suggested. On the contrary, all the evidence points in the direction that at the genesis of the Great Schism was a struggle between Melkonian and Gasparian/Babikian over the constitution of the order and the legitimacy of what Melkonian might have done with the constitution left behind by Abbot Mkhit’ar. In short, a struggle over constitutionalism and representative monastic governance, as well as concerns over Melkonian’s mismanagement of funds were the two principal causes that gave rise to the separation of the congregation in 1773. A more detailed and comprehensive study of the matter will surely further clarify the issues in ways beyond the scope of this preliminary exploration.