

## READER RESPONSE AND THE CIRCULATION OF MKHIT'ARIST BOOKS ACROSS THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE EARLY MODERN INDIAN OCEAN\*

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San Lazzaro was a nimble and tireless workshop. Its members circulated to various parts of Armenia to rescue souls; but more than rescuing souls from perdition, they rescued the centuries-long fruits of the Armenian mind, the past literature of Armenians, which was still in manuscript form and was dispersed in Monasteries and churches as well as in the possession of certain families. Like bees, the Mkhitarist *vardapets* were collecting these flower nectars [*tsaghkahoyterē*] with care and taking them back to Italy, to the tiny island overlooking Venice in order to preserve and care for them. Here, around the treasures that had arrived from the homeland and under their influence a continuous generation of [erudite monks] was cultivated and shaped in that workshop. Mighty laborers came forth... a printing press began there and the gilded books of Venice started to flood on Armenians from all parts of the world. San Lazzaro turned into a small miniature Armenia, not a homeland of ruins and slavery, but one of books. The monks wrote a lot, and above all they wrote religious books. But in doing so they also provided intellectual and emotional nourishment for secular life.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since the Soviet Armenian historian Leo (Arak'el Babakhanian) wrote these perceptive words about the Mkhitarist Congregation and its pivotal role in the Armenian cultural revival of the eighteenth century, much scholarship has been produced on the printing and publishing activities of these erudite monks/scholars operating from the lagoon in Venice. The publication in 1980 of Sahak Jemjemian's *The Publishing Mission of Abbot Mkhitar* followed by a spate of outstanding studies by the same scholar on various aspects of Armenian printing and book history mark a landmark in our appreciation of the Mkhitarist contributions to the history of Armenian print

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<sup>1</sup> Leo, *Hayots' Patmut' iwn* (History of the Armenians), vol. 3 (Yerevan: HSSH GA, 1947), p. 503. Cf. Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006), p. 103.

culture during the early modern period.<sup>2</sup> Jemjemian was the first to train his focus on the publishing activities of his own congregation. As such, he was a pioneer in exploring in detail various aspects of the Mkhitarist involvement in the printing and publishing of Armenian books. Through a detailed examination of papers stored in the Congregation's archives, Jemjemian deftly explored various aspects of Abbot Mkhitar's printing and publishing enterprise from his first publications in Constantinople in 1701 to the resumption of his activities once he had set up a base on the island of San Lazzaro in the Venetian lagoon in 1717. Among the many exemplary qualities of Jemjemian's scholarship is the meticulous attention he devoted to how and where Mkhitar had his books printed in Venice and especially to how book peddlers and missionaries transported the Congregation's printed books to Armenian reading markets in Constantinople and Transylvania during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Although the *Publishing Mission of Abbot Mkhitar* is to date arguably the most authoritative and certainly a foundational work on the topic, there are several areas in the study on which other scholars can aspire to build. First, by the time Jemjemian published his classic work in 1980, the field of "L'histoire du livre" or the history of the book was hardly in existence, and therefore the author could not have benefitted from the conceptual findings of this body of scholarship, though in some interesting ways he may have foreshadowed some insights. Second, and more important for our purposes, Jemjemian's focus in his studies, as the title of his *magnum opus* indicates, is on the Congregation's publishing activities during the tenure of its founder Abbot Mkhitar (r. 1701-1749). As such, the author has very little if at all to say on the pivotal role in the publishing history of the Mkhitarist Congregation

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<sup>2</sup> Sahak Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakchakan arak'elut'iwnē* (The publishing mission of Abbot Mkhitar) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1984); Idem, *Hay tpagrut'iwnē ew Hrom (Zhē. dar)* (Armenian printing and Rome during the seventeenth century) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1989). Jemjemian followed in the footsteps of a long line of Mkhitarist monks who were also learned scholars. Thematically and chronologically, Jemjemian's work succeeds that of the other Mkhitarist savant, Archbishop Karapet Amatuni, who devoted considerable attention in his 1975 publication to early modern Armenian print history, focusing on the seventeenth-century Armenian priest/printer Oskan Yerewants'i and his printing activities mostly in Amsterdam but also in Livorno and Marseille. Like Amatuni, Jemjemian went on to distinguish himself by mastery over numerous languages, his fine-grained archival work, and carefully constructed and elegant narrative histories of Armenian printing activities during the early modern period. Unlike his predecessor, though, Jemjemian, in the above-mentioned work at least, shifted his scholarly focus from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century and from Amsterdam, Livorno, and Rome to Venice. For Amatuni's important study, see Karapet Amatuni, *Oskan Vrd. Yerewants'i ew ir zhamanakē: lusawor ēj mē zhē daru Hay ekeghets'akan patmut'enēn* (Oskan vardapet Yerewants'i and his times: a luminous page from Armenian ecclesiastical history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1975).

played by the Armenian mercantile communities in South Asia or India during the second half of the eighteenth century and therefore in the wake of Abbot Mkhitar's passing away in 1749. After all, relations between the Mkhitarists in Venice and the Armenian communities of Surat, Madras, and Calcutta in India, though barely in existence during Mkhitar's lifetime, became intensified only during the term of Mkhitar's successor Abbot Stephanos Melkonian (r. 1750-1799). Needless to say, the fact that neither the larger scholarship on book history nor the Indo-Armenians get the attention they deserve in Jemjemian's scholarship in no way detracts from his stature as a scholar of towering importance; rather, it is an invitation for those of us whose scholarship follows in his footsteps to build upon the empirically solid edifice left behind by the master.

This essay seeks to be a preliminary contribution to the history of Mkhitarist publishing endeavors during the eighteenth century that is inspired both by Jemjemian's earlier scholarship as well as by methodological debates influenced by the Annales school of historical thinking and in particular by the writings of Lucien Febvre and Robert Darnton. It examines the networks of circulation that shaped how the Mkhitarist printed book was commissioned, produced, shipped, and most importantly received and consumed by readers. The essay will explore one important and largely neglected market of readers and patrons for Mkhitarist books, namely that represented by the Armenian mercantile communities in Surat, Madras, and Calcutta in South Asia. By relying upon a collection of previously unpublished letters written by Mkhitarist missionaries visiting the Armenian communities in South Asia, as well as correspondence belonging to an important India-connected book peddler working for the Congregation essentially as a traveling book salesman, my study will show how the printing activities of a tiny band of erudite Armenian Catholic missionaries working from an island in the Venetian lagoon were shaped by global networks of circulation and exchange that connected the monks in the Mediterranean world with wealthy merchants and readers in the Indian Ocean. More particularly, the study will explore the role of the dissemination or circulation of the Mkhitarist book as a commodity of consumption as well as that of the "reader response" or consumption of the printed book in the Indian Ocean. By exploring the consumption patterns or the "reader response" of Armenians in India, the essay will demonstrate how market forces connected to the consumer demand for books shaped decisions made at the production site in San Lazzaro as to what types of books to publish. The study will conclude by briefly examining merchant patronage as a crucial component in the publishing history of the Armenian book during the early modern period and demonstrate that here as well forces originating at the consumption end of the book circuit in the Armenian mercantile communities

in India had a deep and sustained influence on the production process in the Venetian lagoon. A brief overview of the historiography on book history and the history of print culture in both the Euroamerican and Armenian contexts will help set the groundwork for our discussion of the Mkhit'arist congregation and its publishing enterprise.

### **From Colophons to Archives: The Historiography of the Armenian Book**

Printing by movable metal type invented in the middle of the fifteenth century figures as one of the most transformative technologies of the early modern period. Although it began in Europe, printing and the print culture it spawned soon became a global phenomenon extending to the Middle East, the New World, and making a full circle journey to East Asia, within a century of its origins. The book as a physical and semiotic object circulated across the transregional, hemispheric, and global networks of the early modern world alongside other objects and commodities. In doing so, the technology of print, as Francis Bacon observed, “changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world,” in ways that have yet to be fully fathomed by early modern world historians.<sup>3</sup>

Scholarly interest on the history of print goes back to at least the sixteenth century, culminating in the nineteenth century in specialized studies on “Analytical Bibliography,” that is, “the study of the physical characteristics of books and the process of bookmaking.”<sup>4</sup> However, as Robert Darnton points out in his influential essay “What is the History of Books?” only during the last few decades have scholars working under the influence of the “Annales School” of socio-economic history in France gone beyond the narrow confines of analytical bibliography.<sup>5</sup> The result has been the development, first in France then spreading to the rest of Europe and the United States, of a new

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<sup>3</sup> Bacon counted the printing press alongside two other “recent inventions” that had transformed human history, namely gunpowder and the compass. All three were invented in China and perfected in Europe. Cited in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies After Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, edited by Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2007), p. 157. The passage is originally from Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, edited and translated by Basil Montague, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 3v. (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1854), vol. 3, p. 370.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Pearce-Moses, “A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology,” *The Society for American Archivists*,

[http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=1663](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=1663).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), p. 109. This essay has appeared in numerous places since its initial publication in *Daedalus* (Summer 1982), pp. 65–83. All subsequent citations from this essay refer to the version that appeared in *The Kiss of Lamourette*. See also Darnton’s more recent “What is the History of the Book? Revisited,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 3 (2007), pp. 495–508.

and dynamic field of inquiry known as *l'histoire du livre* in France, *Geschichte des Buchwesens* in Germany, and, in England and North America as the “history of the book” or the “history of books.”<sup>6</sup> As one of its most distinguished representatives, Roger Chartier, has noted one of the hallmarks of this *l'histoire du livre* tradition, as its name indicates, is its unmistakable but difficult-to-pin-down quality of “frenchness.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of dwelling on finer points of bibliography or studies of individual printers and their printing methods, scholars working in this new discipline have followed the *Annales* tradition and “tried to uncover the general pattern of book production and consumption over long stretches of time.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike the conventional studies of printing, the new “history of the book,” as Anthony Grafton explains, has focused less on “the formal study of printers and their products” and more on “the use of these as diagnostic tools, which could reveal the temperature and texture of a whole culture.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite individual differences among scholars in this burgeoning field, the new book history is based on certain fundamental assumptions about the importance of networks of circulation and exchange that enabled the movement of the book as a physical and semiotic object and its ability to shape the mental processes of individuals who were exposed to it. In Darnton’s formulation, the history of the book is concerned with nothing less than the “social and cultural history of communication by print . . . how ideas were transmitted through print and how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behavior of mankind during the last five hundred years.”<sup>10</sup>

The widely acknowledged “bible” of book history is *L’Apparition du Livre* published in 1958 by Lucien Febvre, the co-founder of the *Annales* school, and his student, Henri-Jean Martin, which, as its English subtitle attests, analyzes “The Impact of Printing 1450-1800.”<sup>11</sup> Important milestone studies published in the wake of Febvre and Martin’s work include Natalie Zemon Davis’s *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975), Robert Darnton’s monumental *The Business of the Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopedie, 1775-1800* (1979) followed by many other works,

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<sup>6</sup> For a brief historiographic appreciation of the rise and spread of *l'histoire du livre*, see Cathy N. Davidson, “Towards a History of Books and Readers,” *American Quarterly* 40, 1 (March, 1988), pp. 7-17.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Chartier, “Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading,” *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings* 97 (1987), pp. 308-313.

<sup>8</sup> Darnton, “What is the History of Books?,” p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Grafton, “AHR Forum: How Revolutionary was the Print Revolution?” *The American Historical Review* 107, 1 (2002), pp. 85.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Davidson, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450-1800*, English translation (London: Verso, 1976).

and especially Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (original 2-volume edition, 1979, reprinted in a second abridged edition in 2005). The key questions these authors pose are the following: How were books produced, by whom and for whom? How much did they cost? What were the socioeconomic factors that made it possible for printers to set up shop in particular places? How did books end up in the hands of readers? What types of networks of circulation and exchange and what agents were responsible for the movement of knowledge inscribed in the physical object of the book from the hand press to readers in distant markets? Finally and most recently, who were the typical readers in the early modern period and how did they read books? In some sense, the larger question looming over much of the recent work in book history is whether the study of the book in its multifaceted dimension – from its production site to its destination into the hands of readers – contributes to our understanding of the *mentalité* of any given society. In other words, how do books begin to transform the mental universe of ordinary readers once they are released into a network of circulation?<sup>12</sup>

Like that of its European counterpart, the historiography of the Armenian book began in the late nineteenth century with the discovery of the first printed Armenian book, Hakob Meghapart's astrological manual, *Urbat'agirk'*, printed in 1512 in Venice.<sup>13</sup> The first important monograph-

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<sup>12</sup> The number of works that contain surveys of the historiographic terrain that the new "history of the book" has created along with the most relevant issues it has raised is too long to list here. For useful introductions, see David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); and Leslie Hawsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> There does not seem to be any historiographic survey of the field of scholarship on the Armenian book. The studies on the question of what was the first Armenian printed book began during the second half of the nineteenth century and appear to have been prompted by the discovery of one of Hakob Meghapart's books in the library of the Mkhitarist fathers at San Lazzaro, Venice. As late as the 1797 if not well into the nineteenth century, the consensus seems to have been that Oskan Yerewants'i, the printer of the first printed Armenian bible in Amsterdam in 1666, was the first Armenian printer. This view was elaborated by Movsēs Baghramian in his long Appendix to *The History of Abraham of Crete* (Calcutta, 1796), v. By the 1850s, the focus seems to have shifted to Abgar Tokatets'i (Abgar of Tokat), who printed several titles in Venice in the 1560s. The great Mkhitarist savant, Ghewond Alishan, seems to have been the first to raise the possibility that the first Armenian printed book predated 1565 and pointed in the direction of a book that later turned out to be Hakob Meghapart's *Aght'ark'* of 1512. For the fascinating thread of discussion, see Alishan, "Ch'orord daramut tpagrut'ean Hayots': Abgar Dpir Tokatets'i" (Fourth centenary of Armenian printing Abgar Dpir Tokatets'i), *Bazmavep* (July, 1865), pp. 213-221; H. A. Tiroyan, "Arajin dar Haykakan tpagrut'eants'" (The first century of Armenian printing), *Bazmavep* (1890), pp. 90-104;

length study, Garegin Zarbhanalian's *Patmut'wn Hay tpagrut'ean* (History of Armenian printing) was published in Venice in 1895, on the heels of more specialized studies on Hakob Meghapart. Soon afterwards, a more sophisticated two-volume work authored by a Tiflis-based Armenian historian, Leo (Arak'el Babakhanian) appeared under the title *Hayk'akan tpagrut'yun* (Armenian printing) in Tiflis in 1901, followed by T'ēot'ik's *Tip u tar* (Type and font) in Istanbul in 1913. The publication of both works was influenced by the celebrations of the fourth centennial of the Armenian book held in Istanbul and other Armenian urban centers in 1912. During the twentieth century, the bulk of the scholarship in the field was produced in Soviet and post-Soviet Armenia, with notable contributions by Garegin Levonyan<sup>14</sup> (1946), Raphael Ishkhanyan (1968, 1978, 1981),<sup>15</sup> Ninel Oskanyan, et al. (1988),<sup>16</sup> and others. In the diaspora, Mkhitarist monks and scholars, Karapet Amatuni<sup>17</sup> (1975) and Sahak Jemjemian (1980, 1989),<sup>18</sup> published specialized monographs in Venice, while Raymond Kévorkian in Paris authored a series of trail-blazing essays and a dissertation in the 1980s, paving the way for more conceptually informed work.<sup>19</sup>

While many of these studies have made a genuine contribution to our understanding of the history of Armenian printing, their methodological assumptions, and the research questions that have arisen from these assumptions, have, for the most part, prevented this body of scholarship, from moving beyond the limitations of pre-Annales "analytical bibliography" and

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Grigoris Galēmkearean, "Hay tpagrut'ean erakhayrik' m'al" (Another first fruit of Armenian printing), *Handes Amsorya* (July, 1890), pp. 161-163; idem, "1513i Hay tpagrin giwtin patmakanē ew nor lusavorut'iwinner" (New clarifications and the history of the invention of Armenian printing in 1513), *Handes Amsorya* (1913), pp. 709-718.

<sup>14</sup> Garegin Levonyan, *Hay girk'ē ev tpagrut'yan arvestē: patmakan tesut'yun skzbits' minchev XX darē* (The Armenian book and art of printing: a historical survey from the beginning until the twentieth century) (Yerevan: HSSH GA, 1946).

<sup>15</sup> Rap'ayel Ishkhanyan, *Hay hnatip girk'ē* (Armenian incunabula) (Yerevan: HSSH "Gitelik" Ėnkerut'yun, 1968); idem, *Hay grk'i patmut'yun*, vol. 1 (History of the Armenian book) (Yerevan: "Hayastan", 1977); idem, *Hay girk'ē 1512-1920* (The Armenian book 1512-1920) (Yerevan: HSSH GA, 1981).

<sup>16</sup> Ninel Oskanyan, K'narik Korkotyan, and Ant'aram Savalyan, eds., *Hay girk'ē, 1512-1800 tvakannerin: hay hnatip grk'i matenagitut'yun* (The Armenian book in the years 1512-1800: a bibliography of old Armenian books) (Yerevan: Al. Myasnikyani Anvan HSSH Petakan Gradaran, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Amatuni, *Oskan Vrd. Yerewants'i*.

<sup>18</sup> Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*; idem, *Hay tpagrut'iwne ew Hrom*.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond H. Kévorkian, *Catalogue des 'incunables' arméniens (1511-1965) ou chronique de l'imprimerie arménienne* (Geneva: Patrick Cramer, 1986); idem, "Livre imprimé et culture écrite dans l'Arménie des XVI et XVII siècles," *Revue des études arméniennes* (1982); idem, *Les imprimés arméniens des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècles* (Paris, 1987); idem, *Les imprimés arméniens 1701-1850* (Paris, 1989).

its narrow focus on the book as a material object. Instead of probing into the socioeconomic factors that gave rise to Armenian print culture in the early modern period or properly exploring the social and cultural impact of “typographic consciousness” on Armenians, much of the scholarship on the Armenian book has focused on collecting and studying colophons with the goal of creating analytical bibliographies. On the basis of colophonical material, Armenian scholars have produced a number of useful narrative-centered studies of individual Armenian printing presses and printers as they moved from one location in the diaspora to another. Who printed what, where, and when, and how the printing enterprise figures in the larger saga of Armenian national history and the unfolding of an Armenian “national subject” in its linear odyssey through historical time has taken up the lion’s share of the scholarship on the Armenian book.<sup>20</sup> With few exceptions, namely the recent scholarship of Elizabet Tajiryan and Merujan Karapetyan,<sup>21</sup> the specific

<sup>20</sup> Here I have in mind, Vrej Nersessian’s “Introduction” to *Catalogue of Early Armenian Books* (London: British Library, 1980) and the works of Raphael Ishkhanyan. Both authors place the adoption of print technology by the Armenians in the larger continuum of Armenian national history and see Meghapart, in a teleological fashion, as a direct heir to Mashtots.

<sup>21</sup> Elizabet Tajiryan, “Amsterdami Hay Tpagrutiwnē: Tipabanakan Verlutsut’iwn” (The Armenian printing of Amsterdam: a typological analysis), paper presented at the conference on “Port Cities and Printers: Five Centuries of Global Armenian Print,” UCLA, November 9-11, 2012. Merujan Karapetyan, “Venetikē ev Mkhit’arean hratarakch’akan gortsuneut’iwnē: Karg mē khogumner hratarakch’ut’ean gortsi shurj” (Venice and the Mkhit’arist Publishing Enterprise: Some Reflections on the Business of Publishing), paper presented at the conference on “Port Cities and Printers: Five Centuries of Global Armenian Print,” UCLA, November 9-11, 2012. An earlier Soviet-Marxist tradition emphasized the role of merchants and the Armenian “bourgeoisie” in financing printing in the diaspora but often with exaggerated and caricaturesque results. For the latter see Artashes Karinyan, *Aknarkner Hay parberakan mamuli patmut’yan* (Surveys of the history of the Armenian periodical press), vol. 1 (Yerevan: Haykakan SSR GA, 1956). For a much more sophisticated attempt to link merchants with print culture, see Leo (Arak’el Babakhanian), *Haykakan tpagrut’yun* (Armenian printing), and *Khojayakan Kapitalē* (Khoja Capital) (Yerevan: Petakan, 1933). An even earlier attempt to link print culture with merchants and long-distance trade is Arshak Alpoyachian, “Zmyuīnio tparannerē” (The printing presses of Smyrna) in *Patma-banasirakan Handes* 2 (1964), pp. 67-84. Alpoyachian wrote this essay as part of a larger book on Armenian print at the turn of the twentieth century but did not get around to publishing his work. In the opening line of this chapter, he writes, “If it is carefully studied, it will become evident that the development of Armenian commerce and the growth of Armenian printing presses were almost joined to one another” (67). Jean-Pierre Mahé and Vrej Nersessian have useful insights on the mercantile underpinnings of Armenian printing but do not seem to be aware of the larger euroamerican scholarship on book history. See Jean-Pierre Mahé, “The Spirit of Early Armenian Printing: Development, Evolution, and Cultural Integration,” in Raymond Kévorkian *Catalogue*, pp. vii-xxii; and Vrej Nersessian, ed. *Catalogue of Early Armenian books, 1512-1850* (London, The British Library, 1980), pp. 9-40. For an early attempt at linking mercantile patronage to Armenian printing, see Ina Baghdiantz McCabe’s “Merchant Capital and Knowledge: The Financing of Early Printing Presses by the Eurasian



economic or mercantile underpinnings of Armenian printing presses in Europe and how early modern Armenian printing presses were run as business enterprises have barely been explored; even the proper study of how books were transported from the printing establishments located mostly in European port cities such as Amsterdam, Livorno, Marseilles, and, as we shall see, Venice, to consumer centers in the Ottoman Empire and the Indian Ocean remains to be pursued.<sup>22</sup> The same may be said about statistical studies of book titles according to genres or according to a secular versus religious schema, although here as in the issue of the transportation of books, at least, the work of Raymond Kévorkian has laid an important groundwork that needs further elaboration.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, the scholarship on the printed Armenian book has also been rather insular, both in terms of showing little if any interest in or awareness of the scholarship outside the field of Armenian studies and especially in relation to comparing the Armenian trajectory of print culture to those in Europe or the Islamic world.<sup>24</sup> Finally and perhaps

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Silk Trade of New Julfa,” *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion, and Society*, ed. T.F. Mathews and R.S. Wieck (New York: Pierpont Morgan, 1998), pp. 58–73. Despite its title and insightful yet all too sparse comments in the conclusion, this preliminary and mostly suggestive study is more an examination of Julfan trade than a systematic and evidence-based analysis of the nexus between printing and mercantile capital. For an excellent English-language survey of Armenian printing, see Meliné Pehlivanian, “Mesrop’s Heirs: The Early Armenian Book Printers,” *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution: A Cross-cultural Encounter*, ed. E. Hanebutt-Benz, D. Glass, G. Roper (Westhofen: WVA-Verlag Skulima, 2002), pp. 53–92. See also the intelligent overviews in Boghos Levon Zekian, “The Armenian Way to Modernity: The diaspora and its role,” in *Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and David N. Myers (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), pp. 45–85; and Panossian, *The Armenians*, pp. 75–109.

<sup>22</sup> Jemjemian, *Mkhit'ar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, provides the best account to date of how books were shipped from one location to the next. Kévorkian, “Livres imprimés et culture écrite,” pp. 351–355, also contains an insightful albeit brief account.

<sup>23</sup> See works cited in footnote 19.

<sup>24</sup> One exception is René Bekius, “Polyglot Amsterdam printing presses: a comparison between Armenian and Jewish printers” (unpublished paper). To the best of my knowledge, there have been no investigations of how the Armenian case study of print and book history, which begins in the Gutenberg era of the hand press, compares to its Islamic counterpart that was largely a byproduct of the post-Gutenberg era of the iron hand press of the nineteenth century. For Persian print history, see Nile Green, “Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism, and the Birth of Printing in Early Qajar Iran,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30/3 (2010), pp. 473–490; and idem, “The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper” *Modern Asian Studies* 44,2 (2010), p. 242. For a detailed comparison of Armenian and Islamic (Perso-Arabic) print traditions, see Sebouh D. Aslanian, “The Early Arrival of Print in Safavid Iran: New Light on the First Armenian Printing Press in New Julfa, Isfahan (1636–1650, 1686–1693),” forthcoming in *Handes Amsorya* (2014) and idem, “Port Cities and Printers: Reflections on Early Modern Global Armenian Print,” *Book History* 17 (2014), pp. 51–93.

most importantly, the principal shortcoming of the historiography on the Armenian book has been the near-complete absence of any scholarship on the last stage of the circuit through which all books must inevitably travel, namely the point at which they reach the hands of their consumers and readers.<sup>25</sup> The “history of reading” or who read what, *how*, and where are questions that have occupied center stage in the discipline of the history of the book in Europe and North America but have not even been raised in the largely analytical bibliography-based pre-Annales scholarship on the Armenian book. In the remainder of the essay, I will attempt to explore in a provisional manner some of these questions by focusing on the publishing and book history of the erudite members of the Mkhitarist Congregation operating from a tiny island in the Venetian lagoon. The publishing history of this Congregation was part of a larger pattern of Armenian print history during the early modern period that was largely a creature of port city networks encompassing early modern mercantile settlements and spanning the world’s oceans and seas.

### **Port Cities and Printers: Towards a History of the Armenian Book Circuit**

From the date of its first appearance in Venice in 1512 to the early nineteenth century, Armenian printing establishments were set up in approximately nineteen cities, producing a little over a thousand separate titles and around 750,000 volumes of print.<sup>26</sup> Nearly all these printing locations were in or near port cities, the majority in the Mediterranean and Atlantic seaboard but a significant number as well in the Indian Ocean. The few that were not, such as New Julfa (1638), Lvov (1618), Ejmiatsin (1771)<sup>27</sup> owed their existence to ongoing relations with port locations.

This early phase of Armenian printing overlaps almost perfectly with the “early modern period” (1500-1800) in world history as well as roughly the same period in the history of print (1450-1800) when the basic technology of printing, represented by the Gutenberg wooden handpress, remained essentially unchanged.<sup>28</sup> Although the cradle of Armenian printing during the

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<sup>25</sup> See, however, Sebouh D. Aslanian, “A Reader Responds to Joseph Emin’s *Life and Adventures*: Notes towards a History of Reading in Late Eighteenth Century Madras,” *Handes Amsorya* (2012), pp. 9-64.

<sup>26</sup> I have taken the figure of nineteen cities from Elizabet Tajiryan, “Amsterdami Hay tpagrutiwnē: tipabanakan verlutsut’iwn.” The estimate of around 750,000 copies of books is my own and is based on an average print-run of 750 copies for around a thousand volumes.

<sup>27</sup> The dates in the parenthesis represent when the first book at the given press was published.

<sup>28</sup> Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 12. See also Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, volume one of *Civilization and Capitalism*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 400. For an analysis, see Sebouh D. Aslanian, “Port Cities and Printers.” Momentous transformations in print

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was confined to the largely European port city locations in the Mediterranean such as Venice, Livorno, Marseille, and to a lesser extent Rome, as well as in Amsterdam on the Atlantic seaboard, by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Armenians were printing across a number of port city centers in Islamicate Eurasia, including Constantinople/Istanbul and Smyrna/Izmir in the Ottoman Empire, and Madras and Calcutta in Mughal India. Most Armenian printers in the early modern period were on the whole members of the Armenian clerical establishment who were sent by the Armenian church hierarchy to port city locations in Europe to learn the craft of printing and to mechanically reproduce works that were no longer available in sufficient numbers in manuscript form. For the most part as well, the patrons or benefactors of printing presses run by the clergy were nearly all what I have called elsewhere “port Armenians,” that is, Armenian long-distance merchants who resided for the most part in some of the leading port cities that formed important nodes in the largely maritime-connected global economy that extended from the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea to the far recesses of the Indian Ocean. Most of these port Armenians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were nearly entirely from the Armenian mercantile suburb of New Julfa on the outskirts of the Safavid imperial capital of Isfahan; a small number were also from other Armenian mercantile centers such as Constantinople or Smyrna, and especially from Agulis.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere, port city locations attracted Armenian printers from early on for multifarious reasons that are connected to what I have called the nexus between port cities, port Armenians, and printers or the “PPP connection.” First, Armenian port city settlements especially in Venice, Livorno, Marseille, and Amsterdam, provided a welcoming societal infrastructure for printers who were attracted to port cities in Europe not only because these places were the leading centers for print technology in Europe (e.g., Venice and Amsterdam) complete with specialists such as font casters, compositors, and paper manufacturers but also because port cities with port Armenian communities provided a ready-made diasporic infrastructure that supported the printers many of whom were Armenian priests. Port Armenians also assisted printers by directly bankrolling their printing presses, as was the case with a string of Armenian printing presses that were set up in the largely Julfan-dominated Armenian community of Amsterdam where Armenian printers mostly of New Julfan origin ran printing presses uninterruptedly from

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technology occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the application of Industrial-Revolution steam technology to the production of cheaper and faster iron printing presses.

1660 to 1717.<sup>29</sup> In cases where they did not invest in or own printing presses, port Armenians often commissioned printed books, provided a much-needed consumer base of readers, or acted as valuable contacts who helped Armenian printers by locating and purchasing useful technical equipment like fonts or actual handpresses, as well as paper supplies. On occasion, they shipped them to locations far from port locations, as was the case with the establishment of the first Armenian press in Ejmiatsin (near land-locked Yerevan) where the supplies were shipped to Catholicos Simeon Yerevants'i in Ejmiatsin by a port Armenian named Mikayēl Agha Khojajanian (also known as Chak'igents') residing in Madras and Pondicherry in India.<sup>30</sup> In sum, the

<sup>29</sup> The best work on Amsterdam Armenian Printing remains, Mesrop Gregorian, *Nor niwt'er ew ditoghut'iwinner hratarakich' Vanantets'woy masin* (New materials and observations on the Vanantets'i family of publishers) (Vienna: Mkhitarist, 1966). See also the classic study of the Armenian community in Amsterdam: Arak'el Sarukhan, *Hollandan ew Hayerē* (Holland and the Armenians) (Vienna: Mkhitarist, 1925) and, more recently, Tajiryan, "Amsterdami Hay tpagrutiwnē."

<sup>30</sup> In his Colophon, Catholicos Simēon Yerewants'i identifies Khojajanian's European contact as a "Monsieur Alexandre DeLache [Մուսի Ալէքսանդր Դլաշ] in the city of Pondicherry," to whom the Catholicos sent a letter of gratitude, "for he was the one who sent me the two French paper-makers, as per the request of Chak'igents' Grigor Agha [i.e., Grigor Khojajanian]." The Colophon also recounts that the Catholicos sent the aforementioned a "letter and a holy insignia which he placed in his letter to Grigor Agha so that he shall have it [i.e., the letter] translated, and along with the holy insignia, deliver it to him [i.e., Monsieur Delache]," see Giwt Aghaneants', *Divan hayots' patmut'ean* (Archive of Armenian history), vol. 8 (Tiflis: Aghaneanc'i, 1908), pp. 417-418. Interestingly, the Armenian gem merchant and traveler, Hovhannes Tovmachanian, who traveled to Madras in 1768-1769, met the same "Monsieur Delache, a certain French merchant in Madras" in the company of the city's local Armenian merchants. T'ovmachanean describes the Frenchman as a merchant working for the French *Compagnie des Indes Orientales* headquartered in Pondicherry. See the unpublished manuscript of his travels, *Vark' ew patmut'ewn T'ovmachanean Mahtesi Tēr Hovhannisi Konstantnupolsets'woy oroy ēnd eresun tērut'iwns shrjeal vacharakanut'eamb ew husk hetoy verstin darts' arareal i bnik k'aghak' iwr Konstantnupolis dzeṛnadri and k'ahanay yIgnatios yepiskoposē yeot'anasnerord ami hasaki iwroy apa ekeal dadarē i vans rabunapeti metsi Mkhitar'aray abbay Hōr i Venetik* (The life and history of Mahtesi Tēr Hovhannēs T'ovmachanean of Constantinople who, after wondering through thirty states conducting commerce, once again returns to his native city of Constantinople where he is anointed a celibate priest by Bishop Ignatius at the age of seventy and then comes to repose at the monastery of the great master, Abbot Mkhitar, in Venice), Manuscript no. 1688, folios 255-257. A Monsieur "Henry Alexandre Delarche" is indeed identified as an official of the French Company in Pondichery who was incidentally married to a Madelaine Elias, the daughter of Pondichery's richest Armenian merchant, Coja Elias di Isaac, who was decorated in the 1720s as a "chevalier d'éperon" in gratitude for his role as philanthropist in the French colonial outpost. See Alfred Martineau, *Résumé des Actes de l'État civil de Pondichéry, Tome II: De 1736 à 1760* (1919-1920), p. 64. According to the register, "27 mai [1743] Delarche (Henry Alexandre) age de 24 ans, né à Pondichéry, employé de la Compagnie, et Jeanne Madelaine Elias, agée de 15 ans, née à Pondichery." Madelaine passed away at age 20 in 1748 (ibid., p.

general pattern for early modern Armenian printing presses seems to have been one where printers, consisting mostly of the literate members of clerical class, were attracted to setting up their printing activities in port cities, primarily in the Mediterranean basin that served as the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cradle for Armenian printing, where they would find support – financial or otherwise – from port-Armenian patrons.

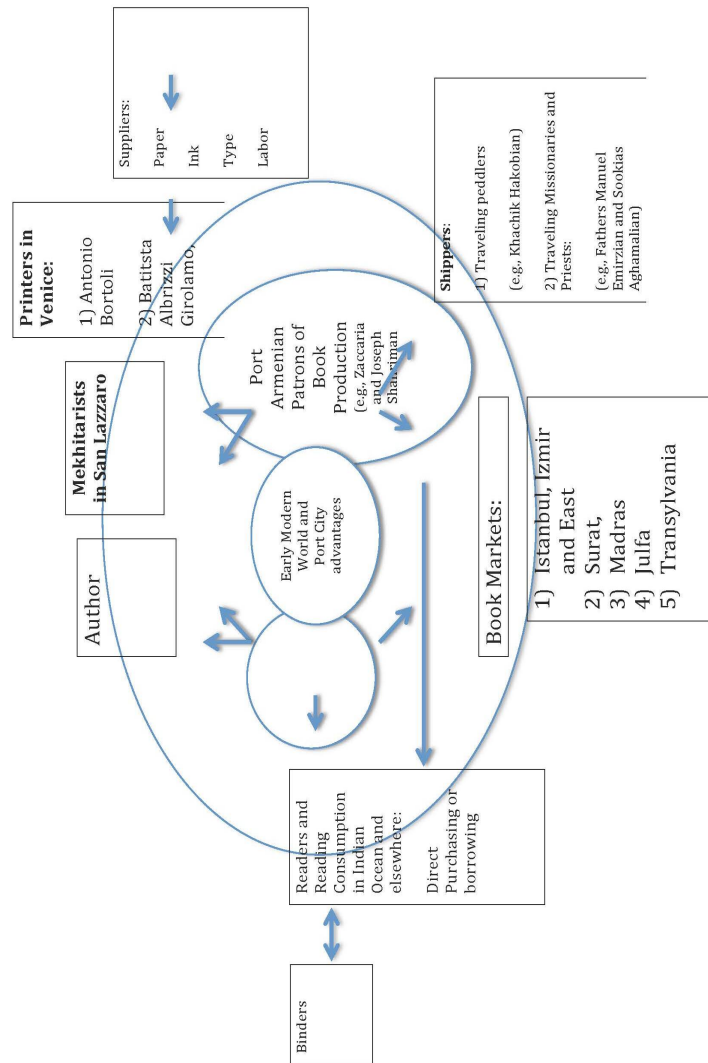
In order to understand more clearly how the Mkhitarist publishing history operated and how it fit within this larger framework of early modern, port-city-dominated Armenian print history, it would be useful here to resort to a theoretical model of the book circuit that Robert Darnton proposed more than twenty years ago that still holds value for the field of book history today. Darnton's model was developed to make sense of the book circuit in late eighteenth century Europe and France to be more specific and may be likened to a "communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader."<sup>31</sup> Adapted to Armenian printing establishments, the model would need to be supplemented by port Armenians and their patronage of printed books. As we shall see in our case study of Mkhitarist publishing, it is the patronage activity of these predominantly Julfan merchants that sets in motion the printing or publishing activities of Armenian printers operating from their printing centers in port cities (e.g., Venice, Amsterdam, Livorno, Constantinople/Istanbul, Madras, and Calcutta). Once their books are printed, they are shipped as commodities (either bound or more often without binding) by either book peddlers or missionaries to reading markets usually also located in port cities where the books are purchased and consumed by literate Armenians who for the most part comprise of the clerical class as well as the very same port Armenians some of whom are also benefactors. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of each stage of the entire communications circuit and will help us more easily conceptualize the operation of the Mkhitarist circuit, a stage-by-stage discussion of which now follows.

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204) her father Elias died five years later in 1753: "Morts 1753: Issac (Coja Elias) age de 76 ans, arménien, negociant à Pondichery," *ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>31</sup> Darnton, "What is the History of Books?," pp. 110-111.

**Model of Book Circuit for the Mekhitarist Congregation during the XVIII Century**  
(based on Robert Darnton)



**Fig. 1**

### **Stage 1: San Lazzaro, the site of book production**

On September 8, 1701, a young, studious priest originally from Sebastea/Sivas in central Asia Minor named Manuk Petrosian (later known as Mkhit'ar of Sebastia or Mkhit'ar Sebastats'i) established an Armenian Catholic brotherhood under the order of Saint Anthony in Constantinople.

Persecuted both by the Armenian Patriarch of the Ottoman capital and the Sublime Porte, Mkhitar first moved with fifteen followers to the Venetian-controlled town of Meton (Methoni) on Morea (the Peloponnese) in the summer of 1703.<sup>32</sup> On the eve of the capture of the town by the Ottomans in 1715, the fledgling congregation, with Mkhitar at its helm, fled to Venice where, through an edict by the Serene Republic's Senate, the Congregation was given the deserted island of San Lazzaro in the lagoon.<sup>33</sup> There, the Congregation of several dozen Armenian monks began systematically to collect ancient Armenian manuscripts from various parts of West Asia and to publish books on Armenian history as well as on the Armenian language, including two grammars by Abbot Mkhitar himself (one for the Classical language, the other for vernacular Armenian) and a two-volume *Dictionary of the Armenian Language* (1749 and 1769). These publications were based on the rigorous study of ancient Armenian manuscripts that had been dispersed throughout the Ottoman Empire and Iran, for the collection of which Abbot Mkhitar and his successors dispatched their missionaries throughout Armenian-populated regions in West Asia. By the time Abbot Mkhitar passed away in 1749, his Order had established an elaborate and informal network of missionaries and book peddlers that stretched from Venice and the Ottoman Empire to India. The traveling missionaries, who were dispatched to various Armenian settlements initially by Mkhitar then by his successors, also established schools and, along with book peddlers working for the Abbot in San Lazzaro, sold books published by their congregation back in Venice. The networks of these mobile missionaries and book peddlers connected early modern Armenian communities across three empires (Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal) to each other and to Venice and to the Mkhitarist publishing enterprise there. As we shall discuss below, these missionary and peddler networks from Venice were, from the beginning, also imbricated into and

<sup>32</sup> Maghak'ia Ormanian, *Azgapatum* (National history), vol. 2, repr. (Antelias: Armenian Catholicosate, 2001), col. 2762.

<sup>33</sup> For Mkhitar's life, see Hovhannes Torossian, *Vark' Mkhitaray Abbayi Sebastats'woy* (The life of Abbott Mkhitar of Sebastia) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1932) and the earlier study of Step'annosi Giwvēr Agonts, *Patmut'iwn kenats' ew varuts' Teārñ Mkhitaray Sebastats'woy Rabunapeti ew Abbayi / hōrineal Step'annosi Giwvēr Agonts' Arhiepiskoposi ew Abbayi* (History of the life and times of the Master Mkhitar of Sebastia, the Master and Abbot, written by Giwvēr Agonts', Archbishop and Abbot) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1810). For good surveys of the order, see Leo, *Hayots' patmut'yun*, vol. 3, pp. 482-522; Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, vol. 2, cols. 2677-2682, 2697-2698, 2703-2704, 2713-2714, 2761-2766, 2829-2834, 2947-2948, and 2969-2971; and Kevork Bardakjian, *The Mekhitarist Contributions to Armenian Culture and Scholarship: Notes to Accompany an Exhibit of Armenian Printed Books in the Widener Library, Displayed on the 300th anniversary of Mekhitar of Sebastia, 1676-1749* (Cambridge, MA: Middle Eastern Department, Harvard College Library, 1976). For an introductory survey of the Congregation's history, see Panossian, *The Armenians*, p. 103.

benefitted from the larger web of the mercantile and information network that stretched out West and East from New Julfa, an Armenian commercial suburb of the Safavid imperial capital of Isfahan.<sup>34</sup>

Following the pattern of Armenian books printed in Venice long before the Congregation had settled there, Mkhit'ar outsourced the printing of his books to local Venetian printers and, until 1727, exclusively to the Italian printer Antonio Bortoli who was given a monopoly on printing Armenian- and Greek-language books by the Senate and whose family enjoyed this privilege for most of the eighteenth century.<sup>35</sup> It was only in 1789, when an Armenian printing press was established on the island, that the Mkhit'arists began to print their own books. In the course of the eighteenth century, this tiny congregation of monks in a city with less than a hundred resident Armenians had a total output of published books only second to Istanbul where close to twenty individual Armenian printers operated at one point or another and catered to the imperial city's close to 80,000 Armenian population.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> On Julfan information networks and the role of couriers and correspondence in circulation information throughout that network, see Sebouh D. Aslanian, "'The Salt in a Merchant's Letter': The Culture of Julfan Correspondence in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean," *Journal of World History* 19, 2 (2008), pp. 127-188, and idem, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa, Isfahan* (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), pp. 86-120. As some letters belonging to Catholic Julfan merchants in the eighteenth century demonstrate, a number of Julfan merchants did not hesitate to rely upon Mkhit'arist monks or missionaries to relay their letters, thus indicating that the two networks were imbricated with one another. Mkhit'arists in their turn also used the Julfan network to relay their letters or printed books across Eurasia. For one instance of Julfan merchants relying on Mkhit'arist monks to send letters, see letter from Avetik di Ibrahim in Basra dated December 31, 1753 to Dateos di Nazar Sceriman/Shahrimanian and Nazar di Dateo Sceriman/Shahrimanian in Venice (Archivio Istituto don Mazza (henceforth Don Mazza), Verona, Busta 2. See also letter to Tadeo di Nazar Sceriman/Shahrimanian from one of his sons (no name given) written in Baghdad, on Ghamar 29 [August 16] Azaria year 164 [1779], Don Mazza, busta 3. My thoughts here on the overlapping of missionary and mercantile networks has benefited from conversations with Michael Pifer and the graduate seminar on "Early Modern Armenian History" I taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, in the spring of 2009.

<sup>35</sup> See Jemjemian, *Mkhit'ar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, pp. 109-122. In addition to Antonio Bortoli who published most of Mkhit'ar's work, the Congregation also employed another Italian printer named Battista Albrizzi Girolamo, *ibid.*, 113. Surprisingly, no separate study of the Bortoli press seems to exist in any language. For passing remarks on different members of the Bortoli family who were active in Venetian printing throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, see Mario Infelise, *L'editoria Veneziana nel '700* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1989), pp. 24 and 170; on Albrizzi, see p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> We don't have 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), p. 176. A slightly higher number of 100,000 for around the same period is provided by H. M.



According to Kévorkian's calculations, Venice and Istanbul together produced about 85 percent of all the Armenian books published during the eighteenth century, that is, 683 titles out of a total of 820 that appeared in Armenian during the same period.<sup>37</sup> Both the high print quality of Mkhitarist publications as well as the erudition and knowledge that went into compiling or writing their books made the Mkhitarists one of the most sought-after Armenian publishers/printers of the eighteenth century. But how did Mkhitarist books find their way to consumers in distant markets where Armenian reading publics existed? Where were these markets located and what method did Mkhitar and his successors follow to transport their books there? Finally, once the books reached their destination, how and by whom

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Ghazaryan, "Merdzavor arevelk'i haykakan gaght'ojakhnerë: Kostandnupolsi ew Zmyurniay gaght'ojakhnerë" (The Armenian diaspora settlements of the Near East: The Diaspora settlements of Constantinople and Smyrna), in *Hay zhoghovrdi patmut'iwn* (History of the Armenian People), vol. 4 (Yerevan: Haykakan SSH GA Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1972), p. 202. For a smart discussion of the dissemination of printed books, see the following works by Kévorkian, *Catalogue*; idem, "Livre imprimé"; idem, *Les imprimes arméniens des XVIe et XVIIe Siecles*; idem, *Les imprimes arméniens 1701-1850*.

<sup>37</sup> Kévorkian, *Les imprimes arméniens 1701-1850*, p. 5. For the Armenian population of Venice of less than a hundred residents (excluding itinerant visitors), see Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, p. 71. A census taken in Venice in 1750 indicates that the city's resident Armenians included seventy merchants associated with the local Armenian church of Santa Croce along with about seventeen clerics. See "Procuratori di San Marco," Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), busta 180, (Santa Croce), stampa folder, "Nazione degl'Armeni nella Chiesa di S. Croce di detta Nazione," pp. 117-118. See Merujan Karapetyan, "Hayerë Venetikum 1750 t'uin" (Armenians in Venice in the year 1750), *Handes Amsorya* (2010), pp. 211-226, for a copy of the same document preserved in the Alishan archives in San Lazzaro. The list does not include Mkhitarist monks or students on San Lazzaro, which could be another twenty to thirty people. At the most, the number of Armenians in Venice in the mid-eighteenth century appears not to have exceeded a hundred people. See also the document in the same collection entitled "Li Armeni, che sono accasiti in Venezia" (The Armenians who have become domiciled in Venice). Ghewond Alishan, in his *Sisakan* (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1893), p. 446, suggests that this census presents the low ebb of the Armenian presence in Venice and that twelve Armenian mercantile houses had left the city in the 1732-1738 period. During the eighteenth century, a total of 365 titles were published in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople/Istanbul, where Armenian printers had shifted their base of operations in the East. In Europe, Venice continued to maintain its lead after the Mkhitarists got established on San Lazzaro in 1717. According to Kévorkian, the Mkhitarists published during the same period a total of 318 titles both in Venice and Trieste. Thus, both Constantinople and Venice together produced a total of 683 publications or 85 percent out of a total of 820 titles that appeared in Armenian during the same period across the world. The remaining 15 percent were published in Rome, Smyrna/Izmir (after 1762) Ejmiatsin (after 1771) Madras (after 1772), London (after 1780), St. Petersburg (after 1781), Nor Nakhijevan (after 1790), Calcutta (after 1796), and Astrakhan (after 1796). For details, see Kévorkian, *Les imprimes arméniens*, p. 5.

were they read, and did the “reader response” of these consumers have an influence on what the Mkhitarists decided to publish?

### **Stages 2 and 3:**

#### **Peddler Networks and Reading Publics across the Indian Ocean**

Like other Armenian printers who had set up printing presses in Europe during the early modern period, the Mkhitarists were located in a busy port city (Venice) with excellent transportation and shipping facilities. Unlike Amsterdam, which had dominated Armenian book production during the second half of the seventeenth century, the Mkhitarist center of operation was much closer to the main reading market for Armenian books, namely Istanbul, home to the largest Armenian urban population during that period. Venice was also an information and transportation hub that was connected to the second most important center for early modern Armenian readers and benefactors, namely the thriving Armenian mercantile communities across the Indian Ocean in South Asia.<sup>38</sup>

The Mkhitarists supplied the market for Armenian books by relying upon two methods of transportation. The first was through traveling book peddlers, a method widely used in Europe during the same period. The available body of archival documentation does not permit us to say how many such peddlers worked for the Congregation during the eighteenth century or on what terms they were employed by the Abbot. Given that the Mkhitarists were intimately connected with the larger mercantile network of Julfan Armenian merchants and that Venice was an important commercial center for Julfan merchants, it is likely that they relied on an informal basis on the kindness of trustworthy Julfans who happened to be passing through Venice on business and agreed to assist the Congregation by selling their books during their travels in the East. For instance, we know from correspondence stored at the Mkhitarist archives that one such book peddler was Khach'ik Hakobian, a *commenda*<sup>39</sup> agent working for a wealthy Julfan merchant and patron for Mkhitar, Khwaja Melik' Khaldarents' residing in Surat, India. Khach'ik regularly peddled books for Abbot Mkhitar as early as the 1720s, when he is reported to have taken a small crate of Mkhitarist books to his master in Surat upon returning

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<sup>38</sup> For Venice's role as an information and transportation hub during the early modern period, see Peter Burke, “Early Modern Venice as a Center of Information and Communication,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2002), 389-420.

<sup>39</sup> On *commenda* agents in Julfan trade, see Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, pp. 121-165, and idem, “Circulating Credit and Merchants in the Indian Ocean: The Role and Influence of the *Commenda* contract in Julfan Trade,” *The Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 50, 2 (2007), pp. 124-171.

home from business in the Mediterranean and Western Europe.<sup>40</sup> According to an entry Abbot Mkhitar made on March 21, 1732, in his accounting ledger where he kept a detailed list of transactions pertaining to his Congregation's publishing business when Hakobian left Venice in 1732, he took with him 817 books, and in the course of the next eight years sold them in such places as Aleppo, Smyrna, Baghdad, New Julfa/Isfahan, Basra, Surat, Madras, and Bengal (Calcutta and Chinsura).<sup>41</sup> We will examine Hakobian's correspondence with Mkhitar for clues on Armenian reading habits as well as his role as a devoted peddler to Mkhitar and his Congregation in detail below in the conclusion. Let us now turn to other methods for the dissemination of the Congregation's books.

In addition to relying on circulating peddlers, Mkhitar and his congregation also relied on their own traveling missionaries to circulate their books to Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and Mughal India. For instance, on April 15, 1729, Mkhitar noted in his special ledger that he placed about 400 books in a crate to be carried by one of his own monks, Father Manuēl, and sold in Transylvania.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when Mkhitar wanted to disseminate and sell his newly printed books to Armenian readers in or near Istanbul, he sent them in special crates on ships leaving from Venice for Istanbul or Izmir, to be received by his monks already residing and working there, and sold to local and other booksellers.<sup>43</sup> Thus, on February 4, 1730, Mkhitar notes in his

<sup>40</sup> For a reference to Khach'ik Hakobian as a *commenda* agent for Khwaja Melik' Khaldarents' in the 1720s, see Abbot Mkhitar's letter to Melik' dated 1724 in *Namakani tsarayin Astutsoy tearn Mkhitararay Abbayi eranashnorh himnadri Mkhitar'arean Miabanut'ean* (Letter book of the Servant of God, Abbot Mkhitar, the blessed founder of the Mkhitarist Congregation) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1961) vol 1, 450-451. Members of the Mkhitarist order printed this valuable collection of correspondence for private consumption. I am grateful to Abbot Yeghia Kilaghibian for allowing me to consult it.

<sup>41</sup> The ledger is stored at the Mkhitarist Archives on San Lazzaro (henceforth ASL) and bears the title in Mkhitar's hand of "Տոմարսկ Գրեանց, 1729-1737" (Register of Books, 1729-1737). See Figure 3, below, for an image of this page. Jemjemian extensively used it in his studies and following him so has Merujan Karapetian. I thank Dr. Karapetian for making a copy of this valuable source available for me. The entry for March 21, 1732 lists a total of 817 books by title that Mkhitar handed on consignment to Hakobian. On April 15, Mkhitar notes that he sent another fifty-eight books to Hakobian in Livorno, bringing the total to 883 books as Mkhitar himself notes. Jemjemian (*Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, p. 305) was the first to discuss this list but appears to have made an error in calculating the total number of books in Hakobian's possession, which he lists as 767 instead of the 817 in initial consignment. See the conclusion below for a discussion of the contents of this list as well as Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, pp. 305-307.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. The entry for April 15, 1729, reads: "We placed in the crate of Father Manuel, the below-given books to be sold in Transylvania" (*Եղաք ի սնտուկն Հ- Մանուէլին զգրեանս ի ներքոյ եղեալս Առ ի վաճառել ի դրանսիւանիայ*).

<sup>43</sup> Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, pp. 278-305.

ledger that he packed about 540 of the Congregation's newly printed books in two separate crates to be shipped to Constantinople by the ship of "Capitano Metteo." The crates were marked "P:M" presumably for Padre Mechitar.<sup>44</sup> As Jemjemian notes in his analysis of this ledger, it was understood that Mkhitar's own missionaries stationed in Constantinople were expected to unload the books and sell them in the Ottoman capital.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes, Mkhitarist monks did double duty as book peddlers by transporting and selling books during their visits to distant Armenian communities. This was the case for the opulent Julfan Armenian communities in India that were intellectually and culturally dependent on Mkhitarist publications despite having their own printing establishments. Thus, when a small delegation of Mkhitarist monks was dispatched in 1772 to the Indo-Armenian communities in Surat, Madras, and Calcutta with the intention of raising money for their congregation, they left San Lazzaro with several crates filled with books to sell in places like Basra and India during their travels.

Much like the correspondence of book peddlers, the letters written back to the Abbot in San Lazzaro by missionaries contain much information on the reading tastes and preferences of the Congregation's literary consumers in India, the majority of whom were merchants. These letters allowed the Abbot back in San Lazzaro to gauge the "reader response" and consumption patterns of faraway reading publics. As an example of how this survey method worked, let us consider what Mkhitarist monks visiting Armenian settlements in Surat, Madras, and Calcutta in India in the early 1770s were reporting home in their letters.<sup>46</sup> In a letter written shortly after his arrival in Madras, by way of Basra, in June 28, 1770, and sent to Abbot Mkhitar's successor, Step'an Melk'onian

<sup>44</sup> ASL, Register of Books, 1729-1737, Entry for February 4, 1730: "We dispatched two crates of books to Constantinople with the ship of captain Matteo whose number is the following" (*Առաքեցաք զ [2] սնտուկ գրեանս ի կոստանդնուպօլիս ընդ նաւու զաբոտան Մաթթօի, որոց գրեանց թիւն է այս*). In the same entry, Mkhitar writes: "And we marked the crates as follows: P:M" (*էւ զսնտուկն նշանեցաք այսպէս: P:M*).

<sup>45</sup> Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch'akan*, pp. 278-305.

<sup>46</sup> The delegation left Venice in 1769 and by way of Alexandria (Egypt) proceeded to the Levant and down to Basra, the gateway to India. It consisted of three monks, Fathers Suk'ias Aghamalian, Manuēl Emirzian, and the formidable Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants'. Ch'amch'iants' stayed back in Basra, while the other two traveled to Surat, Madras, and Calcutta. For background on the visit and a sampling of letters, see Ghewond Tayean, *Mayr diwan Mkhitar'areants' Venetkoy i Surb Ghazar, 1707-1773* (Grand archives of the Mkhitarists of Venice at San Lazzaro, 1707-1773) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1930). See letter by Fathers Manuēl Emirze (Emirzian), Suk'ias Aghamalian, and Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants', to Abbot Melk'onian dated July 3, 1769, Acre in *Mayr Diwan*, 258-259; see also letter by Suk'ias Aghamalian to Melk'onian dated October 20, 1770 from Calcutta, *ibid.*, 348-349; and an excerpt from Suk'ias Aghamalian's letter from Calcutta to Melk'onian dated February 20 and 26, *ibid.*, 351.

(r. 1750-1799), who had been elected as Abbot shortly following Mkhitar's passing away in 1749, Father Suk'ias Aghamalian provides the following assessment of the book market in Madras:

All the Armenians in Madras remain thirsty and are filled with the desire for books. As a result of which, upon our arrival [here] each one came to ask us to have books put aside for them, some [wanting] the Holy Scriptures, others the Dictionary, etc. When we lowered the crate [of books] from the ship, we realized that we could not please everyone on account of the scarcity of our books, for one crate was left behind in Basra and one third of the other crate with us was consumed in Surat. [At that point,] Barons Nazar and Shamir deliberated together about taking the crate of books with someone to Baron Nazar's house and making an announcement to everyone to come there; and one evening, all the wealthy as well as the lesser [members] of this place congregated at Baron Nazar's house. When the crate was opened before everyone, he who was capable of it took what he was looking for, and the books were immediately sold out almost in their entirety. On account of this, we ask that you may hastily send books in great numbers, that is to say, the Holy Scriptures, the Dictionary, the book of Grammar, Naregats'i and other writings in great numbers, *especially if there should be published a new book of history, or something novel*. If there were to be ten crates of such books, they would all be taken here. And if it is possible, send bigger crates by way of England or France, for ships from those lands frequently come [here] and many times they come to the Indies from Europe in four months. Also send the *Great Atlas* [*Ashkharats'oyts'n mets*] and if there are any translations of works on geography. You may send them there [to Madras] if you please to Baron Nazar Khojamalian or if he is not there to Baron Mikayel Tēr Hovhanessian, or to Agha Shamir, for they will sell a portion of it in Madras and send the rest to us in Bengal....(Emphasis added).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> ASL, "Letter by Suk'ias Aghamalian to Abbot Melk'onian, June 25, 1770." The letter must have been sent shortly before Father Suk'ias and his traveling companion left Madras by ship for Calcutta. The original reads: "Ի մատրաս հայքն ամ[ենայն] իբրեւ քաղցեալ եւ ծարաւի փափաքեալ մնային գրեանց, վ[ա]ս[նորո] ի գալ մերում իւրաքանչիւր գայր եւ խնդրեր պահել վասն իւր զգրեանսն գոր խնդրեր՝ ոմն ա[ստուա]ծաշունչ ոմն զբարգիւրք եւ այլն. յիջուցանել մեր զարկղն գրեանց ՚ի նաւէն: Իբրեւ տեսաք զի ոչ կարեաք հաճել զմիտս ամենեցուն վասն սակաւութե[ան] գրեանցն որովհետեւ մի արկղ մնաց ի պասրա եւ միւսոցէ գրեթէ զերրորդ մասն առին ի սուրաթ, խօրհեցան ի միասին պ[ա]ր[ո]ն նազարն ու պ[ա]ր[ո]ն շամիրն հանդերձ մեօք տանիլ զարկղն ի տուն պ[ա]ր[ո]ն նազարին եւ ազդ առնել ամենեցուն զի գայցեն անդ: եւ ի միում երեկոյի լցան տեղսն մեծամեծք եւ փոքունք ՚ի տուն պ[ա]ր[ո]ն նազարին եւ բացեալ զարկղն առաջի ամենեցուն էառ իւրաքանչիւր զխնդրե[ա]յն իւր որ որ եղել ձեռնհաս, եւ ի միում վայրկե[ա]յնի սպառեցին քրեթէ ողջոյն:

The same interest in secular works (geography, history, dictionaries, atlases, and “novel” works demanded by Armenian readers of Madras) is evident in another letter by the same monk, dated February 20, 1771, this time from Calcutta: “There is no one in Bengal who is interested in ancient writings such as Psalters, Breviaries, and so on. But if there were to be copies of the New Dictionary, books of grammar, booklets of the Alphabet and other new works, especially of histories, such works would be sought after here and elsewhere.”<sup>48</sup>

Again, we read the following account of the Armenian book market in Madras in a letter by Father Aghamalian’s traveling companion, Father Manuēl Emirzian, dated February 20, 1771: “Books of histories, on political governance, of secular learning and of fables are very much acceptable to them [i.e., by Armenian readers in Madras]. And they frequently request and ask why we do not print such books. And even if there were to be some unfinished books such as these, they would be pleasing to them, so long as they be secular and contain new or modern information [*noralur*].”<sup>49</sup>

As sparse as these reports may be, they nonetheless offer us a rare glimpse into the “mental horizons” of Armenian readers in the mercantile centers of South Asia. They may not enable us to write a comprehensive history of early modern Armenian reading, but together with other documentation of this sort

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վ[ա]ս[նորոյ] խնդրենք զի փութով յղեսցիք գրեանս յոլովս ա[յսինքն] զա[ստուածա]շունչ, բառգիրք, զքերականութիւն, զնարեկացի, եւ զայլ գրեանս յոլովս, մանաւանդ եթէ տպագրեալ իձէ նոր գիրք պատմութեանց կ[ա]մ ալ ինչ նոր. յորոց եթէ տասն արկեղք եւս լինիցին, առնուն աստ: եւ եթէ հնար է, առաքեսցիք մեծամեծ արկեղքք ընդ անգղեա կ[ա]մ զաղղեա. զի յաճախ զան նաւք յաշխարհաց անտի եւ բ[ա]զ[ու]մ անգամ ի չորս ամիսս ժամանակին յերոպոլիս ՚ի հնդկիւ: Առաքեսցիք եւ զաշխարհացոյցն մեծ եւ զայլս եթէ թարգմանե[ա]լ տպագրեսցեն գիրք աշխարհագրութեանց յայլ կողմանս, վ[ա]ս[նորոյ] առաքեսցիք գրեանս անդ, եթէ կամիք ՚ի ձեռն պարոն նազարին խօճամալեան եւ նա չիձէ անդ, ՚ի ձեռն պարոն միքայէլին տ[է]ր յուհաննիսեան, կ[ա]մ ՚ի ձեռն աղայ շամիրին. զի նորայ զմասն ինչ վաճառեսցեն ի մատրաս, եւ զմասն ինչ առաքեսցեն առ մեզ ՚ի քանկալայ....”

<sup>48</sup> Letter of Father Suk’ias Aghamalian, Calcutta, February 20, 1771, to Mikayēl Ch’amch’iants’, ASL. “Ի Բանգալա չիք որ խնդրող հին գրեանցն, զ[ո]ր են սաղմոս, ժամագիրք եւ [այլն]. Բայց եթէ զբառգիրքն նոր. զքերականութիւն, զտետրակն այբուբենից, եւ զայլ նորանոր գրեանս մանաւանդ պատմութիւնից. եւ այսոսիկ եւս խնդրեն այլուր:”

<sup>49</sup> Letter of Manuēl Emirzian, dated February 20, 1771, ASL. The original reads, “Զգիրս պատմութեանց, կառավարութեան քաղաքաց արտաքին ուսմանց եւ առակաց յոյժ ընթունելի է սոցայ, եւ ստէպ խնդրեն եւ ասեն թէ ընդէ՞ր զայսպիսին ոչ տպագրէք, եւ եթէ անկատար եւս ինչ իցէ հաճոյ է սոցայ միայն աշխարհական եւ նորալուր իցէ...”

as well as previously untapped documents from notarial and probate records of books or private merchant libraries in the estates of the deceased, they suggest that by the second half of the eighteenth century Armenian readers in Madras and Calcutta (and this also probably applies to their counterparts in Istanbul and elsewhere) were affected by the general ethos characterizing the Enlightenment in Europe. Kévorkian, for instance, has calculated that 72 percent of the printed books had a religious or spiritual theme out of a total of 151 books produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We can only surmise that this figure would be considerably lower for the second half of the eighteenth century, especially when the reader response of Armenians in India and the almost desperate tone of the pleas to the Mkhit'arists not to focus exclusively on Psalters or Breviaries but to gear their publications according to the prevailing demands of the market is taken into consideration. More than anything else perhaps, these letters indicate the global nature of the Mkhit'arist enterprise and more particularly on how decisions made in San Lazzaro on what books to write and publish were influenced by "reader response" and market forces originating halfway across the globe in India and more closer to home in Istanbul. It is not coincidental that by the second half of the eighteenth century, Mkhit'arist book production had become increasingly secular in nature, reflecting perhaps the demand for books in India as suggested in this correspondence. The publication of Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants''s monumental *History of the Armenians* (1784-86) followed by a host of new works on geography by Ghukas Injijian (1791, 1804-1817), ancient history (1832), new grammars (1779 and 1830), and the beginning of the vernacular press (1799-1802, 1802-1820, 1844-the present) are all telltale signs that the Mkhit'arists were yielding to the pulls of the literary market in such places as Constantinople and Madras.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond catering to the literary tastes of faraway markets, the Mkhit'arists were also connected to and dependent on the urban centers in the Armenian diaspora for another reason; they needed the financial support and patronage of port Armenians, the majority of whom as we have seen were originally from the great mercantile township of New Julfa and lived in the leading port cities of the Indian Ocean and especially in Surat, Madras, and Calcutta. These port Armenians across the Indian Ocean provided the financial lifeline that was crucial in sustaining the Mkhit'arist printing and cultural/literary enterprise in San Lazzaro. The mercantile capital they provided was vital for the success of the Mkhit'arist enterprise because it enabled them not only to

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<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of these works and the relevant dates of their publication, see Barsegh Sargisean, *Yerkhariwramea grakanakan gortsuneut'iwn ew nshanawor gortsich'ner Venetkoy Mkhit'arean miabanut'ean* (Bicentennial of the Literary endeavors and famous writers of the Mkhit'arist Congregation of Venice) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1905).

pay for their printing expenses but also to create a far-flung network of schools. Here again, the examples of port Armenian patronage from the communities in India are too many to list, and the case of Edward Raphael Gharamians' well-known commissioning of the printing of Charles Rollin's *Histoire Romaine*, resulting in the opening of the Murat Raphael College (or Collegio Armeno) in Venice has already been studied elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> What is less well known is the patronage for printing books by two Shahrmanian/Sceriman brothers in Calcutta that resulted in the printing of a dozen important books by the Congregation during the second half of the eighteenth century including some of the most important works published during that period.

### **The Sceriman Patronage: A Microhistorical Case Study of a Global Patronage Network**

The Portuguese church of the Virgin Mary of the Rosary in Calcutta has two ornately decorated limestone tombstones lying side by side and containing the following inscriptions:

Ի ՏԱՊԱՆԻ ԱՍՏ ԱՄՓՈՓԻ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՈՒՄԵՄՆ ԲԱՐԵՊԱՇՏԻ  
ԱՆՈՒՆ ՍՈՐԱՅ ՅՕՎՍԵՓ ԿՈՉԻ ՈՐԴԻ ԳՈԼՈՎ ԲԱՐԱՂԱՍԻ  
ԱԶՆԻԻ ՅԵՂԷՆ ՇԷՐԻՄԱՆԵՑԻ Ի ԸՄՊԱՀԱՆՈՒ ՃՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ ՈՐ  
ՓՈԽԵՑԱՒ Ի ԿԵՆԱՅՍ ԱՍՏ Ի ԹԻՎՆ 1763 ՅՈՒՆԻՍԻ 11 ՈՒՄՆ

HIC IACET JOSEPH BAGARAM XERIMAN, NATIONE  
ARMENIUS, OBIIT DIE XI, IUNI, ANNO DOMINI  
MDCCLXIII”

[In this tomb lies the body of a pious person whose name was Joseph son of Baragham/Baghrum of the noble lineage of Shahrmanian from Julfa in Isfahan who passed away here in the year 1763 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June]

Ի ՏԱՊԱՆԻ ԱՍՏ ԱՄՓՈՓԻ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՈՒՄԵՄՆ ԲԱՐԵՊԱՇՏԻ  
ԱՆՈՒՆ ՍՈՐԱՅ ԶԱՔԱՐԻԱՅ ԿՈՉԻ ՈՐԴԻ ԳՈԼՈՎ ԲԱՐԱՂԱՍԻ

<sup>51</sup> For the classic account, see Sargis T'ēodorean's magisterial and authoritative, *Patmut' iwn Muratean ew Haykazean varzharanats' ew Mkhit' arean Abbayits'* (History of the Muratean and Haygazean Colleges and of the Mkhit'arist Abbots), vol. 1 (Paris: Chardon Ainé, 1866). See also, Sebouh D. Aslanian, “La fioritura culturale delle comunità armenie in India e nel mondo dell'Oceano indiano e lo sviluppo del pensiero sociale e politico durante il secolo XVIII” (The cultural flourishing of the Armenian communities in India and the Indian Ocean world and the development of their social and political thought during the eighteenth century) in *Armenia: Impronte di una civiltà*, ed. Levon B. Zekiyan, Gabriela Uluhogian, and Vartan Karapetian (Milan: Skira, 2011), pp. 207-211.



ԱԶՆԻԻ ՅԵՂԷՆ ՇԷՐԻՄԱՆԵՑԻ Ի ԸՍՊԱՀԱՆՈՒ ՃՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ ՈՐ  
ՓՈԽԵՑԱԻ Ի ԿԵՆԱՅՍ ԱՍՏ Ի ԹԻՎՆ 1764 ՆՈՒԵՄԲԵՐԻ 27ՈՒՄՆ

HIC IACET ZACHARIAS BAGARAM XERIMAN  
NATIONE ARMENIUS, OBIIT ? DIE VEGESSIMA  
SEPTIMA NOVEMBRIS, ANNODOMINI MDCCLXIV

[In this tomb lies the body of a pious person whose name was Zaccaria son of Baragham/Baghrum of the noble lineage of Shahrmanian from Julfa in Isfahan who passed away here in the year 1764 on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November]<sup>52</sup>

The individuals in question were obviously brothers who died within a year of each other in Calcutta and were scions of one of the wealthiest families from New Julfa, the Armenian-Catholic Shahrman or Sceriman /

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<sup>52</sup> The inscriptions that follow are based on my reading of the tombstone images of them. I thank Liz Chater for providing me with high quality photos of the tombstones in question. Some of these tombstones were transcribed in an essay by Mesrob Seth that came to my attention as this essay was going to press, Mesrob Seth, “Shirimk‘ anmah barerats‘n tpagrut‘ean ch‘amch‘eani erahator patmut‘ean hayots” (Tombstones of the immortal benefactors of the printing of Ch‘amch‘ean’s three-volume History of the Armenians) *Bazmavēp* 96, 4-5 (April-May, 1938), pp. 112-117. A record of them can also be found in M. Derozario, *The Complete Monumental Register: Containing All the Epitaphs, Inscriptions &c &c &c in the different churches and Burial grounds in or around Calcutta....* (Calcutta: P. Ferris, 1815), pp. 179, 180. Note, however, that the transcription of the Classical Armenian is missing in Derozario’s work and that of the Latin inscriptions are flawed as well. There are several other Armenian tombstones in this church including those of the following Shahrmanian members:

Ի ՏԱՊԱՆԻՍ Է ՀԱՆԳՈՒՑԵԱԼ ՃՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ ՇԷՐԻՄԱՆԷՆՅ ՇԷՐԻՄԱՆԻ[?] ՈՐԴԻ  
ՓԼԻՊՊՈՍԻՆ ԱԶԳԱԻ ՀԱՅ ՎԱՃԱՌԱԿԱՆ ՎԱՂՃՍԱՆԵՑԱԻ Ի ԿԱԼԿԱԹԱՅ  
ԹԻՒՆ ՓՐԿՉԻՆ 1755 ԹԻՒՆ ՓՈՔՐ ԱՃԽ [140+1615=1755]ԹԻՐԱՅ Լ [30]

IN THIS TOMB LIES PHILOS THE SON OF SHERIMAN OF THE SHERIMANIAN  
FAMILY OF JULFA AN ARMENIAN BY NATION AND A MERCHANT WHO PASSED  
AWAY AT CALCUTTA IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1755 AND IN THE SMALL  
CALENDAR OF 140 ON 30 OF TIRA [OCTOBER 17]

IN ISTO TUMULO JACET CORPUS DEFUNTI PHILOPI XERIMANI NATIONE  
ARMENI(MERCATOR) DIEM SUPREMUM OBIIT COLICATE DIE 27 OCTOBRIS  
ANNO 1755.

Derozario, *The Complete Monumental Register*, p. 179. The Azaria date for Tira 30 corresponds to October 17 according to Abrahamyan’s table for converting Azaria months, Ashot Abrahamyan, *Hayots‘ gir ev grch‘ut‘yun* (Armenian letters and writing) (Yerevan: Yerevani Petakan Hamalsarani, 1972), pp. 118-120. The Latin date according to the transcription in Derozario is 27 October. The actual tombstone appears to be half covered by some kind of construction making the date illegible. I have relied on Seth, “Shirimk‘ anmah,” to reconstruct part of the covered text in Armenian.

Xeriman family whose members were scattered in different parts of the world and were principally located in Isfahan / New Julfa, Venice, Livorno, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Madras, and Calcutta. In addition to being counts and countesses in the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as a number of Italian city-states, this wealthy family of gem and silk merchants from New Julfa were also great patrons for the arts, and especially for the nascent craft of printing among the Armenians. Joseph and Zachariah's great uncle, Gasparo Shahrman, in fact owned his own private printing press in Venice in the 1685 and had moreover commissioned the printing of several works in Armenian along with other family members. Given their family's wide renown as patrons for printing, it should come as no surprise that these two brothers from the Calcutta branch of the family also distinguished themselves as benefactors for the Mkhitarist publishing enterprise.<sup>53</sup>

A Carmelite missionary, Bishop Cornelius, alludes to these wealthy brothers in his 1767 letter from Bushire in the Persian Gulf:

two brothers of a branch of the Shariman, very rich merchants, who both three years ago (1764) within a year of each other died in Bengal, leaving by their wills, as they had no heirs, the sum of 100,000 rupees (=500,000 scudi) to the convent of S. Lazzaro of the Armenian monks at Venice for the benefit of Catholics, and the conversion of heretics of their race.<sup>54</sup>

What Bishop Cornelius forgets to mention is that the enormous sums bequeathed by the brothers for the Mkhitarist Congregation were not meant for general use let alone “for the conversion of heretics of their race.” Rather, they were specifically put aside for the printing of books in memory of the benefactors. The probate records including the wills of these two brothers stored in the India Office Records (IOR) of the British Library as well as a previously unstudied ledger book entitled “The Accounting Ledger of the Shahrman Brothers of Joseph and Zaccaria”<sup>55</sup> stored in the Mkhitarist Archives in San Lazzaro enable us to reconstruct in part the patronage history

<sup>53</sup> On the Sceriman/Shahrmanian family, see Sebouh D. Aslanian and Hourii Berberian, “Sceriman Family,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* online (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sceriman-family>), 2009. See also Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, pp. 149-159.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Chick, *The Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Missions of the XVII and XVIIIth Centuries*, vol. 2 (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1939), p. 1362.

<sup>55</sup> Alishan Archives, Archivio San Lazzaro (ASL) “Տոմարն Յաշուի Շէրիմանի պարոն Յովսէփին եւ պարոն Զաքարիին” (Account book of Parons Hovsep and Zaccar Shahrmanians/Scerimans). This ledger appears to have been first recorded in 1765 but additions were made to it as late as the 1790s. I am grateful to Abbot Yeghia Kilaghbian for making it accessible to me along with other Sceriman-related papers preserved by Alishan in the Congregation's collection.

of these Shahrman brothers and in doing so to illuminate on the global nature of the Mkhit'arist book enterprise and how port Armenians in India figured in this enterprise.

How and when these two brothers settled down in India is not known. Like other members of their family, they probably fled their hometown of Julfa during the turbulent and tyrannical rule of Nadir Shah Afshar in the 1740s; unlike most of their relatives, however, Joseph and Zachariah, sons of Khwaja Baghrum, did not decide to settle down in either Venice or Livorno where most of their cousins had put down roots but in the English East India Company's settlement in Calcutta. On the twentieth day of the Azaria month of Hamira, in the year 147 (December 5, 1762), the elder of the two, Joseph drafted his last will and testament leaving his entire estate, including several residences in Bengal as well as bonds, to his younger brother Zachariah and requesting from him only "to secure Daily Mass to be said for my Sake as I directed to you by Words of mouth, which must be done in my Remembrance."<sup>56</sup> Before his own death less than a year later, Zachariah in turn left his own will turning the combined assets in his and his brother's estates over to the Mkhit'arist Congregation in Venice and to Abbot Mkhit'ar's successor, Step'an Melk'onian. What is remarkable about this will is not necessarily the request made by Zachariah to have daily prayers for his and his brother's soul but to have the bulk of his and his brother's estate placed in the care of the Congregation "to be used in the Service of Stamping the new Books of any kind as we have no any [sic] Remembrance in the world it may be for our Remembrance." The concluding segment of this will contains the most vital information regarding the brothers' generous act of patronage and deserves to be quoted in full:

I, Zachariah, son of Baggram Sheriman, do confess before God my Judgment being perfect and my memory sound. I do appoint again the Stephan Bishop/the Chief of the Convent of Mekkitar Abat called Appa Hoire [sic] at Venetia or his Deputy to be my powerfull Executors... whosoever it may be to perform my undermentioned [sic] last will and promisses [sic] that when my estate should arrive at the Convent of Venetia to the hands of Stephan Bishop or his Deputy first of all he ought to secure a daily mass to be said for the Sake of my father Baggram, mother Shezada and brother Petrus the Mass to be said by turns first day for one second day for another and third day for the latter this may be said forever [sic]. Secondly he will secure a daily mass to be said for the sake of my Brother Joseph Baggram forever. Thirdly a daily mass he ought to

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<sup>56</sup> Will of Joseph di Baghrum Sherimanian folio 25-27 IOR 154/51, Bengal Wills 1761-1763, folios 25-27.

secure my own sake, the Zachariah Bagram who wrote this Testament forever. After the Establishing the abovesaid three Masses, the Remaining of my Estate to be used in the Service of Stamping the new Books of any kind as we have no any Remembrance in the world it may be for our Remembrance.

Our father Baggram has left us a sum of money in the Cash [deposit bank<sup>57</sup>] of Venetia it is a considerable time that the Interest of it, whether true or false, the Creditors of my Fathers name takes in their possession I give hereby for my part a full power to the Chief of the aforesaid Convent of Venetia that if it may be possible to take a lawyer and speak about that matter the charges should be out of my Estate of it if it can be Released then the Interest of it to be given from year to year to my poor Relations by Fathers side to help them according to their necessity or to be distributed as Charity among the poors being ended in the year of our Saviour 1764 and Styll minor Tira the 5th and October the 2nd in Calcutta.

Signed, Most humble Servant Zachariah Bagram Sheriman.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> The original Julfa dialect document has the term “ձէնքն” [tsenk‘n] which must surely be reference to “zecca” or “Depositi in Zecca.” L. Pezzolo provides the following definition of “zecca”: “The series of voluntary loans was managed by the mint and entitled Dopusiti in zecca (deposits in the mint). It was the most important and powerful means of financing the Venetian state until the republic’s end.” See Luciano Pezzolo, “Venetian Finance, 1400-1797,” *Handbook of Key Global Financial Markets, Institutions, and Infrastructure*, ed. Gerard Caprio (London, 2013), p. 302. Members of the Shahrman/Sceriman family were known to have kept enormous sums in the Zecca beginning with the 1690s when various representatives of the family invested nearly a million ducats in the Adriatic city. “In the 1690s, Nazar and Shahrman, the sons of Murat di Sceriman, another son of Sarhat, had invested close to 720,000 ducats in interest-bearing accounts in various Venetian banks to help finance its wars against the Ottomans.” Another family member Marcara Shahrman invested an additional 200,000 Ducats at around the same time. It is therefore not surprising to read in this will that Baghran di Zachariah Shahrman had also kept money in Venice probably also beginning in the 1690s. See Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*, 150.

<sup>58</sup> “Last Will and Testament of Zachariah di Bagram Sheriman,” BL, IOR/P/154/52, folios 50-51. This and the other will by Joseph di Baghran Shahrman appear to be missing from the collection of wills in the Alishan Archives in San Lazzaro. Spelling and other errors in the English translation quoted above have been maintained as they appear in the copies stored at the India Office Records (IOR). The Armenian original which is slightly different from the official translation provided by the court translator, reads thus:

Դ[ա]րձ[եա]լ ես շէրիմանէնց բ[ա]ղր[ա]մի որդի զաք[ա]րիէս խոստով[ա]նումամ առաջի ա[ստուծոյ] որ իմ խելքս դրիստ [drisd < P. درست, entire, complete, perfect, whole, well, safe, sound; straight, even; firm] եւ միտքս բոլոր վերստին ինձ ջնդրալ վեքիլ եւ ախտիար արարի վան[ա]տկին միսթար վ[ա]րդ[ապէ]տին աբբայիօր վանքին մեծաւոր ըստեփան վ[ա]րդ[ապէ]տն կ[ա]մ նորա փոխանորդն ովոր լինի

The above-mentioned accounting ledger preserved in the “Alishan archives” at San Lazzaro provides a summary of the contents of the Shahrman wills and alludes in general to the kinds of books (without mention of the titles) the money was used to publish over a period of at least three decades. The ledger also gives us a detailed breakdown of how the estate of these brothers was transported from Calcutta via Basra and Istanbul to Venice, often through bills of exchange. Most likely, the Congregation’s representatives in Calcutta relied on local Indian Sarrafs or money-lending bankers to issue them bills of exchange known as *Hundis* or *Avaks* through which large sums of money were periodically remitted from India to Basra or Isfahan, where sarrafs headquartered in India often maintained branch offices or *Kuthis*.<sup>59</sup> Although the ledger does not provide specific information about

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ներգոյգրեալ կտակն եւ իմ խոստումնքս կ[ա]տ[ա]րեն. ինչ ժամանակ իմ կայիս<sup>60</sup> գնումայ վան[ա]տիկ վանքն ըստէփան վ[ա]րդ[ա]պէ[տ]ին կամ նորա փոխանորդին ձեռն նախ մին պատրագեայ հ[ա]ստ[ա]տի իմ հայր բարադամին մայր շէգատէ<sup>61</sup> եւ եղբայր պետրոսիս հ[ա]մ[ա]ր որ պատրագարն<sup>62</sup> մին օր մնին<sup>63</sup> միւս օրն միայսին [միւսին] առի մշտնջենաւոր. Երկրորդ մին պատարաքէց<sup>64</sup> հ[ա]ստ[ա]տի իմ եղբայր յովսէփ բ[ա]ղր[ա]մին հ[ա]մ[ա]ր մշտնջենաւոր. երրորդ մին պատարաքէց հաստ[ա]տի կտակագիրս գրողս զաքարիայ բարդամիս հ[ա]մ[ա]ր մշտնջենաւոր. վերն յիշեալ գ [3] պատարաքէցն հաստատելէն յետ մնացեալ իմ կտակիս ինչ մնաց մեր անվան նորատիպ գրքեր պատմայ տան որ մեզ աշխարհումն յիշատակ չմնաց էն լինի մեզ յիշատակ. Այլ եւ իմ հայր բ[ա]ղրամն մեզ հ[ա]մ[ա]ր փողոյ գձել վան[ա]յտ[ի]կին ձեռնքն [zecca=Depositi in Zecca,] շատ տարիս աղորդ կ[ա]մ տուտ իմ հօր անման<sup>65</sup> շախն քաշուման վերն յիշեալ վան[ա]յտ[ի]կին վանքին իմ կողմանէ կ[ա]րողութիւնամ<sup>66</sup> տալման մեծաւորին եթէ կ[ա]րելի լինի մին վաքիլ բռնեն խօսեն իմ կարուցն խալջին եթէ արձակի տարեց տարի շախն ինչ ձեռն գոյ իմ հայրենիք մերձաւոր չկաւոր ազգականացն. ըստ իւրե[ա]նց պիտոյից չափաւ[ո]ր օգնեն կ[ա]մ թէ այլ կարոտեալ տնանկաց ողորմութիւն տան վերջ Թիվն Փրկչին փոքր աճԽԹ [149+1615= 1764] Թիւրայ ե [5] կալկաթայ ի նուաստ ծա[րա]յ զաք[ա]րիայ բաղրամ շէրիմանէնց պարոն զաքարիայի եղբարովն վկայամ մկրտիճ տի յովսէփս ջամալէնց պարոն զաքարիայի եղբարովն վկայամ բաղտասարի որդի ոհանէս.

<sup>59</sup> On sarrafs and hundis and their role in providing money transferring facilities, see Irfan Habib, “The System of Bills of Exchange (Hundis) in the Mughal Empire,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (1972), pp. 290-303; idem, “Usury in Medieval India,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 6,4 (1964): 393-419; and Om Prakash, “The Cashless Payment Mechanism in Mughal India: The Working of the Hundi Network,” *Cashless Payments and Transactions from the [sic] Antiquity to 1914* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), pp. 131-137; the best studies of bills of exchange among Armenians are Edmund Herzig, “The Armenian Merchants of New Julfa, Isfahan: A Study of Premodern Asian Trade” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1991), pp. 244-256, and Shushanik Khach’ikyan, *Nor Jughayi Hay vacharakanut’yunē yev nra arevratntesakan kaperē Rusastani het XVII-XVIII darrerum* (The Armenian Commerce of New Julfa and its commercial economic Ties with Russia during the XVII to XVIII centuries) (Yerevan: HSSH

who the bankers or sarrafs were that facilitated the remittance of the Shahrman fortune from South Asia to the Venetian lagoon and how this was actually done, we can speculate that several circuits of bills of exchange were employed to transfer the money left by the Shahrman brothers from Calcutta to Basra and from there to Istanbul/Constantinople where it was converted from the Indian sicca (silver) rupee to Ottoman (gold) currency before embarking on the last leg of its voyage to Venice where it would be cashed for gold Ducats. In each segment of its movement west, the money would travel as in a modern-day wire transfer or more precisely a moneygram but with the additional benefit of accumulating interest as it moved toward the Mediterranean. The ledger also provides the exchange rate of various currencies through which the Shahrman funds were converted before they reached the Congregation in San Lazzaro, involving for the most part the conversion of East India Company silver sicca rupees into Ottoman *Zeri Mahbub* gold currency; for instance, we learn from the Ledger that 12,000 rupees equaled 4,102.5 *Zeri Mahbub* Ottoman gold coins in the 1770s. It also tells us how much money was spent on purchasing paper versus for printing expenses. Needless to say, paper made up most of the expenses for a publisher like the Mkhitarists. The accounting ledger does not provide the titles of the books the Congregation published through the generous benefaction of these two brothers who died almost at the same time in Calcutta far removed from the Venetian lagoon where evidently lay their hearts. My own tabulation based on the colophons in Ninel Oskanyan and et al.'s comprehensive collection of colophons of printed Armenian books<sup>60</sup> yields the following list of works published in chronological order by the funds bequeathed by Joseph and Zaccaria Shahrmanians, sons of Paron Baghrum, son of Paron Zaccaria, the eldest son of Khwaja Sarat:

- 1) *Girk' hrashits' surb astuatsatsnin hawak'eal targmanabar i hay barbar i zanazan patmut'eants' italats'i heghinakats'* [Book of miracles of the Holy Mother of God, collected in translation into the Armenian language from various histories written by Italian authors] (Venice: Demetria Teodosius, 1772)
- 2) *Khorhurd astuatsapashtut'ean* [Advice on the worship of God] by Matthew of Evdokia [Tokat], (Venice: Demetrius Theodosius, 1775)

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GA, 1988), pp. 168-189. The scholarship on the European bill of exchange is voluminous; however, for two reliable studies published recently, see Francesca Trivellato, "Credit, Honor, and the Early Modern French Legend of the Jewish Invention of Bills of Exchange," *The Journal of Modern History* 84,2 (2012), pp. 289-334; and Markus Denzel, "The European Bill of Exchange: Its Development from the Middle Ages to 1914," in *Cashless Payments and Transactions*, pp. 153-194.

<sup>60</sup> Oskanyan et al., *Hay girk'ē*.

- 3) *Nor ktakaran* [New Testament] (Venice: Demetrius Theodosius, 1776)
- 4) *K'erakanut'iwn Haykazean lezui* [Grammar of the Armenian language] By Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants' (Venice: Demetrius Theodosius, 1779)
- 5) *Tuabanut'iwn erkus girs bazhaneal* (Arithmetic comprising of two books) by Suk'ias Aghamaliants' (Venice: Demetrius Theodosius, 1781)
- 6) *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* [Armenian history] by Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants', volume 1, (Venice: Pietro Valvasense,<sup>61</sup> 1784)
- 7) *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* [Armenian history] by Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants', volume 2, (Venice: Pietro Valvasense, 1785)
- 8) *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* [Armenian history] by Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants', volume 3, (Venice: Giovanni Antonio Pezzana,<sup>62</sup> 1786)
- 9) *K'erakanut'iwn T'oskanean lezui* [Grammar of the language of Tuscany, i.e., Italian] by Gabriel Avetikian (Venice: Antoni Bortoli, 1792)
- 10) *Imastasirut'iwn baroyakan* [Moral philosophy] translated from Emmanuel Thesaurus by Vrtanes Askerian, (Venice: Antoni Bortoli, 1793)
- 11) *Patmut'iwn Hayots'* [History of the Armenians] by Ghazar P'arpets'i (Venice: Antoni Bortoli, 1793)

What is remarkable about this list is that over half of the printed titles consist of secular books that would seem to correspond in subject matter to

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<sup>61</sup> The on-line English-language catalog of Armenian printed books known as the “Hakop Meghapart Project” (see <http://nla.am/arm/meghapart/English/list.htm>) has transliterated the name of Pietro Valvasense (transliterated in Armenian as Petros Vaghvaghians') as Pietro Valvaziani, which, of course, sounds plausibly Italian but is patently incorrect. On this Venetian printer, see Infelise, *L'editoria Veneziana*, p. 156, where he is described as “uno stampatore dalle poche fortune e dalla limitata intelligenza, ma dotato di una certa perizia nell'opera tipografica” (a printer of little luck and of limited intelligence, but endowed with expertise in the work of printing). Interestingly, Valvasense's small printing shop appears to have been purchased beginning in 1753, by Zaccaria Seriman, a talented Venetian writer and intellectual who hailed from the Catholic Julfan Shehrimanian/Shahrimanian family whose members had settled in Venice in 1698 and married into the city's aristocracy. Zaccaria was a descendent of this family and therefore was related to the two other Shahriman benefactors of the Mkhit'arist Congregation from Calcutta whose bequest was used to print Ch'amch'iants's work in the 1780s, probably after Zaccaria's passing in 1784. For Zaccaria's ties with Valvasense, see D. Maxwell White, *Zaccaria Seriman: The Viaggi di Enrico Wanton, a Contribution to the Study of the Enlightenment in Italy* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1961), pp. 28-29, 114, n. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Oskanyan et al., *Hay girk'ē*, p. 577, have the name as “Giovanni Piats'o” from the Armenian transliteration of Hovannu Piats'eants'. The correct name of the printer appears to be Giovanni Antonio Pezzana. See Infelise, *L'editoria Veneziana*, pp. 324-325.

titles that the Congregation's new merchant readers in the port cities of India were beginning to request from fathers Emirzian and Aghamalian during their visit to India in the 1770-1771.<sup>63</sup> As we shall now see, though unlike other port Armenian patrons the Shahrman brothers did not indicate what type of books they desired the monks in Venice to publish with their bequest, the choices made by the recipients of the bequest by and large indicate a gradual sea-change in reading patterns of the early modern Armenian diaspora.

### **Conclusion: Book Peddling, Reading, and the Business of Mkhit'arist Publishing**

In their 1958 *magnum opus*, *L'Apparition du livre* [The coming of the book], Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin devoted considerable attention to the economic and business history dimensions of the publishing industry that has remained a hallmark of the field of "L'histoire du livre" they helped to create. Discussing the bookseller's or publisher's business in the early modern period, Febvre and Martin noted how the typical publisher of the seventeenth or eighteenth century had to "secure his supply of paper (this was his duty not the printer's), select a suitable printer and superintend the work."<sup>64</sup> More than any other aspect of the publisher's business, the two founding fathers of the "history of the book" focused on the circulation and distribution of the book as an early modern commodity. The printed book as a semiotic and material object, for Febvre and Martin as for Darnton, had to be supplied to distant markets where communities of readers resided. Readers, Febvre and Martin and following them Darnton remind us, were consumers who had distinct needs and a demand for a commodity that a publisher could only afford to ignore at his own peril. Gauging this demand required the early modern publisher to have command over an impressive information and communication network that had at its core the art of correspondence with far-flung agents and associates:

He had, above all, to arrange the distribution of the books he published and see to it that his shop was stocked with what his clients wanted. To ensure this, he needed a network of contacts, near and far, a complicated accounting system, and a knowledge of the market for the books offered to him, relating them to the known tastes of his customers. He needed to be an indefatigable letter

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<sup>63</sup> It is evident that the brothers did not choose to patronize the above titles themselves since they predeceased the publications by a good decade and in some cases by nearly forty years. The decision to allocate their money to these specific publications appears to have been made by the hierarchy of the Congregation. Seth, "Shirimk' anmah," seems to be under the impression that the benefactors chose to patronize the printing of Mikayēl Ch'amch'iants' famous *History*.

<sup>64</sup> Febvre and Martin, *The Coming of the Book*, p. 138.



writer. He would have to write dozens of letters a day and even in the largest publishing concerns he would have the assistance of no more than two or three clerks.<sup>65</sup>

In his *The Book in the Renaissance*, Andrew Pettegree following Febvre and Martin has recently reminded us of the importance printers and publishers attached to having a “distribution network to place [their] books in the marketplace.”<sup>66</sup> “For any printer or publisher,” writes Pettegree, “the first crucial decision was which books to bring to the market. In such a competitive business a single false step could easily spell disaster.”<sup>67</sup> To avoid choosing a losing title that readers would greet with indifference, Pettegree, like Febvre and Martin as well as others before him, notes that early printers and publishers had to be also diligent correspondents and rely on informants and agents operating from distant markets about changing demand patterns for book consumption.

The Mkhitarist publishing network was no exception to the rigors early modern publishers had to undergo in order to avoid bankruptcy. The business papers of both Abbot Mkhitar and his successor Melkonian indicate that both men stood at the center of a vast information network and were “indefatigable letter writer[s]” as described by Febvre and Martin in the passage quote above.<sup>68</sup> They both monitored the reader response of distant markets of readers by regularly reading and responding to the correspondence of their book distributors whether these were members of their own congregation such as Fathers Emirzian and Aghamalian whose correspondence we examined in detail above or professional book peddlers such as Khachik Hakobian whose work we mentioned in passing earlier and need to revisit with more care here. How does the correspondence of Abbot Mkhitar’s loyal book peddler help us understand both the publishing business of the Mkhitarist Congregation as well as shine light on a shift in reading patterns among early modern Armenian readers? To pose these questions and probe the correspondence of Khachik Hakobian is to explore the larger issue

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. This passage is also quoted in an unpublished paper by Michael Pifer, “The Art of Writing, the Fear of the Lord: Rethinking Armenian Networks of Spiritual, Cultural, and Linguistic Exchange during the Early Modern Period,” submitted to a graduate seminar I taught on early modern Armenian history at the University of Michigan in 2010 and later to a panel I organized, “The Circulation of Silver and Print: Some Reflections on Early Modern Armenian History,” at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting of 2011 in Boston.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Pettegree, *The Book in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Abbot Mkhitar’s correspondence and use of information or intelligence network has been masterfully studied by Jemjemian in his *Mkhitar Abbahor hratarakch’akan* and following him more recently by Karapetian in “Venetikē ev Mkhitarian hratarakch’akan gortsuneut’iwnē.”

with which we began this essay, namely the insights that Annales-style “book history” promises to bring to the study of early modern Armenian print culture in general and the Mkhitarist publishing enterprise in particular.

Our sources on Hakobian’s background are rather spotty despite about a dozen letters he exchanged with Mkhitar between 1732 and 1737. As fragmentary and inferential as our documentation on this enigmatic peddler may be, we know from piecing together evidence from scattered sources that Hakobian was born in Julfa probably in the early years of the eighteenth century, possibly hailed from a Catholic Armenian family or had himself converted to Catholicism, and was, like many young Julfans, working for a wealthy senior merchant as a traveling business partner employed in a long-distance partnership contract known as the *commenda* or *enkeragir* to use the Julfan term. Mkhitar’s personal correspondence with his India-based patron and benefactor Melik’ Markar Khaldarents’ in Surat indicates that Hakobian worked for Melik’ Markar as his agent and in that capacity had visited Venice on business in the early 1720s to conduct trade for his master who had evidently stayed back in India.<sup>69</sup> It was probably during this trip that Hakobian first met the young Mkhitar who had only recently moved from his residence in the Castello neighborhood of Venice to the island of San Lazzaro. After carrying some books as presents back to Surat to give to his master Melik’ Markar, Hakobian most likely agreed to become the Abbot’s principal bookseller in both Europe and the Middle East and on occasion also in South Asia.

When he left Venice with two crates filled with books in 1732, Hakobian transported with him a broad variety of the latest publications Mkhitar had recently gotten printed on the mainland mostly through his Italian printer, Antonio Bortoli. Among the 817 copies of books he carried in his crates to sell in the East, it is interesting to note that the largest number consisted of religious or spiritual works including *Paradise of the Soul* (62 copies), a book known as *Spiritual Garden* (62 copies), Mkhitar’s 1720 edition of the *Gospels and New Testament* (50 copies), *Book of Virtues* and *Book of Vices* (50 copies each), *An Abridged Theology of the Blessed Albert the Great*<sup>70</sup> (30 copies), *Psalms of David* (45 copies), a *Song-book [dagharan]* (60 copies). It is interesting to note that Hakobian’s list is virtually identical to the one Mkhitar shipped to the Armenian communities in Transylvania (presumably to Gherla and Pashbalov, [Başfalău, Elizavetpolis or Dumbrăveni in modern-

<sup>69</sup> In one of his letters to Melik’ Markar in Surat, Hakobian is alluded to as follows: “Մէր սիրելի պարոն Խաչիկն, որ է ընկեր քո, պատմելով մեզ զորպիսութեանց քոց,” see *Namakani tsarayin Astutsoy tearn Mkhitaray Abbayi*, vol. 1, p. 451.

<sup>70</sup> Համառոտութիւն աստուածաբանութեան երանելոյն Մեծին Ալպերտի (Venice, 1715).

day Romania] both with substantial Armenian communities and important locations for Mkhitarist missionary and educational work) and Constantinople around the same period.<sup>71</sup> The chief non-religious books, which today we would call “secular,” do not appear to have been “bestsellers” in the 1730s if Hakobian’s list or that found in Mkhitar’s ledgers are any indication of what sold or did not sell in the principal Mkhitarist markets of the time. For instance, the only recognizable “secular” book in Hakobian’s collection of books is a work simply listed as “a grammar” (*Kerakanut’iwn*), which in most likelihood was the Armeno-Turkish primer on the grammar of the Armenian language published by Mkhitar in 1727 and entitled *Gateway to the Grammar of the Vernacular Language*;<sup>72</sup> Hakobian only seems to have carried thirty copies of it probably to be sold in Constantinople or Smyrna as well as the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>73</sup>

A couple of years after traveling from Venice to Livorno and Smyrna, we catch up with our tireless peddler in the Persian Gulf port of Basra at the gateway to the Indian Ocean. On February 1, 1734, Hakobian relays the following details to Mkhitar about the status of the Congregation’s book sales:

And the books I have sold in Izmir and Diyarbakir are the following:  
 24 *Grammars*, 31 *Book of Virtues*, 29 *Book of Vices*. 12 [*Theology of the Blessed*] *Albert*, 23 *Gospels*, 34 *Guides to Penitence*, 18 *Flowery Meadow*, 79 *Paradise of the Soul*, 19 *Miracle of the Soul*, 28 *Small Book of Christian Theology in the Vernacular Language*, 9 large size *Catechism with Hymns* that I had brought with me, 33 *Spiritual*

<sup>71</sup> ASL, “Տոմսակ Գրեանց, 1729-1737” (Register of books, 1729-1737). For the entry of April 15, 1729, Mkhitar includes a long list of titles he packed for sale in Transylvania. Most of the books he lists are spiritual in nature and include forty copies each of *Partez khokmamp* (Meditative garden), *Vark’ Ohannnu* (Life of John), *Aghbiwr bari* (Fountain of goodness), *Girk’ Kavarani* (Book of Purgatory) *Dagharan kashakazm* (leather-bound Song-book), paper-bound “Song-book,” eighteen *Psalms*, twenty-four *Krtut’iwn k’ristonēakan* (Christian discipline), three *Arakinut’iwn* (Book of Virtues), two *Girk’ Molut’eants’* (Book of Vices). This list almost replicates the book titles sold in Basra and its environs by Khach’ik Hakobian around the same period. The main difference here is that Mkhitar includes one copy of Clement Galanos’s *History of the Armenian Church* in Armenian, one [printed] dictionary (*Baḡgirk’ tpetseal*), and one booklet on arithmetic (*Tuabanut’ean tetr*). Less than a year later on February 4, 1730, the shipment of 565 books for Constantinople includes similar titles with the only exception that 200 books—or slightly less than half—were *Psalms* (ibid., “entry for February 4, 1730). The popularity of *Psalms* in this list is to be explained by their wide use as textbooks for literacy in Armenian parish schools. On the latter, see Kévorkian, “*Livre imprimé*,” p. 353. The use of *Psalms* for literacy education explains why such works often had print runs into the thousands.

<sup>72</sup> “Դուռն քերականութեան աշխարհաբար լեզուին.” See Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch’akan*, pp. 81-83, for a detailed discussion of this work.

<sup>73</sup> The list is based the entry in Mkhitar’s ledger (stored at the ASL) for March 21, 1732. See also Jemjemian, *Mkhitar Abbahōr hratarakch’akan*, pp. 305-306.

*Gardens*, 22 *Burastans*, 13 *Discipline of Prayers* (1718), 22 *Fountain of Goodness*, 29 *Christian Theology*, 10 *Psalters*, 11 *Life of Saint John of God*, the total value amounted to 699 ghurush.<sup>74</sup>

Three years later on June 23, 1737, Hakobian writes to the Abbot once again from Basra to inform his spiritual master about the books he had in his charge. After dispatching to India Mkhitarist publications for sale from his base in Basra, often on English ships or by caravan up north to Julfa and beyond, only a fraction of the initial consignment of 883 books was left in his possession.

After much labor, let the state of the books that remain [with me] be known to you. There are only 70 remaining books with me; the rest I have sold here [in Basra] and by dispatching to Surat, Madras, Bengal, and Julfa. And I hope to make a good and successful profit on the proceeds of the sales by combining them with my own money. I have sent with brother paron Harut'iwn Chinese ceramics and other goods to Venice to be sold there from which your own share from the books will be 49 tumans, 1,110 dians, which is 282 ducats and one quarter, I have written to Paron Harut'iwn that after safely selling the goods, he shall hand over the money to you my esteemed father. In addition, I [recently] also sent some pearls to Venice from the proceeds of which sale your share of the profits for the books should be 4 tumans and 1,100 dians, which makes 84 ducats, that you should receive after the items are sold until, in nine or ten months, by God's will I shall bring with me the entire earnings of the sale of books with me to your honorable father.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Letter of Khach'ik Hakobian to Abbot Mkhitar, February 1, 1734, Archivio San Lazzaro (ASL): “եւ թէ իզմիր կամ դիարբեքիր ծախածս գրեանքն են այսոքիկ, իդ [24] քերականութիւն, լա [31] առաքինութեանցն, Իթ [29] մոլութեանց ժբ [12] ալբերտ իգ [23] կտակարան, լդ [34] յարացոյց, լա [31] հանդերձեալ, ժբ [18] դաշդիկ [Դաշտիկ Ծաղկալի/Prato Fiorito], Էթ [79?] դրախտ հոգւոյ ժթ [19] հրաշից հոգւոյ իբ [28] փոքր աշխարհաբար քրիստոնէական թ [9] մեծ աշխարհաբար քրիստոնէական ընդ շարակնոց որ ինձ հետ բերի, լգ [33] պարտեզ, իբ [22] բուրաստան, ժգ [13] կրթութիւն, իբ [22] աղբիր բարի, իբ [29] գրորէն քրիստոնէական, ժո [10] հատ սաղմոս, ժա [11] ոհան աստուծոյ [Վարք երանելւոյն Սրբոյ Յոհաննիսին Աստուծոյ (1726)] բովանդակին գինն եղեւ զճիթ [699] դուրուշ եւ քանի դուրուշ.” See Figure 2, below, for an image of this letter.

<sup>75</sup> Letter of Khach'ik Hakobian to Abbot Mkhitar, June 23, 1737, Archivio San Lazzaro (ASL): “Զկնի բազում աշխատանաց յայտ լինիցի որպիսութեանցն գրեանց հետս եղելոց կայ մնացեալ Հօ [70] հատ մանր գրեանց թէ ոչ բովանդակին աստ, սուրաթ, մադրաս, բանկալայ ճուղայ առաքելով վաճառեցաք եւ դրամն ընդ դրամոց իմոց աստ եւ անդ առաքելով յուսամ շահեցուցանել, բարի աջողութեամբ եւ զչինիքն [chinikn= chinese ceramics] եւ զաղլուղքն որ ողորկածեմ վէնէտիկ ի ձեռն եղբայր

Khach'ik Hakobian's correspondence with Abbot Mkhit'ar raises a number of important issues regarding the business of Mkhit'arist publishing that future book historians working in early modern Armenian history need to explore further. First, the circulation of books from the production center of Venice to the consumption centers in the Middle East and South Asia, whether carried out by Mkhit'arist monks like Fathers Emirzian and Aghamalian, whose "reports" we looked at above, or by book peddlers like Hakobian, formed an integral part of the success of the Mkhit'arist enterprise. As we have seen above, such correspondence between the consumption centers and the base in San Lazzaro kept the Abbot (whether Mkhit'ar himself or his successor Melk'onian) abreast of the necessary information regarding the reading preferences of book consumers in such places as Transylvania, Belgrade, Constantinople, Smyrna, Julfa, Diyarbakir, Baghdad, Surat, Madras, and Calcutta. According to the "book circuit" model that we briefly outlined earlier, letters from the field functioned like a final loop that helped complete the book circuit linking readers and consumers in India to publishers and printers in Venice. Second, these reports back to the Congregation's headquarters in San Lazzaro suggest that an important and subtle transformation had taken place in the *mentalité* of Armenian readers between the years 1732-1740 (when Hakobian was peddling books) and 1770-1772 (when Fathers Emirzian and Aghamalian were visiting India). They suggest that at least in India and possibly if not likely in other urban centers elsewhere in the early modern Armenian diaspora, books on *Penitence* or *Psalters* and *Breviaries*, that carried the day when Khach'ik Hakobian headed out to Basra in the spring of 1732 carrying books for Mkhit'ar, no longer appealed to readers or wealthy patrons thirty years later. The documentation we possess by Mkhit'ar's trusted peddler or the missionary reports by Fathers Emirzian and Aghamalian from India are admittedly sparse. Yet it would not be unreasonable to conclude by a careful reading of these letters that two sorts of transformations probably occurred in the early modern Armenian diaspora in the short period separating Hakobian's peddler letters of the 1730s and the missionary reports from India in the 1770s. First, the principal buyers of Abbot Mkhit'ar's books in the 1730s appear to have been the clerical class of

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պարոն յարութիւնայ գրեանց դրամէ բաժին գոյ ի մէջ նոցունց իս [49] թոման առճժո [1,110] դիան որ է բճճբ [282] տուկատ առուպ [Ar. رءس, "quarter, fourth-part, 25-piastre piece"], գրեցաք պարոն յարութիւնայ, որ զկնի բարեպէս ծախելոյնս դրամն տացէ գերյարգելի հօրս, այժմ եւս սակաւ իմն մարգարիթ ողորկեցաք, որ գրեանց դրամէ բաժին գոյ դ [4] թոման առճժո [1,100] դին որէ Ձդ [84] տուկատ որ յետ ծախելոյնս առցես զդրամն մինչեւ աջողեցէ տէր աստուած զկնի թ [9] կամ ժո [10] ամսոց բովանդակն ընդ յիս բերելոցեմ առ հայրդ պատուական." I thank my colleague, Jessica Goldberg, for clarifying the meaning of the Arabic term "roob" for me.

literate priests residing in Diyarbakir, Smyrna, Constantinople, and Armenian settlements in Transylvania among other places. Naturally, these consumers would be predominantly interested in purchasing spiritual books such as Mkhit'ar's *Commentary on the Gospels*, his edition of the *Psalms*, or his *Book of Virtues*, and *Book of Vices* to name a few. By the 1770s, however, the readership of the Congregation's books appears to have shifted and included more and more port Armenian or merchant readers. This change in the composition of readership in the mid-eighteenth century, from predominantly clerical readers to secular ones, needs to be further explored before we are able more definitively to ascribe to it larger societal transformations. Until more research is carried out, we can only speculate that the shifting patterns of book consumption for Mkhit'arist books from largely religious/spiritual to more "secular" works was most probably due to the greater role of merchant readers who appear to have become more prominent by the second half of the eighteenth century. Merchants, after all, were likely to be more interested in secular books such as histories, geographies, dictionaries, travel books, and so on, and less in Psalters or gospels, which is not to say that merchants did not read religious or devotional books. It is hoped that in the coming years as new untapped archival sources for early modern Armenian history become more and more accessible to historians, such scholars will further develop the young field of the "history of books" in Armenian historiography to open up new horizons of thinking in early modern world and Armenian history.

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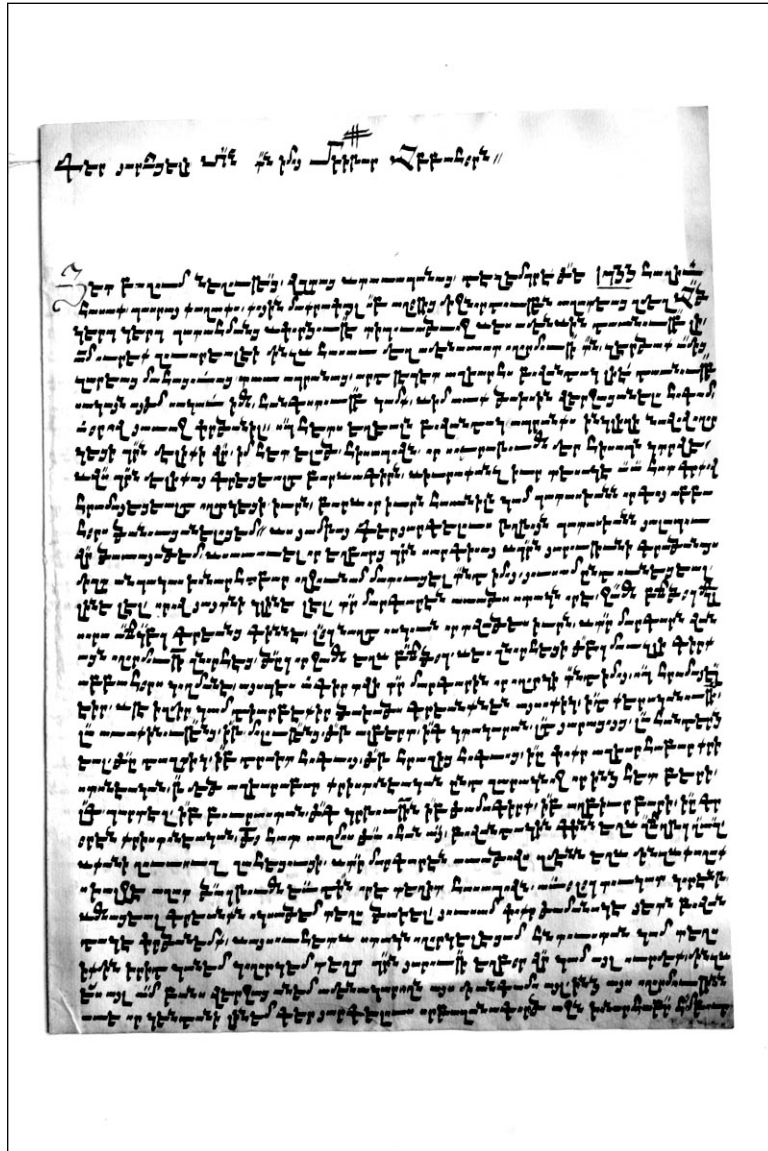
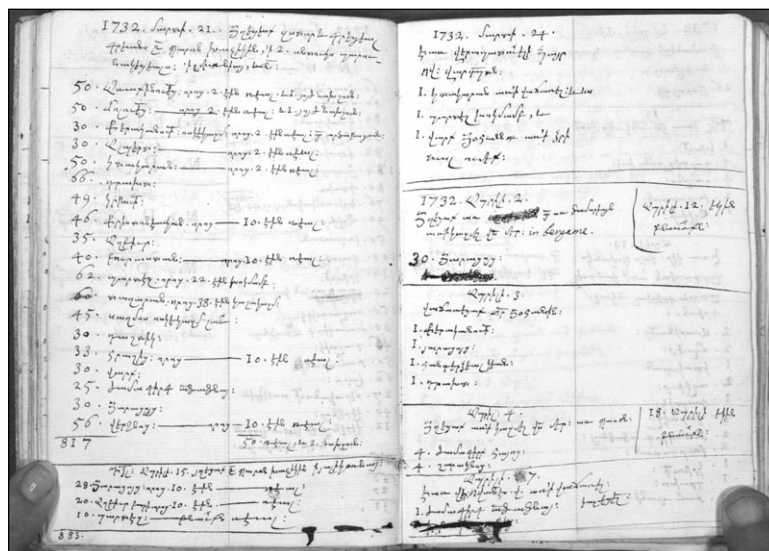


Fig. 2

Letter of Khach'ik Hakobian in Basra  
to Abbot Mkhit'ar in Venice, February 1, 1734.



**Fig. 3**  
**Page from Mkhit'ar's Ledger**  
**on Khach'ik Hakobian's books.**