Mapping Safavid Iran

Edited by
Nobuaki Kondo

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA)
Mapping Safavid Iran

Edited by

Nobuaki Kondo

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA)
Fuchu, Tokyo
Contents

Preface

Nobuaki Kondo 1

From Textual Evidence to Ijtihad:
The Twelver Shi‘a Juristic Tradition, 10th–16th Century

Rula Jurdi Abisaab 7

The Shah‘Abd al-‘Azim Shrine and its Waqf under the Safavids

Nobuaki Kondo 41

The Safavid King Who Was Crowned Twice:
The Enthronement of Safi Mirza as Shah Safi II in 1077/1666, and as Shah Sulayman in 1078/1668

Rudi Matthee 67

Development of Transport and Growth of Cultural Homogenization in the later Safavid Period

Yukako Goto 99

The Safavid Legacy as Viewed from the Periphery:
The Formation of Iran and the Political Integration of a Kurdish Emirate

Yamaguchi Akihiko 127

Aq Qoyunlu and Safavid European Diplomacy:
Strategy, Millenarism, Wishful Thinking

Giorgio Rota 155
A Historian on the Move:
An Early Modern Persian Chronicler under the Safavids and the Mughals
Sholeh A. Quinn 171

Julfan Merchants and European East India Companies:
Overland Trade, Protection Costs, and the Limits of Collective Self-Representation
in Early Modern Safavid Iran
Sebouh David Aslanian 189

Silk for the Court: Safavid Silk Textiles in Japanese Collections
Katsuhiko Abe 223

Index 243

Figures
3.1 Talar-i Tavilah, Engelbert Kaempfer 79
3.2 Sulayman's (Safi II's) enthronement, Jean Chardin 80
3.3 The four symbols of Safi II's enthronement, Jean Chardin 81
3.4 Chihil Sutun Palace 93
5.1 Genealogy of the Ardalan Family 154
8.1 Agreement with the Armenian Merchants 222
9.1 Silk cloth with supplementary wefts in metal wrap foil on silk core 237
9.3 Pouch accompanying a chaire (tea container or caddie) belonged to Count Akira Matsura (Lord of Hirado, 1840-1906), Private Collection 238
9.4 Unstitched pouch, attached on a paper, inscribed and dated 1806, Private collection 238
9.5 Kire-chō or Kire-Tokugami (Album of cloths), Private collection 239
9.6 A fragment from the Album 239
9.7 Detail of a fragment from the Yomei Bunko Collection 240
9.8 Detail of a fragment from the Yomei Bunko Collection 240
9.10 Detail of the back with stamp of the cloth from the Yomei Bunko Collection 241

Map
2.1 Waqf villages of Shah 'Abd al-'Azim 65

Tables
2.1 Waqf for the 'Abd al-'Azim Shrine before the Safavid Period 44
subject is in need of further research, Khvandamir's rewriting of his own history and his life as a historian on the move seems to suggest a Persianate historiographical tradition that occupied a fluid, flexible, and easily modified cultural space.

Persian Literature, 2:800-02. Other family members were also active in literary composition under the Mughals.

Sholeh A. Quinn

Sebouh David Aslanian
University of California, Los Angeles

Julfan Merchants and European East India Companies: Overland Trade, Protection Costs, and the Limits of Collective Self-Representation in Early Modern Safavid Iran*

During the Ottoman-Safavid wars of 1603-1605, the Safavid ruler Shah 'Abbas I deported Armenian silk merchants from the frontier town of Julfa on the Aras River and resettled them on the outskirts of his new imperial capital of Isfahan where the deportees founded a mercantile suburb named New Julfa, in memory of their evacuated town. Shortly after their deportation, these merchants accomplished a remarkable feat by coming to preside over one of the greatest trade networks of the early modern period with settlements stretching from London, Cádiz, and Amsterdam in the West to Mughal India, Canton (China), and Manila (the Philippines) in the East.

The study of Julfan history is a relatively new field, and we are only now beginning to understand the complexities of the rich history created by Armenians from this township. Much of the work in this field, exemplified by the contributions of Levon and Sushanik Khachikian and Edmund Herzig, has focused on the economic facets of the township's history. My own book on Julfa has

*Earlier versions of this paper were presented at a international conference on "Armenia and Armenians in International Treaties," March 20, 2009, University of Michigan and at the 4th Berg International Conference, "In- Between: Trade and Legal Pluralism in the Era of the Geniza," Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law, May 29-31, 2013. I would like to acknowledge the organizers of these conferences, especially Gerard Libaridian, for
sought to illuminate the economic and social institutions that helped sustain the global trade networks of the Julfan community. Emphasis on Julfa’s economic history is in part a reflection of the vast amounts of commercial documents written by Julfans that have remarkably survived in dozens of archives around the world. In contrast to the wealth of documentation on the commercial interaction of Julfans with other members of their own community, documentation on their diplomatic and political interactions with sovereign states and their representative bodies has been relatively lacking. The result is that we know considerably less about Julfan interactions with outsiders in the early modern period than intra-Julfan commercial interactions.1

Inspired by earlier work by Ronald Ferrier and Edmund Herzig, this paper examines a series of trade agreements signed between Julfan merchants and foreign states and/or their chartered East India companies mostly but not exclusively during the second half of the seventeenth century.2 The essay focuses

encouragement while writing this piece, and Houri Berberian, Olivier Raveux, and Ashot Martin-Angari for comments on an earlier draft of this essay.
4 Herzig, “On the Brink” and Ronald Ferrier, “The Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation, 22nd June 1688,” Revue des Études Arménienes, n.s. 7 (1970): 427–43; idem, “The Armenians and the East India Company in Persia in the Seventeenth and on the most important of these agreements, namely on “The Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation,” signed in London on June 22, 1688. While previous scholarship has, for the most part, studied this treaty in isolation, my study seeks to examine it within the larger context of similar agreements negotiated between the Julfans and other foreign entities. These include an agreement signed with the Russian state in 1667-73, the little-known and aborted attempts to sign an agreement with the French Compagnie des Indes Orientales in 1681-83, an agreement with the Duchy of Courland (modern day Latvia) in 1692 and Sweden in 1697, the virtually unknown attempt to sign an accord with the Scottish East India Company in 1699, and finally the equally obscure attempts to enter into negotiations in 1792 with the Spanish Compania Real de Filipinas. My study inspects these agreements with the intent of exploring what they can tell us about two areas of Julfan history that remain relatively under explored and which may be summed up under the headings of 1) economic motives for signing the agreements in question and 2) the methods of collective action involved in treaty negotiations. In terms of the larger motives that led Julfan merchants to open negotiations with the companies, I argue that their principal incentive was to reduce what Frederic C. Lane and following him Niels Steensgaard call their “protection cost,” that is “the price merchants had to pay in taxes, tolls, fees, and bribes, to ensure the flow of their commodities.” As we shall see, this is a crucial factor in Julfan economic history in general and in the history of their interactions with the European Companies in particular that has hardly received the attention

it deserves. As for Julfan methods in carrying out these negotiations, I contend that influential individuals or agnatic families acting as self-styled representatives of the Julfan community - as opposed to an institutionalized "corporate body" or corporation capable of collectively and in a sustained fashion representing the "Armenian Nation" - were responsible for initiating or signing these agreements. An examination of these agreements will thus prove useful in shedding light on Julfa's institutional (in)ability to engage in collective bargaining and national representation of the sort usually associated with national states and their centralized chartered East India companies with which the Julfans were interacting in the early modern world.7

The study will begin by providing an outline of the institutional underpinnings of Julfan history, probing in particular the agnatic structure of their families and examining how the latter shaped the way Julfans interacted with outsiders, both in trade as well as politically in terms of entering into binding agreements or treaties with foreign states and their chartered companies. After a survey of Julfan political interactions with a number of foreign states and their corporations including in particular their agreement with the English East India Company (EiC) of 1688, where the issue of protection cost will be explored, the study will conclude with some comparative thoughts on Julfans, with their predominantly agnatic familial social structure, and the larger Northwest European joint-stock corporations, especially the English East India Company, with which the Julfans interacted sometimes collaboratively but often in rivalry both before and after they signed the crucial 1688 agreement.


7 This essay draws inspiration from the earlier study of Herzig, "On the Brink of the Modern."

8 The standard works on this office are A. K. S. Lambton, "The office of kalantar under the Safavids and Afshars" in Melanges d'orientalisme offerts à Henri Masm (Tehran, 1963), 206-07; idem, "Cities i.-iii. Administration and Social Organization," Encyclopaedia Iranica, 5:611-13; and idem, "Kalantar," Encyclopedia of Islam (Supplement).

9 See Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, 40-41 for a detailed discussion. It is interesting to note that the Ottoman town of Basra, which was also a mercantile center, had a similar urban structure. According to Khoury, "Basra's quarters were mostly named after their katkhudas, an indication perhaps of the openness of the city and the fluidity in social relations of its residents." Khoury, "Merchants and Trade," 55.
scholars such as Ina Baghdiantz McCabe have proposed that New Julfa was not only an autonomous suburb but was instead a full-fledged “republic” with its own government; this view which stems from a superficial and naïve reading of some European travel accounts from the period, tends to exaggerate the real powers of Julfa’s institutions and gives the impression that they were imbued with attributes of real sovereignty. Others such as Shushanik Khachikian, Edmund Herzig, and myself assert that Julfa was a mercantile suburb or ghetto of the Safavid imperial capital endowed with broad administrative autonomy that was nonetheless confined to the welfare of its inhabitants and, in some limited instances, to those Julfans trading and residing abroad.

Our knowledge of these institutions’ role in dealing with foreign bodies is almost next to nothing. My own work has shed some light on how Julfa’s municipial council occasionally drafted legal documents to be used by European legal institutions such as courts. One case in point is that of the Julfan merchant Martin Marcara Avachintz (Avakshinents), the first regional director of the French Compagnie des Indes Orientales who was involved in a high-profile lawsuit in Paris in the 1670s and whose misadventures are the subject of one of my book projects. The Municipal Council in that case sent a notarized document translated into French testifying and validating Marcara’s claim before the French courts that he was of noble descent. Similar notarized documents were also sent to Venice in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and seem to have carried legal weight before Venice’s tribunal of the cinque savi. These cases suggest that when push came to shove, Julfan individuals abroad could and did rely upon legal representation by a semi-formal institution back in their township and that such representation was in reality received with seriousness, in ways that were roughly similar to the reception of legal documents from other sovereign states in Europe. However, these examples concern the role the Municipal Council in Julfa was able to play to represent individual Julfans in foreign jurisdictions; they do not involve the representation of Julfans as a collective. The closest example of such collective representation that we have concerns the signing of the Julfan agreement with the Russian state in 1667-1673 (see below), where the Assembly of Merchants, the township’s other juridical body, appears as one of the parties to an international agreement with a foreign state and on the face of it signs an agreement on behalf of all of Julfa’s merchants. This appears to have been an exceptional case. On the whole, neither this body nor its Municipal counterpart seem to have initiated or concluded any internationally binding agreements with foreign states for reasons that I will touch upon below. Rather, as we shall now see, the parties involved in interacting with foreign states and their companies, were mostly individuals or families often acting, in a fashion all too familiar to us in Armenian history, as self-styled representatives of the entire community. Collective representation by any institution based in Julfa was not one of Julfa’s strong suits most likely because of the limited nature of Julfan autonomy reflected in the restricted institutionalized representation was in reality received with seriousness, in ways that were roughly similar to the reception of legal documents from other sovereign states in Europe.


11 Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, chapter seven.


13 Baghdiantz McCabe erroneously claims (The Shah’s Silk for Europe’s Silver, 320) that the certificate attesting to Marcara’s nobility was issued by “the Armenian Church in New Julfa,” whereas the seals of the kalantar and katkhutas on the document indicate that it was issued by the Municipal Council. For similar notarized documents sent to Venice, see Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, 294 fn. 114.
authority in Julfa, on the one hand and, perhaps more important, because of the social structure of Julfan society privileging the family as the basic organizational unit of Julfan economic and social life, on the other.

The fundamental organizational unit for Julfan trade and society was the patriarchal family or tehm. As the great scholar of Sasanian and Parthian Iran, the late Anahit Perikhanian, has noted, this "agnatic" association of family members, which permeated almost every aspect of Armenian society and history has deep roots in Iranian history. Whether or not the Julfans inherited the agnatic social structure of their community from the Armenian tradition or as a byproduct of their interactions with agnatic societies in their region of Eurasia is a question that remains to be explored. What is clear is that agnatic social relations pervaded almost every aspect of Julfan life, including the selection of the kalantar and kalikhdads based on their family background. The agnatic family was also the bedrock of Julfan economic history; it shaped the way Julfans made business decisions, raised capital from family holdings (as opposed to joint-stock, for instance) and also, as we shall see, entered or left binding agreements with foreign states or their corporations. Like other Asian mercantile communities of the period, the Julfans organized their business ventures around the economic institution known as the "family firm." Contrary to the claims of a number of

14 Armenians shared their social structure grounded on the "agnatic" family with the Iranians. On the "Agnatic" basis of Armenian and Iranian society during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, see Anahit Perikhanian's chapter on "Iranian Society and Law" in The Cambridge History of Iran, volume 3: The Sasanid, Parthian and Sassanid Periods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). As Perikhanian points out, "In its simplest form the agnatic group included several dozen patriarchal families who all originated from one common ancestor on the father's side, three or more generations back from the living heads of these families." (642).


The overriding importance of the agnatic family in Julfan political and economic life can be seen in the way the Julfans interacted with foreign states and their chartered East India Companies. The family-based, agnatic social structure of Julfan society can also be seen as a pivotal factor contributing to the central paradox of Julfan interactions with foreign states and or their East India Trading Companies: namely, their tendency to project momentarily an image of a corporate collectivity in the form of a "nation" as a prelude to signing important trade agreements with them, followed by their inability to generate collective action of the type usually associated with other national or state actors of the early modern age with whom the Julfans were interacting. The dominant role of the family in Julfa's social structure, in most cases, privileged the pursuit of each family's particular interests over those of a "national" collectivity in whose name most Julfan agreements were signed. The famous 1688 Agreement with the East India Company is an illustrative example of this paradox.

The 1688 Treaty with the East India Company

The 1688 Agreement was signed against a backdrop of sustained rivalry between Julfan merchants and the English East India Company, established in 1600 by a royal charter from the English state and provided with a monopoly to trade in the Indian Ocean: The Role and Influence of the Commercal Contract in Julfan

Soviet Armenian scholars as well as Baghdiantz McCabe, there exists no shred of credible evidence that Julfan economic organization had any other structure than that of the agnatic family firm. As we shall explore more fully later, claims that Julfans had a single overriding unified and centralized "New Julfa Trading Company" of the type characterizing the European East India Companies of the period lack evidence. The 1688 Treaty with the East India Company
East Indies. As early as 1615, when the company began to look into trading prospects in Safavid Iran, there were tensions between its representatives and local Armenian merchants in Isfahan. In 1619, when a public auction was held for the right to export Iranian silk, the Armenians, demonstrating a rare display of corporate unity, acted collectively, under circumstances that remain unclear, to outbid the English and succeeded in gaining a dominant position in the export of the Iranian silk to Europe. For the rest of the seventeenth century, the company did all it could to compete with the Armenians on the northern land-based routes, trying to undersell them in the cloth they brought from Aleppo. As Rudi Matthee explains,

However their costly infrastructure, their deficient knowledge of the interior, and their dependence on bulk trade, made it impossible for the Europeans to dislodge the resourceful Armenian traders from their position of strength. Having failed at outright competition, the English in the 1680s and 90s attempted to capitalize on the instability of the Turkish trade route and the Armenian commercial expansion into Europe by proposing business arrangements with the Julfans.

Unable to compete successfully with their Armenian rivals, the English thus resorted to the policy of “if you can’t beat them, join them.” To this end, in 1688, the Company’s Court of Directors opened communications with the Armenians that led to the signing of an important agreement. Three principal individuals were involved in the negotiations: Sir Josiah Child, the Company’s deputy Governor and mastermind behind most of the company’s key decisions; Sir Jean Chardin, a Huguenot French gem merchant and enlightened traveler then working for the Company and engaged by the latter as well as the Armenian merchants as their “go-between;” and, finally, Chardin’s friend and associate in the English capital, the eminent Armenian merchant named Khwaja Panos Calendar (Ghalandarian), a native of New Julfa and a member of one of its most influential families then residing in London but with an extensive network of contacts in Venice, Marseille, Isfahan, Surat, and Madras, representing the Armenian “nation.” For the Company, the main objective of the Agreement was to encourage the Armenians “to alter and invert the ancient course of their Trade to and from Europe,” that is, to have the Armenians transport their Persian raw silk, Kerman wool as well as a host of other commodities from South Asia (e.g., diamonds, musk, and so on, upon which the Company’s monopoly did not extend) to Europe on English Company ships around the Cape of Good Hope as opposed to the overland caravan route across Ottoman territory. For the Armenians, their principal motivation in signing this agreement appears to have been to acquire a cheaper variety of protection cost, that is expenses “paid by private merchants in the form of taxes, customs, bribes, etc., in order to receive the legal and military protection from state institutions and their emissaries.”

Given the centrality of protection cost as a factor in Julfan trade and, as we shall see more fully below, as a motive present though not always spelled out in nearly all their agreements with the East India Companies as well as with the Russian state, it is important to outline briefly the key points in the literature on protection cost before resuming our discussion of Julfan trade agreements.

In a series of pioneering essays written in the 1940s, Lane had the foresight and brilliance to argue that “an essential charge on any economic enterprise is the cost
of its protection, its protection from disruption by violence.” Echoing Lane’s work, Philip Curtin also noted in his *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* that “some form of protection payment – some form of implied or actual coercion – was a normal cost of doing business.” For Lane as for Curtin and Steensgaard, as we shall see, costs in the form of customs duties paid on caravan routes, say from Isfahan to Izmir by way of Tabriz or Isfahan to Aleppo (both crossing Safavid to Ottoman territory) in addition to money merchants had to pay for securing the safe, unmolested passage of their goods through the desert by either hiring a security detail to guard their goods or bribing a local chieftain through whose territory the caravan would pass often amounted to very large part of the cost in investing in a commodity. Thus, it would stand to reason that if the protection cost of investing in a commodity for long-distance sale was high the profits from the sale of that object would be low.

Perhaps the most groundbreaking contribution to protection cost literature in the field of long-distance trade was made by Steensgaard in his seminal *Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade* of 1974. Here, the great Danish historian analyzed the impact of the intrusion of European chartered East India Corporations into the Indian Ocean trade beginning in the early seventeenth century and concluded that an analysis of long distance trade that ignores the question of protection and its price in favour of conventional market factors will be incomplete. Protection was a service that was necessary for the maintenance of trade; it was not a free service—protection had its price just as well as a camel.

Steensgaard further noted that pure transport costs alone were not necessarily cheaper by sea compared to land; in fact, he observed that in many instances, transporting goods by ship could be more expensive than dispatching them across the desert by camel caravans, especially when the intervals in the monsoon seasons were taken into account. However, the sea route was more economical than the land route because the protection costs were almost always cheaper by sea than by land. Across the overland routes, for Steensgaard, “the protection costs normally exceeded the transport cost.” In every single case of recorded journeys examined by the Danish historian, “the expenses connected with [...] customs duties undoubtedly exceeded the true transport costs.”

Against this larger backdrop, it became all the more evident to Steensgaard that one of the principal reasons the European chartered companies triumphed in the early modern Asian trade and, in fact, ushered in an “Asian trade revolution” was the fact that they themselves “produced the protection they needed.” In other words, to use Steensgaard’s famous expression, they “internalized protection costs” that overland merchants like the Armenians had to pay out ordinarily to others (customs guards or marauders in the desert) to buy protection and ensure the smooth delivery for their goods. Therefore, instead of paying out customs fees or bribes or wages for hiring security guards, the Companies “could obtain their protection at cost price.” They were able to reduce their protection costs either by mounting cannons on their vessels or traveling with armed convoys, or by bypassing numerous tolls by sailing the cape route to the markets of the Indian Ocean (an expensive inconvenience that overland caravans could not avoid). In either case, the total costs of transporting goods by the maritime route were significantly lower than could be the case overland and therefore the profit margins could also be higher.

Given the lower protection costs offered by the English East India Company’s agreement terms with the “Armenian Nation” in the 1688 agreement (about 2% to 10% on most goods including diamonds, corals, cochineal, coffee and “for all Raw Silks of Persia £21 per Ton Freight, but no permission, custom or any other charges whatsoever”) it is no surprise that this would appeal to some Julfans as a more profitable option than transporting their goods overland either north through the

---

22 Lane, “National Wealth and Protection Costs,” 12
26 Ibid., 40.
Russian route or west across Ottoman territory. More than cheaper protection costs, by signing the agreement, the Julfan side also stood to gain trading privileges in India and the Indian Ocean and, thereby, expand their trading network overseas across the Indian Ocean and into the most dynamic of trading centers in South Asia. In this respect, one of the privileges the Company granted the Armenians was the “liberty at all times hereafter to pass and repass to and from India on any of the Company’s Ships on as advantageous terms as any Freeman whatsoever,” as well as low customs fares. The most important clause in the Agreement, at least as far as the subsequent expansion of the Julfan network into India and the Indian Ocean was concerned, is the following:

that they shall have liberty to live in any of the Company’s Cities, Garrisons, or Towns in India, and to buy, sell, and purchase Land or Houses, and be capable of all Civil Offices and preferments in the same manner as if they were Englishmen born, and shall always have the free and undisturbed liberty of the exercise of their Religion.

In an addendum to the Agreement, the Company further agreed that,

whenever forty or more of the Armenian Nation [emphasis added] shall become Inhabitants in any of the Garrisons, Cities or Towns belonging to the Company in the East Indies, the said Armenians shall not only have and enjoy the free use and exercise of their Religion, but there shall be also allotted to them a parcel of Ground to erect a Church thereon for the worship and service of God in their own way and that we will also at our own Charge, cause a convenient Church to be built with stone or other Solid Materials to their own good liking ... and the said Governor and Company will also allow fifty Pounds per annum during the space of Seven Years for the maintenance of such Priest or Minister as they shall choose to officiate therein.

The introductory part of the text of the agreement clearly states that it was signed on behalf of the “Armenian Nation,” thus giving the impression that the Julfan Armenians were a collective that acted like other “trading nations” of the early modern age. However, this glosses over important differences between the Armenians and some of their counterparts in Europe or elsewhere. For instance, unlike the Julfans, the English and Dutch trading nations had state-chartered East India trading companies with joint-stock ownership and clearly centralized administrative bureaucracies, were endowed by their national states with the legal status of “corporations” that, as we shall see later, had the capacity to make collective decisions and to follow through on them. Lacking such a centralized “Trading Company,” the Julfans acted on the basis of the dominant social structure at their disposal, namely agnatic family firms and individuals from well-known and wealthy families who arrogated for themselves the right to represent the entire Julfan community. That this was the case with the 1688 Agreement in London is demonstrated by the fact that the principal signatory of the Agreement on behalf of the Armenians was Khwaja Paros Ghalandarian, a merchant from a prominent Julfan family residing in London and a self-styled representative of “the Armenian Nation.”

No institutionalized body in Julfa such as the Assembly of Merchants or the Municipal Assembly was involved either in the negotiations or in

---

27 Ibid., 438.
28 Ibid., 439.
29 Ibid., 442.
the actual signing of the Agreement.

In the long term, the Agreement had some benefits for both parties in so far as it acted as the catalyst for Julfan expansion into the Indian Ocean and allowed many Julfans to settle down in secure English settlements in India such as Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay at a time when much of India was unstable due to the slow implosion of Mughal power on the subcontinent. In the aftermath of the treaty, the English East India Company officials in Madras were so optimistic of collaborating with the Julfan Armenians that they even planned to give the name “Julpha” to a particular quarter of Madras where they hoped to attract the Armenian settlement. However, the Julfans did not collectively honor the principal clause of the Agreement regarding the rerouting of the silk trade away from the overland route as many Julfan family firms found it more advantageous to carry on with their overland trade through the Ottoman Empire than to use the English East India Company’s maritime route.

Following the initial failure of the 1688 agreement, the Company tried once again in the mid-1690s to conclude a similar agreement with prominent Julfan merchants and their family firms. However, that too did not yield the desired effect for the English, as some of these family firms were particularly reluctant to board their goods on English ships during times of war in Europe when they could lose their merchandise in the event that their enemies captured English ships.

By the end of the seventeenth century, a number of Julfan firms had also become important ship owners and used their own private shipping instead of relying on the Company’s ships. Roughly a similar paradox between momentarily projecting a collective image of a “corporate nation” as a prelude to signing an international agreement with a foreign state followed by an inability to generate and sustain collective action characterizes the signing of an earlier trade agreement this time with the Muscovite state to the north and with Colbert’s Compagnie des Indes Orientales in Isfahan, Surat, and Paris.

Interactions with the outside world:

The 1667 Agreement with the Russian State and the Overtures to the Compagnie des Indes Orientales of the Early 1680s

Like the 1688 Agreement with the English, the 1667 Agreement with the Russian state came on the heels of Julfan interests in expanding their network and finding alternative and better (i.e., cheaper and more secure) routes to export their silk to Europe. Julfan merchants began exploring the possibility of using the Russian route to transport their silk to Europe in the middle of the seventeenth century. The chronic insecurity of Ottoman routes and the fact that the northern route was shorter made Russia attractive to Julfans. The first step in this direction was taken in 1660 when a prominent Julfan merchant named Khwaja Zaccaria di Sarat, the eldest of four brothers belonging to Julfa’s wealthy Sceriman/Shahriranian family of Catholic Armenians, traveled to Moscow in the capacity of a royal merchant to

---

31 The Company’s officials in the Madras presidency communicated the following regarding the plan: “We have discoursed Sir John Goldsborough about enlarging our Christian town to a quadrangle so as it may be done without detriment to the Company with handsome stone bridges over the river in which designed new moiety of the city one quarter of that moiety may be set apart for the Armenian Christians to build their new church...and convenient dwelling houses for their merchants...that quarter so set apart you may call Julpha, that being the town from whence Shah ‘Abbas the Great brought them when he conquered Armenia.” See Vahi Rahaloosi and Margaret Makepeace, Armenian Merchants of the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: English East India Company Sources. (Philadelphia:American Philosophical Society, 1998), document # 143.


33 Ibid., 51ff.


36 A detailed treatment of this family’s history on the basis of heretofore largely not consulted Julfa dialect and Italian-language documents, See Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, 149-59; see also Sebouh Aslanian and Houri Berberian “Sceriman Family,” Encyclopaedia Iranica, online edition, 2009, available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sceriman-family.
the vizier of Shah Sulayman, bearing with him a golden throne studded with hundreds of diamonds and innumerable precious stones as a gift from his family and the Julfan community for Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. This generous gift, which later served as the throne for the coronation ceremony of many tsars, paid off because in 1667, Julfa's most prominent merchant families signed a trade agreement (rescinded in 1673 but reinstated in 1676) with the Russian state wherein they outlined their motives, abundantly making clear their interest in better protection costs as follows:

We transport annually some 4,000 bales of silk to Europe via Turkish territory and ports and import European goods. We suffer great losses due to banditry on land and piracy at sea. Since Persia and Russia have had friendly relations and because our great Shah 'Abbas, professes brotherly love for the Great Tsar of All the Russians, Alexei Mikhailovich, we, the representatives of the Armenian Trading Company propose a trade agreement between our nations. In 1672, the Armenians wrote again to the tsar, promising "to cease our trade with the Turks and to take our raw silk, camel wool, and other goods to Russia," as soon as the Russian monarch could "assure our safety and rid the land from the bandit Cossacks and others who hindered our trade." The upshot of these overtures was a resounding success for the Armenians who succeeded in attaining a favor that had eluded the English and the Dutch: the right to transport their merchandise overland from Iran across Russia to northwestern Europe by way of the Russian port of Archangel on the mouth of the White Sea, and to do so by paying low customs fees. The Julfans were also exempted from a number of prohibitions on foreign merchants that had been passed into law only a year prior to signing their agreement. Like the 1688 Agreement signed with the English East India Company, the Russian agreement appears to have been initiated by private merchants and in this case by a member of the Shahrimanian family who most likely played a role comparable to Khwaja Panos Ghalandarian in London. However, unlike the 1688 Agreement with the English, the signing of the Russian agreement appears to have involved more than a single individual or family. As Shushanik Khachikian has pointed out, the kalîntar and twenty-two or twenty-three prominent Julfan merchants who were possibly the kalînbas of the township signed the treaty. It is likely that the Julfans on this occasion were projecting themselves as a unified company "probably hoping thereby to enhance their status and achieve the kind of commercial treaty they had seen European companies negotiate in Iran and elsewhere." So much was their desire to appear as a corporate body similar to the European chartered corporations that they seem to have gone out of their way to refer to themselves in the official Russian translation of their agreement (made by one of their own) as "we, the representatives of the Armenian Trading Company," whereas, in reality, the signatories were the heads of separate agratically structured family firms. Following the agreement, although the bulk of Julfan silk exports to Europe went through the Russian route in the north, not all Julfan family firms complied with the accord, as some silk continued flowing west

---


41 Shushanik Khachikian appears to have been the first scholar to have noticed the egregious and revealing discrepancy between the official Russian translation of this treaty, where the word "Armenian Trading Company" is purposefully used in place of the original Julfa dialect term which states Armenian companies, in the plural. Khachikian, "Hay-rusakan arevtrakan paymanagir'i," 271, and ibidem, Nor Jughayi, 27. See also Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, 145.

---

For the document on Zaccaria's arrival in Moscow in 1660 via Astrakhan, see George Bouroumiot, Armenians and Russia, 1680-1796: A Documentary Record. Annotated translation and commentary by George A. Bouroumiot (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 15-17 (doc. 10).

Emphasis added. The document is translated into English in Bouroumiot, Armenians and Russia, 15-17 (doc. 10). The original Russian with facsimile Julfa dialect original is in Vahan Parsamyan, Armeniakan Atneserakan ev XVIII wke [Documents on Armenian-Russian relations in the seventeenth century], Vol. 1 (Yerevan, 1995).

Bouroumiot, Armenians and Russia, 21.
overland across the Ottoman routes.\textsuperscript{45} Two other agreements signed by Julfans around the same time demonstrate the role of individual or family as opposed to collective or corporate initiative. In 1692, an eccentric Julfan merchant, a convert to at least five faiths in less than a decade, operating under several names including Khwaja Phillip'os, Compte de Siry, Husayn Beg Talish, and finally Philip de Zagly, who by all accounts was a master fraudster and an embodiment of what Natalie Zeamon Davis in another context has referred to as a "trickster traveler," signed two agreements on behalf of Julfan merchants. One of these agreements was with the Duchy of Kurland (modern-day Latvia) and the other with Sweden, allowing Julfans access to the region across the Baltic Sea to transport their silk to northwestern Europe and especially to Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{46} These two agreements seem to be part of the larger pattern of Julfan interactions with foreign states where self-styled representatives or members of prominent families initiated agreements on behalf of Julfans as a collective without necessarily having all Julfan family firms follow through on the terms of the agreement. Similar attempts by Julfan individuals to initiate trade agreements occurred later in the same century involving the French Compagnie des Indes Orientales.\textsuperscript{47} Despite great distrust between the Julfans and the French Compagnie stemming from the illegal arrest, torture and abuse of its Julfan director Marcara Avachintz whose sensational trial in Paris was known to many in the

\textsuperscript{44} As with other overtures to European companies, the Julfans offered to divert their silk from the overland Ottoman route to an all-maritime route from Bandar 'Abbas to Surat, then straight to Marseille. This aborted agreement has hardly attracted any attention despite its importance as a micro-level case study of a much larger macro reality. The Compagnie's leading official and "founder of French trading fortunes" in India, François Martin, records in his memoirs the circumstances leading up to the agreement where he singles out the Julfan

\textsuperscript{45} On the non-compliance, see Matthee, The Politics of Trade, 197.


\textsuperscript{47} This failed agreement has received scant attention and only in passing. See Ferrier, "The Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation," 432-433, and ibidem., "The Armenians and the East India Company," 50; Vahan Papazyan, Hayastani otrevakan UFACT-sravguyner oteren otrhen, XVI-XVII dâ. [The Trade Routes of Armenia within the sphere of International Trade, XVI-XVII Centuries] (Yerevan, 1998), 74-75; and Matthee, "Merchants in Safavid Iran," 241, fn 27.
overland across the Ottoman routes.49

Two other agreements signed by Julfans around the same time demonstrate the role of individual or family as opposed to collective or corporate initiative. In 1692, an eccentric Julfan merchant, a convert to at least five faiths in less than a decade, operating under several names including Khwaja Phillip'os, Compte de Siry, Husayn Beg Talish, and finally Philip de Zagly, who by all accounts was a master fraudster and an embodiment of what Natalie Zemon Davis in another context has referred to as a “trickster traveler,” signed two agreements on behalf of Julfan merchants. One of these agreements was with the Duchy of Kurland (modern-day Latvia) and the other with Sweden, allowing Julfans access to the region across the Baltic Sea to transport their silk to northwestern Europe and especially to Amsterdam.50 These two agreements seem to be part of the larger pattern of Julfan interactions with foreign states where self-styled representatives or members of prominent families initiated agreements on behalf of Julfans as a collective without necessarily having all Julfan family firms follow through on the terms of the agreement. Similar attempts by Julfan individuals to initiate trade agreements occurred later in the same century involving the French Compagnie des Indes Orientales.51 Despite great distrust between the Julfans and the French Compagnie stemming from the illegal arrest, torture and abuse of its Julfan director Marcara Avachintz whose sensational trial in Paris was known to many in the French capital as well as in the markets of the East as “L’Affaire Marcara,” a number of Julfan families in Isfahan in the early 1680s appear to have buried the hatchet and approached the Company’s representative in the Iranian capital, le Sieur Alexandre de L’Estoille 52 to seek the Company’s collaboration and assistance.53 As with other overtures to European companies, the Julfans offered to divert their silk from the overland Ottoman route to an all-maritime route from Bandar ‘Abbas to Surat, then straight to Marseille. This aborted agreement has hardly attracted any attention despite its importance as a micro-level case study of a much larger macro reality. The Compagnie’s leading official and “founder of French trading fortunes” in India, François Martin, records in his memoirs the circumstances leading up to the agreement where he singles out the Julfan

49 On the non-compliance, see Matthee, The Politics of Trade, 197.
51 This failed agreement has received scant attention and only in passing, See Ferrier, “The Agreement of the East India Company with the Armenian Nation,” 432-433, and ibidem., “The Armenians and the East India Company,” 50; Vahan P’ap’ayan, Hayastani orvelron anghneri miyasagayn orervi ambor, XVI-XVII dd. [The Trade Routes of Armenia within the sphere of International Trade, XVI-XVII Centuries] (Yerevan, 1990), 74-75; and Matthee, “Merchants of Safavid Iran,” 241, fn 27.
52 Ann Kroell, “Alexandre De Lestoille: Dernier Agent de la Compagnie Royale des Indes en Perse,” Moyen Orient & Ocean Indien, XIXe-XXe s. 1, 1 (1984): 65-72. Members of the L’Estoille family resided in Julfa and were half French, half Armenian. The family descended from Isaac Boutet de L’Estoille (also spelled L’Etoille), a Calvinist Huguenot from Lyon or Charente who arrived in Safavid capital of Isfahan in the early years of the seventeenth century and appears to have served as a goldsmith for Shah ‘Abbas before marrying a local Armenian bride from New Julfa named Maria (circa 1643). The couple had several sons who served as translators for the Compagnie des Indes Orientales or were kalamchi at the Safavid court. One of the L’Estoille daughters (Reine de L’estoille) married a young Swiss clockmaker and jeweler from Geneva named Jacques Rousseau, a cousin of the famous philosopher. Their offspring in the late nineteenth century was Mirza Malikum Khan an Armenian convert to Islam and constitutionalist intellectual who operated out of London in the early twentieth century. On this family, see Jean Calmard, “The French Presence in Safavid Persia: A Preliminary Study,” in Iran and the World in the Safavid Age, eds. Edmund Herzig and Willem Floor (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 309-26. See 316-19 on various members of the L’Estoilles family, most of whom are buried in the historic Cemetery of Julfa.
53 This and many other examples of Julfan collaboration (intended or real) with the Compagnie des Indes Orientales stand in stark contrast to the bizarre insistence by Baghdiantz McCabe that one of consequences of the Marcara trial in Paris, was “the non-cooperation of the Armenians with the French.” For Baghdiantz McCabe, “The story of Marcara Avachinz [ ... ] largely explains the fruitless results of long hours spent in the French archives searching for other Armenians in the service of the Company. No Armenians are to be found in the service of the Company from its beginning, in 1664, to 1720.” The Shah’s Silk, 297. In fact, one of the Company’s most able financiers in Pondicherry during the early eighteenth century was the Julfa Armenian Coja Elias Isaac. See Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, 255-56, fn. 107.
inability to stick to the terms of a proposed agreement, noting that nothing came of their proposals.\footnote{François Martin, Mémoire de François Martin Fondateur de Pondichéry (1665-1696), ed. A. Martineau (Paris: Soc. d'éd. géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1931), 2:330.}

I have already noted that there was a proposal made in Isfahan by several Armenian merchants to the Sieur de L'Estoille, merchant of the Company, to transport silk of Persia, that they have carried by land until Smyrna and Aleppo, to Bandar 'Abbas where the Company's ships would come to load them in order to transport them from there to Surat and finally by sea on the same ships all the way to France. The Armenians found that the route by land was of great expense on account of the customs they would have to pay at various places. There were also risks in the caravans that were often attacked and sometimes stolen by thieves. The risks did not end by arriving in Smyrna or Aleppo. By transporting them [the goods] from there to Europe, they had still to run the risk of encountering Mediterranean corsairs. The Armenians found much more security and lower costs through the means [maritime transport] they wanted to try. The Sieur de l'Estoille had written to the Company in France concerning this proposal and having found it very advantageous, they had written to the Council in Surat to inform them of it and make it succeed. The Sieur de l'Estoille arrived in that month and was entrusted by the Armenians to propose to us the conditions. We did not find the affair as easy to conclude as we were led to believe. The merchants who sought security demanded that we explain that, in the event of war, who would pay the costs of the expenses of transporting the [silk] until there [Bandar 'Abbas] or of the delays if there could not be ships to take the goods? There were also other articles that were not easy to resolve to the satisfaction of both parties. This affair dragged on for three or four years, the Armenians always giving rise to new difficulties that could not be overcome. [The company] abandoned it [the agreement] at the end.\footnote{Ibid., 283-84.} 

\footnote{Ibid., 283-84. "J'ai déjà remarqué qu'il y avait une proposition faite à Isphahan par plusieurs marchands arméniens au sieur l'Estoille, marchand de la Compagnie, pour faire passer les soies de Perse qu'ils font porter par terre jusqu'à Smyrne et Aleo, au Bander Abassey où les navires de la Compagnie viendraient les charger pour les passer de là à Surate et ensuite à court à les passer de la même manière par les corsaires de la Méditerranée. Les Arméniens trouvaient beaucoup plus de sûreté et moins de frais par la voie qu'ils voulaient tenter. Le sieur de l'Estoille avait écrit à la Compagnie en France sur cette proposition; elle l'avait trouvée fort avantageuse; elle avait donné des ordres au conseil de Surate d'y entendre et de la faire réussir. Le sieur de l'Estoille arriva dans ce mois; il était chargé de la part des marchands arméniens de nous proposer les conditions. Nous ne trouvâmes pas l'affaire si aisée à terminer que l'on s'était persuadé; les marchands qui cherchaient leur sûreté demandaient qu'on s'expliquât [sur le sort] en cas de guerre [de] leurs soies portées au Bander Abassi et qu'on n'y put avoir de vaisseaux pour les prendre; sur qui courraient les frais, les dépenses et retardements de les avoir fait porter jusque-là? Il y avait encore d'autres articles qui n'étaient pas faciles à décider pour satisfaction des deux parties. Cette affaire a tâiné trois ou quatre ans, les Arméniens faisaient alors périodique de nouvelles difficultés, qui n'ont pu être surmontées; elle a été abandonnée à la fin. See Paul Kaeppelin, La Compagnie des Indes Orientales et François Martin: Études sur l'histoire du Commerce et des Etablissement Français dans l'Inde Sous Louis XIV (1664-1715) (Paris: Librairie Maritime et Coloniale, 1908), 352 and 473 for cases of individual Armenian merchants freighting French Company ships in the 1690s and early 1700s.}
making nice proposals without ever concluding anything.”

The heretofore little-explored and marginal case of Julfan overtures to the Compagnie des Indes in 1681 can be used as a case of what microhistorians refer to as “l’eccezionale normale” (the exceptional normal), a term first used by Edoardo Grendi to describe both extra-ordinary documents as well as usually marginal individuals that, as Francesca Trivellato explains, “if subjected to proper micro-analytical reading could nonetheless illuminate broad trends.” 52 First, they indicate that as with the later 1688 agreement with the English East India Company, the 1681 overtures to the French were motivated by the desire to find a cheaper and safer method of transporting their principal commodity (Persian raw silk but also later South Asian diamonds, gems, and other commodities as well) via the maritime route, thereby avoiding the overland route through Ottoman territory. As Martin perspicaciously notes in his memoirs, the maritime route was preferable for the Armenians as it was with other merchants because of the mounting expenses associated with the overland caravan transport from Isfahan to Aleppo or Izmir/Smyrna, where the Julfans had to pay extortionate sums to purchase protection cost. In the form of customs fees and tolls, not to mention fees paid to purchase guards and security against bandits on land or pirates at sea, protection costs, as we have already noted, would usually make up the lion’s share of a long-distance merchant’s costs and would often far outweigh the cost of the actual transportation. 53 As if overland customs fees were not costly enough, Julfans using the overland routes, as Martin notes, were also concerned with possible banditry in the desert and piracy in the Mediterranean as their goods traveled from either the port of Smyrna or Alexandretta (near Aleppo) to Venice, Livorno, or Marseille. Given these mounting costs and the high risks involved, signing an agreement with one of the European chartered East India Companies and shipping on their armed vessels provided the Julfans with lower and more secure protection 54 rent since company ships “internalized their protection costs” by traveling across open seas with canon. In cases of intra-European wars, however, the protection costs with the European companies would rise sometimes significantly as cargos on ships could be plundered or destroyed by enemy shipping. This was a concern to which the Julfans were not strangers as the EIC failed negotiations of the 1690s and the French negotiation examined above also demonstrate. As Martin’s passage above demonstrates, notwithstanding intra-European wars, lower protection costs over the maritime route was the main factor that attracted the Julfans in 1681 to the officials of Colbert’s Compagnie des Indes Orientales. It was no doubt the same logic of reducing their protection costs that drove the Julfans to sign a treaty with the English EIC in 1688, though this is something not mentioned in the English agreement and has therefore escaped notice, whereas it is made explicit in Martin’s discussion of the French agreement. As we have seen, however, in both cases, the Julfan side demonstrated a lack of resolve when it came to following through with their terms. In both cases, once the momentary illusion of acting as a unified “corporate” entity called the “Armenian Nation” had dissolved, each Julfan family firm pursued a course of action it presumed more advantageous to its interests. While this lack of resolve in collective action can and must be seen by us as an almost natural reflection of an agnatic social structure and weak Safavid institutional legacy in collective self-representation, to European officials like Francois Martin, already prejudiced against Armenians, it indicated a natural propensity among this nation to cheat and trick the opposition.

In the late 1690s, the allure of lower protection costs offered by the European East India Companies attracted some Julfan merchants residing in Amsterdam to approach the newly established and little-studied “East India Company of Scotland trading in the East and West Indies” with a proposal to use Scottish ships to transport their merchandise. 55 The extremely fragmentary nature of the surviving
evidence on the Armenian overtures to the Scottish Company does not allow us with certainty to tell on whose behalf the agreement in question was to be signed. It appears that like earlier agreements or overtures, this one too was initiated by a single Armenian merchant, in this case, a certain Martin Gregory presumably from Julfa and then residing in Amsterdam where Julfan merchants had their own church and were active members of the Dutch city’s commercial links with Russia and the East Indies. Unlike earlier agreements, however, the one that Martin Gregory tried to negotiate, does not appear to be on behalf of the “Armenian Nation” or a collective, but between the Company and an unspecified number of Armenian merchants who around 26 June, 1699 had “arrived from Moscovia per via Nerva and Lübeck here in this city [i.e., Amsterdam] with their silk and precious stones; amongst whom are several that inclines to go for Suratti with your Companies Ships, and if in case wee can make an agreement with the honorable Lords Directors for their passage, then they should accept it.” In an undated “memorial” probably written in the summer of 1699 and entitled “Martin Gregori of Amsterdam in Holland, in the name of the Armenian Merchants att Present in Amsterdam Doth Shew unto the Honorable Lords Directors of ye african and india Company of Scotland,” the same Martin Gregory, acting in the fashion of Khwaja Panos Ghaladarian of London, drew up a rough proposal for the newly establish Scottish East India Company outlining the interests of the Armenians:

That the said Armenian merchants inclines [sic] to load in the said Companies Ship or Ships, for Suratii in the East indie the Valley of one hundred thousand guilders provisionally, in several goods and merchandises, here under Specified, Viz.: Amber and blood corals worked and not worked, Cochinille, English cloth bought and made up in London or here, Several! Venetian and Neuremberger wares, Swords, and other small things, principally consisting in Clothes, Amber and Blood Corals and Cochenille being all goods that take little place or room, and are if great vallew, item pigs of lead

and what they further shall finde fitt for this trade."

Mr. Gregory offered to pay “ten per Cent of ye Vallew of the goods provided the goods which they shall bring in from Abroad are to be free of charges as also att Bombay.” After noting the Armenians’ willingness to offer 10 percent freight charges as protection cost, Mr. Gregory ended his letter by emphasizing the importance of protection and security and asking the “Lords Directors to lett them have Securitie that they the said Armenians shall not be molested or troubled in their persons or goods by ye English Nation or Company, as well in carrying their goods from England for Scotland as in the way and at Suratti.” George Pratt Insh, who first discovered Martin Gregory’s correspondence with officials of the Scottish Company writes that, “nothing apparently came of the Armenian merchants’ project.” In light of earlier agreements and especially the overtures with the French Company, it would not be farfetched to conclude that this one too was aborted.

Perhaps the most unusual attempt to broker negotiations between the Julfans and a European East India Company occurred as late as 1792, when Dom Josef di Perreira Viana, a consultant to the board of directors or junta of the Spanish Real Compania de Filipinas, founded in 1785, recommended that the upstart company sign a treaty with the Julfan Armenians and invite them to settle officially in Manila. In his report, entitled “The Method I Propose to Make Manila the [Principal] Emporium in the Gulf of China,” submitted to the junta, Viana had rather glowing things to say about the reputation of the Julfan Armenian merchants:

agreement, see George Pratt Insh, ed. Darien Shipping Papers, 1696-1707 (Edinburgh: Constable, 1924), 6:219-29.
56 Insh, ed. Darien Shipping Papers, 6:223.
57 Ibid., 226.
58 Ibid.
60 This treaty has hardly been studied and was first discussed in Aslanian, from the Indian Ocean, 63ff. There are two surviving version of the project in question. The first is entitled “Methode que propongo para que la ciudad de Manilla sea el Imporito del Comercio en el Golfo chinico, Madrid, May,12, 1793,” in “Papeles tocantes a la Compania de Filipinas,” terno I, Egerton 518 Bl., Plut. DXVIII.H, folios 217-25. A more complete version with many more
The Armenians, among whom are a number of Catholics, are the most capable and astute businessmen in all of Asia; they know the trading centers and deal with all the manufacturers both in the coastal areas as well as the interior of those countries. It is they who have taught the English the commerce of that part of the world, and they who have made with them [i.e., the English] on 22 June 1688 a treaty bringing their skills to their [i.e., English] establishments. However, the English having reneged on their promises, the Armenians now find themselves disappointed with this nation and feel oppressed by the impediments that have been imposed upon them. Experience demonstrates that whatever country where the Armenians have settled, they have not only enriched it with the great wealth they have brought with them, but have also made industrious through their skill and through their relations with that country.

Imitating the earlier Julfan treaty with the English East India Company, Viana then proposed that the newly created Royal Philippine Company "invite the Armenians to the Philippine Islands and bring through them the manufactures of the Coromandel Coast and Bengal." He argued that this could be achieved by signing a treaty with the Armenians containing the following cardinal points: (1) that the Armenians "enjoy the same privileges as the Spaniards"; (2) that they "be able to live in any ports of those islands and to have trading settlements"; (3) "that they be eligible to hold any office"; (4) "that they be exempt from paying more customs fees than the Spaniards"; and (5) "that they be allowed to navigate with full freedom to any of the ports of Asia." For Viana, the settlement of the Armenians in the Philippines would result in "attracting all the manufactures and fruits of all of Asia by means of the extension they would give to the port-to-port trade [i.e., the "country trade"] in the Indian Ocean." This to him could only benefit the Royal Philippine Company and the economy of Manila as the Armenians had done, in Viana's mind, for the English East India Company and its settlements in India. It is important to note here that while Viana's proposal was self-consciously modeled on the 1688 treaty between the Armenians and the English East India Company, the main points of which are reproduced in his document, Viana did not and probably could not offer the Armenians the freedom to build their own churches and tend to their religious needs by following their own church. What Viana did not realize was that by the time he drafted his proposal in 1792, Julfa had collapsed as a nodal center of a global trade network, and Julfans, for the most part, had ceased being "the most capable and astute businessmen in all of Asia," as Viana had thought they were.

One of the common leitmotifs in the above discussion of Julfan overtures to foreign states and their East India Companies is the alacrity and ease with which Julfan merchants opened up talks for agreements with foreign entities and the equally swift nature in which most of these agreements failed to materialize. The same pattern seems to be repeated in different places and times with diverse parties, each time with a minor recalibration but staying true to the overall pattern. At least this is what our preliminary exploration of the different approaches made by Julfan merchants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has indicated. The image is one of the Julfans' ability of periodically projecting an image of themselves as a "unified trading nation" capable of operating on a truly global scale.
entering into international agreements with foreign legal entities on the basis of being a "corporate entity," followed soon after with an inability of generating and sustaining collective action usually associated with that image. My preliminary probing into this understudied area of Julfan history suggests that such inability was most likely the outcome of the limited institutional power of Julfa's semi-formal institutions coupled with a peculiar social structure that privileged the agnatic family unit as the ultimate organizational basis of Julfan economic and social life. The distinctive institutional dynamics of the Julfan community invites a comparison, however brief, at the institutional level with the different trajectories of the early modern East India Companies with which the Julfans interacted.

The entities with which the Julfans tried to cooperate when they were not busy competing with them were mostly chartered joint-stock corporations from Northwestern Europe. As a "Corpus politicum et corporatum" and "communitas perpetua," the English East India Company, for instance, as Philip Stern has recently reminded us, was far from being solely a business enterprise. Rather, entering into international agreements with foreign legal entities on the basis of being a "corporate entity," followed soon after with an inability of generating and sustaining collective action usually associated with that image. My preliminary probing into this understudied area of Julfan history suggests that such inability was most likely the outcome of the limited institutional power of Julfa's semi-formal institutions coupled with a peculiar social structure that privileged the agnatic family unit as the ultimate organizational basis of Julfan economic and social life. The distinctive institutional dynamics of the Julfan community invites a comparison, however brief, at the institutional level with the different trajectories of the early modern East India Companies with which the Julfans interacted.

The entities with which the Julfans tried to cooperate when they were not busy competing with them were mostly chartered joint-stock corporations from Northwestern Europe. As a "Corpus politicum et corporatum" and "communitas perpetua," the English East India Company, for instance, as Philip Stern has recently reminded us, was far from being solely a business enterprise. Rather, entering into international agreements with foreign legal entities on the basis of being a "corporate entity," followed soon after with an inability of generating and sustaining collective action usually associated with that image. My preliminary probing into this understudied area of Julfan history suggests that such inability was most likely the outcome of the limited institutional power of Julfa's semi-formal institutions coupled with a peculiar social structure that privileged the agnatic family unit as the ultimate organizational basis of Julfan economic and social life. The distinctive institutional dynamics of the Julfan community invites a comparison, however brief, at the institutional level with the different trajectories of the early modern East India Companies with which the Julfans interacted.

The entities with which the Julfans tried to cooperate when they were not busy competing with them were mostly chartered joint-stock corporations from Northwestern Europe. As a "Corpus politicum et corporatum" and "communitas perpetua," the English East India Company, for instance, as Philip Stern has recently reminded us, was far from being solely a business enterprise. Rather, entering into international agreements with foreign legal entities on the basis of being a "corporate entity," followed soon after with an inability of generating and sustaining collective action usually associated with that image. My preliminary probing into this understudied area of Julfan history suggests that such inability was most likely the outcome of the limited institutional power of Julfa's semi-formal institutions coupled with a peculiar social structure that privileged the agnatic family unit as the ultimate organizational basis of Julfan economic and social life. The distinctive institutional dynamics of the Julfan community invites a comparison, however brief, at the institutional level with the different trajectories of the early modern East India Companies with which the Julfans interacted.

The entities with which the Julfans tried to cooperate when they were not busy competing with them were mostly chartered joint-stock corporations from Northwestern Europe. As a "Corpus politicum et corporatum" and "communitas perpetua," the English East India Company, for instance, as Philip Stern has recently reminded us, was far from being solely a business enterprise. Rather, entering into international agreements with foreign legal entities on the basis of being a "corporate entity," followed soon after with an inability of generating and sustaining collective action usually associated with that image. My preliminary probing into this understudied area of Julfan history suggests that such inability was most likely the outcome of the limited institutional power of Julfa's semi-formal institutions coupled with a peculiar social structure that privileged the agnatic family unit as the ultimate organizational basis of Julfan economic and social life. The distinctive institutional dynamics of the Julfan community invites a comparison, however brief, at the institutional level with the different trajectories of the early modern East India Companies with which the Julfans interacted.
As non-state actors devoid of real sovereignty, they did not have the power to legislate or live in their own segregated and fortified settlements in India as did the East India Companies, a fact that endeared them to Asian monarchs from the Mughals to the Safavids; they did not have standing armies, and their ships (when they owned them) did not field guns or regularly travel in armed convoys, hence one of the factors that attracted them to the Companies. This does not mean, of course, that they were merely a “trade diaspora” devoid of any interest in mixing political power with commerce, as the dominant paradigm inherited from Philip C. Curtin would have us believe. 66 To the contrary, dabbling in political power was not unfamiliar territory for the Julfians. To strengthen their declining economic fortunes in South Asia during the second half of the eighteenth century, they relied on the political/military protection of their host states; 67 on occasion, they even combined state power and commerce by engaging as “portfolio capitalists” 68 as was the case in Bengal during the tensions leading to the Battle of Buxxar (1764) when some Julfan merchants joined forces with the last nawab of Bengal in a last-ditch effort to wage war against the East India Company with results that were unfavorable to them. 69


67 For examples of this, see Aslanian, “Trade Diaspora versus Colonial State.”


69 For an interesting account based on English-language sources, see B. Bhattacharya, “Between Fact and Fiction: Khoja Gregory alias Gurguin Khan, the ‘evil genius’ of Mir Qasim”, in J. J. L. Kolff (ed). Circumambulations in South Asian History: Essays in honour of Dirk H. A. Kolff (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 133–58. The author, however, does consult the valuable contemporaneous primary source account of participation by Armenian merchants in the army of the Bengali governor Mir Qasim found in the manuscript “History of Hindustan” written by the Julfan merchant, T’omas Khojamalian (Thomas Cojamaul), and stored in the All Savior’s Monastery Archives in New Julfa as was the case in Bengal during the tensions leading to the Battle of Buxxar (1764) when some Julfan merchants joined forces with the last nawab of Bengal in a last-ditch effort to wage war against the East India Company with results that were unfavorable to them. 69

Patmatur’iwn Hindistan, (History of Hindustan) written only five years after the battle of Buxxar and containing a long history of the Bengal suba (province). See Ms. 553.


71 On Julfians’ role in the creation of a national constitution for a future mercantile republic in the form of a sovereign state in their “national homeland” see Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean, 215-214 and especially Aslanian, “From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: Circulation and the Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa” (Ph. D. diss, Columbia University, 2007), chapter 8.
Silk for the Court: Safavid Silk Textiles in Japanese Collections

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that silk played a key role in Dutch-Asian trade throughout the seventeenth century. Written sources confirm that raw silk and silk fabrics appear to be one of the major commodities through which the Dutch conducted trade with Japan. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) records the import of Chinese silk but it also imported silk from Bengal, Vietnam and Iran. Along with the silk fabrics, wool and cotton fabrics from various origins appear on the Company records and were sold on the Japanese market throughout the Edo period up until the nineteenth century.

Today, in Japan, various museums and collections have preserved a certain number of silk textiles that were made with threads of precious metal, such as silver and gold, spun around a silk core. These are usually ascribed to Iranian or Indian production from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and usually catalogued as mōru or mōru fabrics. Although a certain number of descriptions of these silk textiles from historical sources such as the VOC records have survived, they are not descriptive enough to help us identify any specific object. Therefore, the question of their attribution, either through their dating or provenance, remains to be clarified.

The textiles preserved in Japanese collections constitute not only a corpus of historical sources, as can be used to gain an understanding of the way in which...