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 Mkhit‘arist vardapets were collecting these flower nectars [tsagghahoyteré] 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.1

Ever since the Soviet Armenian historian Leo (Arak‘el Babakhanian) wrote these perceptive words about the Mkhit‘arist 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 Mkhit‘ar 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 Mkhit‘arist contributions to the history of Armenian print

* I would like to thank Houri Berberian for her insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article and Merujan Karapetyan, Abbot Yeghia Kilaghbian, and Father Vahan Ohanian for placing valuable archival documents at my disposal without which I could not have written this essay. Sergio La Porta provided me useful feedback on this paper when I first delivered it at a Middle East Studies Association panel in 2012. All translations unless otherwise mentioned are my own as are any errors of interpretation. Quoted material in the footnotes has been reproduced as it appears in the original, including orthographic and punctuation irregularities. This essay has also benefited from long conversations with Merujan Karapetyan, Khachig Tö löyan, Gerard Libaridian, and Marc Mamigonian.

culture during the early modern period. 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 Mkhit'arist 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 Mkhit'ar’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 Mkhit'ar 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 Mkhit’ar 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 Mkhit’ar (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 Mkhit’arist Congregation.

2 Sahak Jemjemian, Mkhit’ar Abbahör hratarakchakan arak'elut'iwnē (The publishing mission of Abbot Mkhit’ar) (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 Mkhit’arists monks who were also learned scholars. Thematically and chronologically, Jemjemian’s work succeeds that of the other Mkhit’arist 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 17th 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
Mkhit’ar’s passing away in 1749. After all, relations between the Mkhit’arists
in Venice and the Armenian communities of Surat, Madras, and Calcutta in
India, though barely in existence during Mkhit’ar’s lifetime, became
intensified only during the term of Mkhit’ar’s successor Abbot Step’anos
Melk’onian (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
Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’arist 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
Mkhit’arist 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 salesmen,
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 Mkhit’arist 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.  

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.” 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. 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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3 Bacon counted the printing press alongside two other “recent inventions” that had
transformed human history, namely gunpowder and the compass. Cited in Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies After
Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, edited by Sabrina 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


5 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,”
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.” 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.” 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.” 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.”

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.”


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10 Cited in Davidson, 8.
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?\(^\text{12}\)

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, *Urbaťagirk’*, printed in 1512 in Venice.\(^\text{13}\) The first important monograph-

\(^{12}\) 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 McMillan, 2010); and Leslie Hawsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006).

\(^{13}\) 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 Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’arist savant, Ghevond 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 *Aghṭ’ark’* of 1512. For the fascinating thread of discussion, see Alishan, “Ch’o’ord 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, “Arājin dar Hayakakan tpagrut’eants’” (The first century of Armenian printing), *Bazmavep* (1890), pp. 90-104;
length study, Garegin Zarbhanalian’s *Patmut’iwn 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’čot’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 (1946), Raphael Ishkhanyan (1968, 1978, 1981), Ninel Oskanyan, et al. (1988), and others. In the diaspora, Mkhit’arist monks and scholars, Karapet Amatuni (1975) and Sahak Jemjemian (1980, 1989), published specialized monographs in Venice, while Raymond Kévorkian in Paris authored a series of trailblazing essays and a dissertation in the 1980s, paving the way for more conceptually informed work.

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


17 Amatuni, Oskan Vrd. Yerewants’i.


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 colophonic 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. With few exceptions, namely the recent scholarship of Elizabet Tajiryan and Merujan Karapetyan, the specific

20 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.

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.\textsuperscript{22} 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.\textsuperscript{23} 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.\textsuperscript{24} Finally and perhaps


\textsuperscript{22} Jemjemian, \textit{Mkhit’ar Abbahōr hratarakch’akan}, provides the best account to date of how books were shipped from one location to the next. Kévorkian, \textit{“Livre imprimé et culture écrite,”} pp. 351-355, also contains an insightful albeit brief account.

\textsuperscript{23} See works cited in footnote 19.

\textsuperscript{24} 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, \textit{“Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism, and the Birth of Printing in Early Qajar Iran,”} \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East} \textit{30/3} (2010), pp. 473-490; and idem, \textit{“The Uses of Books in a Late Mughal Takiyya: Persianate Knowledge Between Person and Paper”} \textit{Modern Asian Studies} \textit{44.2} (2010), p. 242. For a detailed comparison of Armenian and Islamic (Perso-Arabic) print traditions, see Sebouh D. Aslanian, \textit{“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 \textit{Handes Amsorya} (2014) and idem, \textit{“Port Cities and Printers: Reflections on Early Modern Global Armenian Print,”} \textit{Book History} \textit{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. 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 Mkhit‘arist 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. 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) 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. Although the cradle of Armenian printing during the

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26 I have taken the figure of nineteen cities from Elizabet Tajiry an, “Amsrterdami Haytpagrutwn: tipabanakan verlutsut’iw’n.” 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.

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

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. 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 Mikayêl Agha Khojajanian (also known as Chak’igents’) residing in Madras and Pondicherry in India. In sum, the

29 The best work on Amsterdam Armenian Printing remains, Mesrop Gregorian, Nor niwt’er ew ditoght’iwnner hratarakich’ Vanantets’way masin (New materials and observations on the Vanantets’i family of publishers) (Vienna: Mkhit’arist, 1966). See also the classic study of the Armenian community in Amsterdam: Arak’el Sarukhan, Hollandan ew Hayere (Holland and the Armenians) (Vienna: Mkhit’arist, 1925) and, more recently, Tajiryan, “Amsterdami Hay tpagrutwnë.”

30 In his Colophon, Catholicos Siméon Yerevants’i identifies Khojajanian’s European contact as a “Monsieur Alexandre DeLache [ՄուսիԱլէքսանդրԴլաշ] 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 Aghanants’, 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’ovmachanian 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’iwn T’ovmachanean Mahtesi Tër Hovhannisì Konstantnupolsets’way oroy ènd eresun têrût’iwnn sraçeriakan’Camb ew hsk hetoy verstin darts’ arareal i bnik k’aghak’ iwr Konstantnupolis dzerinadri and k’ahanay ylgnatisos yepiskoposè yeot’anasnerord ami hasaki iwroy apa ekela dadarê i vans rabuna peti metsi Mkhit’aray abbay Hôr i Venetik (The life and history of Mahtesi Tër Hovhannës T’ovmachanian 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 Mkhit’ar, in Venice), Manuscript no. 1688, folios 255-257. A Monsieur “Henry Alexandre Delarche” is indeed identified as an official of the French Company in Pondicherry who was incidentally married to a Madelaine Elias, the daughter of Pondicherry’s richest Armenian merchant, Coja Elias di Isaac, who was decorated in the 1720s as a “chevalier d’eperon” 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, employe de la Compagnie, et Jeanne Madelaine Elias, âgée de 15 ans, née à Pondichéry.” 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.”31 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.

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. This brotherhood, known as the Khor virap (Convent of the Holy Cross), later became known as the Kecharis. It was a community of monks dedicated to the production and preservation of the Armenian liturgy and the translation of religious texts into Armenian.

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. This brotherhood, known as the Khor virap (Convent of the Holy Cross), later became known as the Kecharis. It was a community of monks dedicated to the production and preservation of the Armenian liturgy and the translation of religious texts into Armenian.
Persecuted both by the Armenian Patriarch of the Ottoman capital and the Sublime Porte, Mkhit’ar first moved with fifteen followers to the Venetian-controlled town of Meton ( Methoni) on Morea (the Peloponnese) in the summer of 1703. On the eve of the capture of the town by the Ottomans in 1715, the fledgling congregation, with Mkhit’ar 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. 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 Mkhit’ar 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 Mkhit’ar and his successors dispatched their missionaries throughout Armenian-populated regions in West Asia. By the time Abbot Mkhit’ar 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 Mkhit’ar 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 Mkhit’arist publishing enterprise there. As we shall discuss below, these missionary and peddler networks from Venice were, from the beginning, also imbricated into and

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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.\textsuperscript{34}

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.\textsuperscript{35} 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.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} 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,” \textit{Journal of World History} 19, 2 (2008), pp. 127-188, and idem, \textit{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 Sceirman/Shahrimanian and Nazar di Dateo Sceirman/Shahrimanian in Venice (Archivio Istituto don Mazza (henceforth Don Mazza), Verona, Busta 2. See also letter to Tadeo di Nazar Sceirman/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.

\textsuperscript{35} See Jemjemian, \textit{Mkhit'ar Abbahor hratarakh'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, \textit{L’editoria Veneziana nel’ 700} (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1989), pp. 24 and 170; on Albrizzi, see p. 145.

\textsuperscript{36} 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,” \textit{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. 37 Both the high print quality of Mkhit’arist publications as well as the erudition and knowledge that went into compiling or writing their books made the Mkhit’arists one of the most sought-after Armenian publishers/printers of the eighteenth century. But how did Mkhit’arist books find their way to consumers in distant markets where Armenian reading publics existed? Where were these markets located and what method did Mkhit’ar and his successors follow to transport their books there? Finally, once the books reached their destination, how and by whom


37 Kévorkian, Les imprimés 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, “Hayerê 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 Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’arists got established on San Lazzaro in 1717. According to Kévorkian, the Mkhit’arists 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 imprimés arméniens, p. 5.
were they read, and did the “reader response” of these consumers have an
influence on what the Mkhit’arists 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 Mkhit’arists 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 Mkhit’arist 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.  

The Mkhit’arists 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 Mkhit’arists 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 Mkhit’arist archives
that one such book peddler was Khach’ik Hakobian, a commenda agent
working for a wealthy Julfan merchant and patron for Mkhit’ar, Khwaja
Melik’ Khaldartents’ residing in Surat, India. Khach’ik regularly peddled
books for Abbot Mkhit’ar as early as the 1720s, when he is reported to have
taken a small crate of Mkhit’arist books to his master in Surat upon returning

38 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.
39 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
home from business in the Mediterranean and Western Europe. According to an entry Abbot Mkhit‘ar 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). We will examine Hakobian’s correspondence with Mkhit‘ar for clues on Armenian reading habits as well as his role as a devoted peddler to Mkhit‘ar 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, Mkhit‘ar 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, Mkhit‘ar 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. Similarly, when Mkhit‘ar 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. Thus, on February 4, 1730, Mkhit‘ar notes in his

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41 The ledger is stored at the Mkhit‘arist Archives on San Lazzaro (henceforth ASL) and bears the title in Mkhit‘ar’s hand of “Տոմսակ 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 Mkhit‘ar handed on consignment to Hakobian. On April 15, Mkhit‘ar notes that he sent another fifty-eight books to Hakobian in Livorno, bringing the total to 883 books as Mkhit‘ar himself notes. Jemjemian (Mkhit‘ar 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, Mkhit‘ar Abbahōr hratarakch‘akan, pp. 305-307.

42 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” (Եդաքիսգրեանց Հագարեց ռտառաջի Հարավստորում Կանի վերաստորում Հայկազյանց արդարախամուր). Jemjemian, Mkhit‘ar 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. As Jemjemian notes in his analysis of this ledger, it was understood that Mkhit’ar’s own missionaries stationed in Constantinople were expected to unload the books and sell them in the Ottoman capital.

Sometimes, Mkhit’arist 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 Julfān Armenian communities in India that were intellectually and culturally dependent on Mkhit’arist publications despite having their own printing establishments. Thus, when a small delegation of Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’arist monks visiting Armenian settlements in Surat, Madras, and Calcutta in India in the early 1770s were reporting home in their letters. In a letter written shortly after his arrival in Madras, by way of Basra, in June 28, 1770, and sent to Abbot Mkhit’ar’s successor, Step’an Melk’onian

44 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 զսնտուկ գրեանս ի Կոստանինուպոլիս նաւու գաբուտան Մաթիօի ն այս թիւն էայ). In the same entry, Mkhit’ar writes: “And we marked the crates as follows: P:M” (եւ զսնտուկն նշացաք այսպէս։ P:M).

45 Jemjemian, Mkhit’ar Abbahōr hrataragh’akan, pp. 278-305.

46 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’amech’iants’. Ch’amech’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 Mkhit’areants’ Venetkoy i Surb Ghazar, 1707-1773 (Grand archives of the Mkhit’arists of Venice at San Lazzaro, 1707-1773) (Venice: San Lazzaro, 1930). See letter by Fathers Manuēl Emirze (Emirzian), Suk’ias Aghamalian, and Mikayēl Ch’amech’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 Mkhit’ar’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 Mikayēl 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).

47 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: “Իմատրասհայքնամենայնիբրէւքաղցեալեւծարավիփափաքեալինինգրեանց,վասնիւրզգրեանսնզորխնդրեոմնանգրեանցինաւէն։Իբրէւտեսազիչաքարեաքհաճելզմիտսամենեցունվասնսակաւութեանգրեանցնորհետվեմիարկղմնանիպասրեւմմիւսոցէգրեթէզերրորդմասնառինիսուրաքանչիւրգայցենոմնայւրաքանչիւրզխնդրեոմն.”
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, 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.”

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 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].”

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

48. Letter of Father Suk’ias Aghamalian, Calcutta, February 20, 1771, to Mikayēl Ch’amch’iants’, ASL. “Հերենուն ընդեմ քերեր հեռու թղթաշար գրքերից, այսինքն՝ ազդանցություն, դատապարտություն և այլն. այսինքն՝ թղթաշար գրքերից, որոնք ապահովում են զանգակատեղիությունը այսպիսի հուշարձաններից. դեռևս մենք չենք կարողանում գրել այսպիսի հուշարձաններից, և դա չինչ է սա պատրաստված ամբողջ սիրողական խորհուրդ։”

49. Letter of Manuēl Emirzian, dated February 20, 1771, ASL. The original reads, “Զգիրս այսպիսի հուշարձաններից, դատապարտություն, զանգակատություն, հրահարություն, ու այլն. այսինքն՝ թղթաշար գրքերից, և դեռևս կարողանում ենք գրել այսպիսի հուշարձաններից, և դա չինչ է սա պատրաստված ամբողջ սիրողական խորհուրդ։”
Reader Response and the Circulation of Mkhit‘arist Books

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‘ monumental History of the Armenians (1784-86) followed by a host of new works on geography by Ghukas Inijjian (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.\(^{50}\)

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

\(^{50}\) For a discussion of these works and the relevant dates of their publication, see Barsegh Sargisean, Yerkhariwramea grakanakan gortsuneut‘iw n 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 Gharamiants’s 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. What is less well known is the patronage for printing books by two Shahrimanian/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:

ՀԱՅՐԱՏ ՏԱՊԱՆԻ ԱՍՏԱՊՈՓԻ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՈՒՄԵՆՆ ԲԱՐԵՊԱՇՏԻ ԱՆՈՒՆ ՍՈՐԱՅ ՅՈՎՍԵՓ ԿՈՉԻ ՈՐԴԻ ԳՈԼՈՎ ԲԱՐԱՀԱՄԻ ԱԶՆԻՐ ՑԵՂԷՆ ՇԵՐԻՄԱՆԵՑԻ Ի ԸՍՊԱՀԱՆ ՈՒ ՃՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ ՈՐ ՓՈԽԵՑԱՎԻ Ի ԿԵՆԱՑԱՍ ԱՏԻ ԹԻՎՆ 1763 ՅՈՒՆԻՍԻ 11

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/Baghram of the noble lineage of Shahrimanian from Julfa in Isfahan who passed away here in the year 1763 on the 11th of June]

ՀԱՅՐԱՏ ՏԱՊԱՆԻ ԱՍՏԱՊՈՓԻ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՈՒՄԵՆՆ ԲԱՐԵՊԱՇՏԻ ԱՆՈՒՆ ՍՈՐԱՅ ՅՈՎՍԵՓ ԿՈՉԻ ՈՐԴԻ ԳՈԼՈՎ ԲԱՐԱՀԱՄԻ ԱԶՆԻՐ ՑԵՂԷՆ ՇԵՐԻՄԱՆԵՑԻ Ի ԸՍՊԱՀԱՆ ՈՒ ՃՈՒՂԱՅԵՑԻ ՈՐ ՓՈԽԵՑԱՎԻ Ի ԿԵՆԱՑԱՍ ԱՏԻ ԹԻՎН 1763 ՅՈՒՆԻՍԻ 11

51 For the classic account, see Sargis T’ëodorean’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 armene 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: Imponte di una civiltà, ed. Levon B. Zekiyan, Gabriela Uluhogian, and Vartan Karapetian (Milan: Skira, 2011), pp. 207-211.
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 Shahrimanian or Sceriman.

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 barerarats’n tpagrut’ean ch’amch’eani erahator patmut’ean hayots’” (Tombstones of the immortal benefactors of Ch’amch’eans 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 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 Shahrimanian members:

IN THIS TOMB LIES PHILIPOS 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

Derozario, The Complete Monumental Register, p. 179. The Azaria date for Tira 30 corresponds to October 17 according to Abrahanyan’s table for converting Azaria months, Ashot Abrahanyan, 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 Shahriman, 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 Mkhit’arist publishing enterprise.\(^{53}\)

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.\(^{54}\)

What Bishop Cornelius forgets to mention is that the enormous sums bequeathed by the brothers for the Mkhit’arist 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 Shahriman Brothers of Joseph and Zaccaria”\(^{55}\) stored in the Mkhit’arist Archives in San Lazzaro enable us to reconstruct in part the patronage history

\(^{53}\) On the Sceriman/Shahrimanian family, see Sebouh D. Aslanian and Houri 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.


\(^{55}\) Alishan Archives, Archivio San Lazzaro (ASL) “Տումարն Յաշուի Շէհրիմանի պարոն Յովիսէփի և պարոն Զաքարին” (Account book of Parons Hovsep and Zaccar Shahrimanians/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 Shahriman 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 Bagham, 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.” 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

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 bank57] 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. 58

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57 The original Julfa dialect document has the term “ձէնք” [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 Dopositi 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 Shahriman/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 Shahriman, 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 Shahriman invested an additional 200,000 Ducats at around the same time. It is therefore not surprising to read in this will that Baghram di Zachariah Shahriman had also kept money in Venice probably also beginning in the 1690s. See Aslanian, From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, 150.

58 “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 Baghram Shahriman 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:
The above-mentioned accounting ledger preserved in the “Alishan archives” at San Lazzaro provides a summary of the contents of the Shahriman 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. 59 Although the ledger does not provide specific information about

who the bankers or sarrafs were that facilitated the remittance of the Shahriman 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 Shahriman 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 Shahriman 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 Mkhit’arists. 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 yields the following list of works published in chronological order by the funds bequeathed by Joseph and Zaccaria Shahrimanians, sons of Paron Baghram, 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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60 Oskanyan et al., *Hay girk’è*. 
3) *Nor ktakaran* [New Testament] (Venice: Demetrius Theodosius, 1776)
4) *K’erakanut’iwn Haykazezn 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, 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, 1786)
9) *K’erakanut’iwn T’oskanean lezui* [Grammar of the language of Tuscany, i.e., Italian] by Gabriel Avetikian (Venice: Antoni Bortoli, 1792)
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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61 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 Vaghvaghants‘) 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.

62 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. As we shall now see, though unlike other port Armenian patrons the Shahriman 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.” 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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63 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.

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.” 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.” 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 Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’ar and his successor Melk’onian 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. 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 Khach’ik Hakobian whose work we mentioned in passing earlier and need to revisit with more care here. How does the correspondence of Abbot Mkhit’ar’s loyal book peddler help us understand both the publishing business of the Mkhit’arist 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 Khach’ik Hakobian is to explore the larger issue

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65 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.


67 Ibid.

68 Abbot Mkhit’ar’s correspondence and use of information or intelligence network has been masterfully studied by Jemjemian in his *Mkhit’ar Abbahör hratarakch’akan* and following him more recently by Karapetian in “Venetik’ ev Mkhit’arian hratarakch’akan gortsuneut’iwnê.”
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 Mkhit’arist publishing enterprise in particular.

Our sources on Hakobian’s background are rather spotty despite about a dozen letters he exchanged with Mkhit’ar 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. Mkhit’ar’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. It was probably during this trip that Hakobian first met the young Mkhit’ar 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 Mkhit’ar 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), Mkhit’ar’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 (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 Mkhit’ar shipped to the Armenian communities in Transylvania (presumably to Gherla and Pashbalov, [Başfalău, Elizavetpolis or Dumbrăveni in modern-

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69 In one of his letters to Melik’ Markar in Surat, Hakobian is alluded to as follows: “Մեր սիրելի պարոն Խաչիկն, որ է ընկեր քո, պատմելով մեզ զորըսութեանց քոց,” see Namakani tsarayin Astutsoy teaın Mkhit’aray Abbayi, vol. 1, p. 451.
70 Համառօտութիւն աստուածաբանութեան երանելւոյն Մեծին Ալպերտի (Venice, 1715).
day Romania] both with substantial Armenian communities and important locations for Mkhit’arist missionary and educational work) and Constantinople around the same period. 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 Mkhit’ar’s ledgers are any indication of what sold or did not sell in the principal Mkhit’arist 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 Mkhit’ar in 1727 and entitled *Gateway to the Grammar of the Vernacular Language*; 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.

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 Mkhit’ar 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

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71 ASL, “Տոմսակ Գրեանց, 1729-1737” (Register of books, 1729-1737). For the entry of April 15, 1729, Mkhit’ar 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), *Yark’ Ohammu* (Life of John), *Aghbiwr bari* (Fountain of goodness), *Girk’ Kavarani* (Book of Purgatory) Dagharan kashakazm (leather-bound Song-book), paper-bound “Song-book,” eighteen *Psalters*, twenty-four *Krtut’iwn k’ristonakan* (Christian discipline), three *Arakinut’iwn* (Book of Virtues), two *Girk’ Molu’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 Mkhit’ar includes one copy of Clement Galanos’s *History of the Armenian Church* in Armenian, one [printed] dictionary (*Bargirk’ tpetsk*), 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 *Psalters* (ibid., “entry for February 4, 1730). The popularity of Psalters 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 Psalters for literacy education explains why such works often had print runs into the thousands.

72 “Տոմսակ Գրեանց, 1729-1737.” See Jemjemian, *Mkhit’ar Abbahôr hratarakch’akan*, pp. 81-83, for a detailed discussion of this work.

73 The list is based the entry in Mkhit’ar’s ledger (stored at the ASL) for March 21, 1732. See also Jemjemian, *Mkhit’ar Abbahôr hratarakch’akan*, pp. 305-306.

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 Mkhit’arist 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 should be 4 tumans and 1,110 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.\footnote{Letter of Khach’ik Hakobian to Abbot Mkhit’ar, June 23, 1737, Archivio San Lazzaro (ASL): “Բովանդակին գինը եղել է զճղթյուն 699 ղուրուշ.”}
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...
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.