Most of the literature on networks assumes that what is described and referred to as a “network” somehow exists as a discrete and real thing “out there.” To be sure, all networks have a material existence, a materiality, in so far as they are constituted by real individuals, have physical buildings like houses, churches, temples, bazaars, port facilities, such as docks for ships, and so on. Rather than simply existing “out there,” however, networks need to be materialized and rematerialized into existence through the use of paper instruments by travelers and merchants before the latter are able to navigate and work through them. This seminar revisits some old debates on the importance of several types of paper instruments in sustaining and facilitating long-distance trade networks in Medieval and early modern Europe as well as the early modern world of the Indian Ocean. It concentrates particularly on the development and use of long-distance partnership contracts known as commendae as well as on bills of exchange, which acted both as an effective means of money remittance, currency exchange, and interest-bearing credit transactions among merchants as well as others. The readings for the seminar converge on the uses of commendae and bills of exchange (bundis, avaks, barats, and sanads) in the world of Julfan Armenian merchants operating across the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean from their remote base in the suburb of the Safavid imperial capital of Isfahan from the early seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries. In addition to reading scholarly analyses of paper instruments and networks, the seminar will place emphasis on paleographic reading and analyses of Julfa dialect commercial documents such as commendae and bills of exchange (avaks and bundis) predominantly from a special collection of financial papers stored in Lansdowne 1047 and 1048 manuscripts at the British Library, in addition to documents from other collections such as the Archivio di Stato of Venice and a private collection of Julfan documents in Don Mazza archives in Verona.
WEEK 1 (JAN 9): NODES, CIRCUITS, AND NETWORKS OF CIRCULATION AND EXCHANGE


WEEK 2 (JAN 16): AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE COMMENDA


WEEK 3 (JAN. 23): THE JULFAN COMMENDA AND ITS USES


WEEK 4 (JAN 30): THE INDIAN MERCHANTS IN EURASIAN TRADE


WEEK 5 (FEB.6): MULTANIS AND MARWARIS IN INDIA, IRAN, AND RUSSIA


WEEK 6 (FEB 13): CREDIT NETWORKS AND THE BILL OF EXCHANGE IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE


WEEK 7 (FEB 20): CREDIT NETWORKS AND THE BILL OF EXCHANGE IN MEDIEVAL/EARLY MODERN EUROPE AND MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC WORLD


WEEK 8 (FEB. 27): CREDIT NETWORKS AND THE BILL OF EXCHANGE IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SOUTH ASIA—THE HUNDI


Irfan Habib, “Usury in Medieval India,” Comparative Studies in Society and History, 6, 4 (1964), 393-419*


Om Prakash, “The Cashless Payment Mechanism in Mughal India: The Working of the Hundi Network,” in Cashless Payments and Transactions from the Middle Ages to 1914, eds. Sushil Chaudhuri and Markus A. Denzel, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 131-137*


Sushil Chaudhuri, “No Ready Money? No Problem! The Role of Hundis (Bills of Exchange) in Early Modern India, c. 1600-1800,” in Cashless Payments and Transactions from the Middle Ages to 1914, eds. Sushil Chaudhuri and Markus A. Denzel, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 139-153*

A. Jan Qaisar, “The Role of Brokers in Medieval India,” Indian Historical Review, (Sept. 1974): 220-246*


WEEK 9 (MARCH 6): CREDIT NETWORKS AND BILLS OF EXCHANGE IN THE JULFAN NETWORK


Shushanik Khachikian, “The Bill of Exchange in the Milieu of New Julfan Armenian


Hussain, Ruquia. “Credit Techniques in Armenian Commerce in Mughal India,” Proceedings-Indian History Congress. 51 (1990): 327-331*

WEEK 10 (MARCH 13): SOME SAMPLE JULFAN BILLS OF EXCHANGE

Selected bills of exchange from Lansdowne 1047 and 1048 and Don Mazza Archives (Verona), Sceriman papers, busta 1*