

HANDES AMSORYA

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR ARMENISCHE PHILOLOGIE

ՀԱՆԴԵՍ ԱՄՍՕՐԵԱՅ

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A Reader Responds to Joseph Emin's *Life and Adventures*: Notes
toward a "History of Reading" in Late Eighteenth Century
Madras*

Sebouh D. Aslanian

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, a burgeoning field of scholarship known as the "history of reading" has developed as a natural extension of the history of print culture and what has come to be known as *l'histoire du livre* or the history of the book. In some ways, this scholarship is an attempt to shift the focus of attention from the production and circulation of books to their reception and consumption by readers. Unlike earlier attempts to statistically quantify and study the contents of private libraries, the post-1970s scholarship on the history of reading has devoted attention not only to *what* books individuals read in the past but also to *how* they read those books. As Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier have noted, how contact with the printed word helped shape the way

readers construed meaning from the world around them has been a principal concern of scholars working in this field.¹ Carlo Ginzburg's 1976 reconstruction of the fantastic mental universe of a sixteenth century humble Italian miller, Menocchio, based on the "aggressive originality" of the way he read printed books is to date the most celebrated study in this genre.² Like

* I dedicate this essay to the memory of Jerry H. Bentley (1949-2012), great scholar, wonderful human being, and unwitting mentor, who passed away alas too young

I would like to thank Hourri Berberian for reading more drafts of this article than she or I would care for and Loretta Nasser for the many conversations on Joseph Emin's work. Vartan Matiossian and Jirair Libaridian helped in clarifying the meaning of a few passages in my translations below, and James Russell, Talar Chahinian, Mana Kia, Michael Fisher, William Gervase Clarence-Smith, Raymond Kévorkian, and Marc Mamiqonian provided valuable feedback. Needless to say, I alone bear responsibility for any remaining errors.

1 For the classic theoretical work on reading, see Michel de Certeau's chapter, "Reading as Poaching," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 165-176. For Chartier's prolific work, see most recently Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds. *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), and Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe from 14th and 18th Centuries* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994). For Darnton's equally prolific *oeuvre*, see Robert Darnton, "What is the History of Books?" and "First Steps toward a History of Reading," *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections on Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990) and idem., "Readers Respond to Rousseau," in *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes from Eighteenth Century France: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1982). Two excellent introductions to the topic are Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), and David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See also Alberto Manguel's helpful *A History of Reading* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

2 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*

the history of the book, though, the history of reading has for the most part fixed its attention almost exclusively on Europe and North America.

This essay is a preliminary attempt to fill this gap and bring the history of readers and reading in the non-European world back into focus. It does so by exploring the reader response of a semi-literate Armenian reader in Madras to an English-language memoir printed in London in 1792 by Joseph Emin, a Calcutta-based Armenian from Hamadan (Iran) who had traveled to London in 1751. The essay begins by first providing a brief analysis of Emin's book *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin an Armenian written in English by Himself*, focusing in particular on its author's Enlightenment-inspired views on the "Orient" and "Orientals" in general and on Armenia and Armenians in particular. It then looks at the "reader response" to Emin's book by examining a few submissions to the "letters to the editor" section of the 1795 issue of the first Armenian newspaper in the world, *Azdarar*, published in Madras from 1794 to 1796. By performing a close textual analysis of an eighteenth century Madras-based reader's experience of reading Emin's memoirs of his travels across Europe, Russia, Iran, and India, my study explores the possibility of using a history of reading in early modern Madras to shed light on the cultural history of the city's largely Iranian-Armenian community of merchants.

(Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 33. The original Italian edition was published in 1976.

An Indo-Armenian Memoir Written in English

First published in London in 1792, *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin the Armenian Written in English by Himself* is an autobiographical text in the third person authored by an Armenian from Calcutta.³ Its significance for eighteenth-century imperial history and East-West encounters has recently been noted by Michael Fisher, who has described Emin as the first Asian to "counterflow" from India to Britain and to write an account of his "adventures" in a European language mastered for the most part during his travels.⁴

3 The work exists in two editions, the original published privately in London in 1792 and a second 1918 edition with annotations and appendices of original correspondence by the author, published by the Calcutta Baptist Mission Press by Emin's great great granddaughter, Amy Aparcar. The latter text appears to be identical in content to the original edition but the free-flowing narrative of the 1792 edition is broken up into chapters and chronologically arranged. A partial and not entirely reliable Armenian translation was published in Beirut by H. Kashmanian as *Hovsep' Ēmini keank'n u arkatsnerē* (Beirut: Tparan Mshak, 1958). Most studies of Emin have relied either on the second 1918 edition or on the Armenian translation. My references below are to the 1792 edition. Joseph Ēmin. *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Ēmin, an Armenian. Written in English by Himself* (London, 1792).

4 Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travelers and Settlers to Britain, 1600-1857* (London: Permanent Black, 2004) and idem, "Asians in Britain: Negotiations of Identity through Self-Representation," in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 98. See also the excellent unpublished essay by Mana Kia, "Paradoxes of Circulation and Hybridity: Joseph Emin's Cultural Idioms of Self and Nation," (paper presented at the confer-

The Life and Adventures is a hybrid between a memoir and a wide-ranging early modern travelogue, recounting the “narrative of his transactions in life”⁵ of the Armenian protagonist born in Hamadan (Iran) in 1726 and raised in Calcutta, where he and his father had resettled in the 1740s like many Armenians fleeing political turmoil in Iran. The book is an introspective stock-taking of “the peculiar content of [a young man’s, Emin’s] mind,”⁶ who sees himself as an oriental subject, breaks with his father and the Armenian mercantile tradition that had sustained him, and at the age of twenty-five (when Armenian men were expected strictly to follow in the footsteps of their fathers), embarks on an East Indiaman for London. Arriving there in 1751 “without either a friend or money,” he begins on a lifelong quest to refashion himself into a distinct personality and individual. The book is in many ways a heroic account of a son’s rebellion against his “Asiatic” heritage as well as his father’s wishes for grooming him in commerce in India and narrates Emin’s travels across the Indian Ocean and into a new world (the “West,” more specifically the metropole of London) in search of a European/British Enlightenment education. Along the way, Emin is employed as a “lascar” on a transoceanic voyage scrubbing the deck of a ship, a menial porter and brick-layer in the streets of London, copyist for Edmund Burke’s manuscripts, friend and protégé of British notables, including his “queen of Sheba,” Lady Montagu, student at

ence “Armenians in the Indian Ocean World,” UCLA, 2007.

5 Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 2.

6 Ibid.

London’s prestigious Woolwich Military Academy, a soldier of fortune in the army of Frederick the Great of Prussia, and finally a frustrated liberator for his oppressed people. The purpose of his travels and indeed his destiny, Emin tells us while writing his autobiography, is to “study the disposition of Europeans,” to harness the “fruits of European knowledge,” that is, his education in the martial and liberal arts of the “industrious”⁷ Europeans, and to deploy them in the service of “liberating” what he deems to be his “oriental” countrymen. In this connection, having internalized the orientalist discourse popular in Europe at the time of the writing of his memoir, which is also the time of Europe’s unrivalled rise to power across most parts of Asia and Africa, Emin explains to his reader the purpose that has driven his entire life. It bears mentioning here that Emin’s orientalist logic should not be construed in a simplistic way but rather, as Mana Kia has pointed out, one that is nuanced and “interrupted by the partial affiliations with the people and cultures he represents.”⁸ Nonetheless, one should also not underestimate the extent to which Emin’s views of the world were powerfully shaped by orientalist tropes and ways of seeing the world. In his autobiography, Emin often mimics European representations of “Asiatics”

7 Emin, 6.

8 Kia, “Paradoxes of Circulation and Hybridity.” As Kia writes, “A common ground upon which this affiliation takes places is provided by Emin’s adoption of an ethical system that resonates with both British and Islamicate ideals of virtue. Emin destabilizes the radical opposition between East and West through these multivalent ethics and the affiliations with both Europeans and Asians that they enable.”

and Africans as childlike and incapable of possessing rationality and agency.

In regard to the Asiatics or Africans, they, when in prosperity, are generally intoxicated with their success, and rolling in all manner of vices, (he excepts his own harmless country,) and continue stumbling in their soft beds, the light is extinguished, and the house remains in total darkness; then the enemy comes with sword in hand cutting them off, and taking possession of their whole territory. When he thus turned his wandering thoughts on his nation, from their beginning to the time of this troublesome undertaking, he observed their *simplicity and weakness of mind*, as yet resembling children imposed on by the holy divines of their church; he resolved therefore to lay the foundations of his hope, and go over to England to see the admirable European System of wise and useful regulations.⁹

Indeed, as this revealing passage suggests, it is almost axiomatic for Emin that only Europe is capable of rationality and its corollary, "liberty." That is why Emin feels compelled to travel to Europe to reinvent himself as a new subject. In the concluding paragraph of his work discussing the "true meaning of liberty," Emin returns to this theme and confidently states that, "all of Asia, from the creation of the world to this moment, have been, and are blindly ignorant." Thus in a manner reminiscent of Hegel, he concludes his memoirs in the following way: "Since the Orientals know not what freedom is, the author could not have learned the meaning of it in Asia; but he went to improve himself in the knowledge of European manners, and happily found at last that liberty is the source of all the comforts of life."¹⁰

9 Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 14.

10 *Ibid.*, 640.

In a 640-page autobiographical narrative, the reader is transported through the different stages of Emin's coming into self-awareness as a distinct and new kind of *masculine* "Asiatic"¹¹ and Armenian on his quest to impart his Enlightenment education and European masculinity to his oriental and *feminized* people so as to make them worthy of attaining *and maintaining* an independent and sovereign state of their own, free of "oriental subjugation." The reader is informed of how upon arriving destitute in London, the brave Emin manages to meet and in some instances to befriend eminent representatives of British high society, including the likes of Edmund Burke, William Pitt (the Secretary of State), the Duke of Northumberland, as well as a bevy of "lady" patrons such as Lady Montagu and her "blue stocking circle." Having earned the respect of his British "protectors," Emin then embarks on a series of quixotic and fruitless campaigns into the mountains of Armenia (in one case disguised as a botanist)¹² dreaming of liberating his countrymen from Iranian and Ottoman domination. In the 1780s, thwarted in his objectives by the "inveterate enem[ies] of the Armenian nation," that is the clergy, the rebellious son finally returns to his community and family in Calcutta there to retire and write his

11 Emin consistently identifies himself and his countrymen as "us Asiatics." *Life and Adventures*, 6. My thoughts on Emin's obsession with masculinity are informed by Mana Kia's "Paradoxes of Circulation and Hybridity." Unlike Kia, though, I place more emphasis on Emin's association of commerce or trade with effeminacy, a strand of thinking that is inspired by some Enlightenment thinkers, and especially David Hume.

12 Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 129.

memoirs in English. While the outcome of his constant and bewildering travels around the world with the goal of enlightening and liberating his people may have failed, his memoirs enable Emin to construct, for his mostly British readers, a distinctly noble individuality born out of suffering and translation across cultures and lands that would seem ordinary for Britons, according to him, but quite remarkable in an Asian and Armenian. He explains:

The singularity of his sufferings would, in his opinion, scarce excite curiosity had he been an Englishmen...but considering that he is the only Armenian, out of several thousands, and in thousands of years [!], who has had an inexpressible thirst for improvement and liberty, it is natural that the world should wish to know the particulars of his life.¹³

Emin makes his singularity as an individual, a man, and an Armenian abundantly clear throughout his narration. Writing an autobiographical narration of a singular life is for him “a novelty never before attempted by any of his rich countrymen.”¹⁴ Addressing his compatriots, Emin notes in the passage immediately following this brazen assertion: “may they be inclined to receive the bright dawn of true knowledge in their gloomy minds, so as to become considerable in the eyes of every nation...”¹⁵ Such exaggerated claims about his place in Armenian history accompanied by orientalist stereotypification, even “infantilization” of them, as we shall see below, would not endear him to his contemporary compatriots even as they validated his standing in

the eyes of his European patrons and readers.

Much ink, both in Armenian and English, has been spilled on Emin’s seminal text. With few exceptions, however, most of the scholarship, especially that produced from within the field of Armenian Studies, has essentially reduced a rich and multilayered memoir, touching on complex issues ranging from orientalism, gender, and the development of British colonial policy in South Asia, to a narrow, almost caricatured focus on Emin’s place in what is erroneously referred to in Armenian historiography as the “Armenian National Liberation Movement of the Eighteenth Century.”¹⁶ As a result of their singular

16 For representative samples of such work, see Abgar R. Hovannisyan, *Iosif Emin* (Yerevan, 1989), M. Telunts, *Hay Azgayin-Azatagrakan Sharzhumë XVIII dari Yerkrord kësın ev iravak’aghak’akan midk’ë* [The Armenian National Liberation Movement during the Second Half of the XVIII Century and Legal-Political Thought] (Yerevan, 1995). For works in a similar vein, see also the incisive treatment in Gerard Libaridian, *The Ideology of Armenian Liberation: The Development of Armenian Political Thought Before the Revolutionary Movement (1639-1885)*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1987, 60-64, and more recently, Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Monarchs and Merchants to Commissars* (Columbia University Press, 2006), 115-120, and Vazken Ghougassian, “The Quest for Enlightenment and Liberation: The Case of the Armenian Community of India in the late eighteenth Century,” *Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999). While the above works demonstrate insight and sound scholarship, especially Hovannisyan’s Russian-language study, which I have consulted in an unofficial Armenian translation, they focus on Emin’s text not as a literary work pregnant with different possible readings, but as a source for the “Armenian liberation movement” and the diplomatic developments of the time and to a lesser extent as a possible conduit for En-

13 Ibid., 3.

14 Ibid., 11.

15 Ibid., 11.

obsession with subjecting Emin's multi-faceted work to what I have elsewhere called "the optic of the nation(-state),"¹⁷ scholars have failed to address many important questions that naturally arise from a careful reading of such a fecund work traversing and straddling both East and West. How does Emin's travelogue figure among other, more well-known, non-European authored first-person travelogues such as Olaudah Equiano's celebrated slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano: or, Gustavus Vassa, the African Written by Himself* (1814), which also relies upon the words "written by himself" in the title as a means of asserting a non-European's agency?¹⁸ What light can this work shed on eighteenth-century European and British representations of the Orient and on the gendered dimensions of such representations? How does Emin as a non-

European author shuttling between his beloved adopted homeland of Britain, and his alternate natal lands in West and South Asia negotiate and construct his distinctly individual identity as a unique Armenian in the course of writing his memoirs and travelogue?¹⁹ What roles do orientalist discourse and the Western genre of the autobiography play in this process of the author's identity construction? One might even ask, as does Fisher in his study, how Emin's text can serve to rescue "the multiplicity of voices in [eighteenth century] British public discourse," a matter that is often overlooked by scholars working under the influence of Edward Said's pioneering but one-dimensional study of *Orientalism* that has a tendency of silencing the voice or agency of the oriental "other" in part because of relying near-exclusively on the study of European texts.²⁰ All of these are questions worthy of exploration and will have to await a future study.

lightenment ideas reaching the "Madras group," though even here the optic used to interpret Emin's text is an Armenian-national one as opposed to a global or imperial history optic. For a brilliant exception of a piercing and multidimensional analysis of the period much of which based on a careful reading of primary sources, see Tadevos Avdalbekyan's Marxist-inspired studies from the 1920s published in *Hayagitakan Hetazodutyunner* [Armenological Researches] (Yerevan, 1969). Avdalbekyan does not specifically write about Emin, but his pioneering work provides a useful context for anyone interested in studying Emin. Essays by Fisher and Kia (see fn. 4) are an exception to this rule, as they examine Emin's work without subjecting it to the procrustean bed of the "Armenian National Liberation Movement."

17 Sebouh D. Aslanian, "From Autonomous to Interactive Histories: World History's Challenge to Armenian Studies," (2011), unpublished paper.

18 Michael H. Fisher, "Asians in Britain: Negotiations of Identity through Self-Representation," 98.

What I seek to do in the investigation that follows is to address another equally important question that has also suffered from scholarly neglect; namely, how some of Emin's contemporaries read his 640-page memoirs. Reading is a central theme in Emin's text. Emin, as he reminds his readers on more than one occasion in his memoirs, was troubled by how he would be read by posterity. He does not seem to have been preoccupied about his book's reception among his European readers and patrons who made up the over-

19 For an insightful preliminary study of this, see Mana Kia's "Paradoxes of Circulation and Hybridity," as well as Fisher, "Asians in Britain."

20 Ibid. See also Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*.

whelming majority of his “pre-paid” subscribers.²¹ Armenians, however, were a different matter. Would they read his work written in English, and if so would they understand the virtues of his hard-earned Enlightenment education and learn to put the European ideals he extolled to good use? It appears that while Emin had not written his memoirs primarily with Armenian readers in mind, he also did not entirely dismiss them as potential readers and converts. In fact, toward the conclusion of his autobiography, he alludes to his own, as usual “singular,” place in history as a conduit for European Enlightenment ideas and the “gloomy” minds of his “oriental” compatriots, who were like children, to be sure, but not entirely hopeless:

...and he flatters himself that the young Armenians, whose knowledge of the [English] language is but superficial, may easily read and understand a work so plainly written. Who knows but it may throw some light into their minds, if they communicate the substance of it to others, or translate it into their own language? In time to come it may be of service to them, and rouse them from their slumber, till they open their eyes by degrees, and understand the true meaning of liberty.²²

In retrospect, Emin was not “flattering himself” too much in predicting the future reading and positive reception of his book by Armenians. But for his prediction to come true the book had to wait for the dawn of a different age, an age of nations, nation-states, and nationalist ideologies. A second edition of the book was in fact issued in 1918 by

his great, great grand-daughter just as the age of nation-states and their ideologies of both emancipation for some and persecution or intolerance for others were emerging from the trenches of World War I. It is perhaps the work of the “cunning of reason” that the second and by far more well-known edition of his book saw the light of day the same year Emin’s lifelong quest of establishing an Armenian nation-state was realized.²³ Even his anticipated Armenian translation was carried out in 1958 in Beirut. More recently, his marble tombstone in the courtyard of Calcutta’s Holy Nazareth Armenian Church was renovated and transformed from an object of neglect to one of veneration and even as a national pilgrimage shrine for an official state visit, in December of 1995, by a delegation from Armenia headed by the new Republic’s first Head of State, Levon Ter Petrosian.²⁴ In short, Emin’s work is much read, celebrated, and talked and written about both in con-

²³ Armenia became an independent state and republic in 1918 but maintained its independence only for a brief period until 1920 when it was Sovietized and subsequently transformed into one of the Soviet Union’s fifteen socialist republics. In 1991, as the Soviet Union was breaking up, Armenia became among the first socialist republics to declare its independence.

²⁴ His tombstone in the courtyard of the Calcutta Armenian church reads: “This is the tombstone of Joseph Eminiantz son of Emin Agha born at Hamadan Iran in 1726 died in Calcutta on 2nd August 1809.” Next to it, we read the following words of praise added many years later when Emin’s reputation was already on the rise: “An outstanding patriot, statesman and soldier of fortune who worked ceaselessly for the freedom of Armenia (tombstone constructed by the Armenian Church Committee in 1975 on the occasion of the 250th birth anniversary.)” I thank Liz Chater for supplying me with this transcription as well as photo of Emin’s tombstone.

²¹ For a list of subscribers, see the list reproduced in Amy Apcar’s edition of Emin’s *Life and Adventures*, pp. xxiii-xxv.

²² Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 640.

temporary Armenia and the diaspora. He is held in high regard as a national icon. Many Armenian readers today consider him as an early torchbearer for their modern, nationalist ideals. Emin even has a street named after him in Yerevan.

Contemporary celebratory views aside, while he was still alive, Emin and the ideas and ideals he espoused were read and condemned by the elite members of the Armenian Church. In fact, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi (r. 1763-1780), whom Emin met during his travels and found to be the "cause of fastening more strongly the chains of slavery on the Armenians..."²⁵ actively persecuted Emin because he found his Enlightenment ideas threatening to the Catholicosate's position in Armenian society at large. While there is no way for us to know with certainty how Yerevantsi would have read and reacted to Emin's autobiography since he had long passed away by the time *The Life and Adventures* was published, the available evidence suggests that he probably would have categorically dismissed the book on the basis of the Enlightenment ideas it contained. We know this because in the 1770s the Catholicos infamously ordered the public burning of another book containing ideas uncannily similar to those of Emin's and most likely partially written by Emin himself. The work in question is the first Armenian book printed in Madras, *Nor tetrak vor kochi hordorak* (*New Pamphlet Called Exhortation*). Published in 1772 on the printing press of an Armenian merchant prince originally from New Julfa,

²⁵ Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 484.

the book was printed the same year Emin was visiting Madras to collaborate with the individuals behind the publication of *Nor tetrak*. Whatever the details of Emin's involvement in the authorship of *Nor tetrak* may have been, what is certain is that the elite hierarchy of the Armenian church led by Simeon Yerevantsi found its (and by extension, Emin's) ideas to be "diabolic" (*divashunch*), "impure" (*pghtsoyt*) and ultimately threatening to the Catholicosate. We shall return to this point below when we look at how an anonymous reader in Madras reacted to Emin's ideas after reading his book. Suffice to say for now that Yerevantsi was unwilling to brook any dissent from people like Emin and his collaborators in Madras whose new, Enlightenment conception of Armenian nationhood, one that included popular-cum-national sovereignty manifesting itself in a parliament of elected representatives, would signal the end of the Armenian Church's "divine right" to represent the nation. Such was the Catholicos's contempt for the ideas championed by the author of the *Life and Adventures* that he even had one of Emin's former associates and relatives, whose name was listed on the title page of *Nor tetrak* as its ostensible author, excommunicated from the Armenian Church for putting to print ideas that were uncannily similar to and most likely borrowed from Emin.²⁶

²⁶ The person in question is Movses Baghramian, the author of a political tract, *Nor Tetrak vor kochi Hordorak* (Madras, 1772), espousing republican ideals for a future state of Armenia. He was probably one of only a handful group of individuals to be excommunicated from the Armenian Church during the entire early modern period. See Sebouh Aslanian, *Dispersion History and the Poly-*

If we take the upper level of the diaspora merchant class, usually referred to as Khwajas and collectively known as the “merchant princes” or the “aristocracy of commerce”²⁷ along with the clerical hierarchy of the Catholicosate to represent the “elite” stratum of Armenian society at large, we can safely conclude that to the extent that they read Emin’s autobiography, they almost unanimously rejected its message. But how did “ordinary” urban Armenian readers, as in lower level merchants, known as *commenda* agents, and employees who worked for the khwaja “class” and whose level of literacy was not as high as that of the clergy and Khwajas, in the eighteenth century react to his book?²⁸ Did they even read him, and if so what impressions did Emin’s modern, Enlightenment-based

ideas leave on their minds? To ask these questions is to ask whether Emin’s text can enable us to explore, however tentatively, both a “reader response” among early modern Armenians and a history of Armenian “popular culture” of the period.²⁹

What has in recent decades come to be known as the “history of reading,” as many scholars from Carlo Ginzburg and Roger Chartier to Robert Darnton have noted, may hold the key to how scholars can explore in novel ways cultural history or what the third generation members of the Annales school have called “*l’histoire des mentalités*.”³⁰ In the context of eighteenth-century Armenian cultural history, we may provisionally state that to understand *how* eighteenth-century Armenians read books “is to understand how they thought.”³¹ Reading or the act of constructing meaning from printed texts is an integral stage to how individuals construct their subjectivity in relation to a larger world of signification around them. But how can we capture the complex workings of that elusive and mysterious activity known as reading when the readers in question are not

centric Nation: Simeon Yerevantsi’s Girk or Kochi Partavchar and its Role in the Armenian National “Revival” of the Eighteenth Century, (Venice: San Lazzaro, 2004).

27 For these terms, see Libaridian, “Ideology of Armenian Liberation,” 47, 51.

28 What indeed does “ordinary” mean in the context of early modern Armenian history? Scholars of European “popular culture” such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Peter Burke, and Robert Darnton, usually lump together peasants, artisans, and members of the working class in the category of “ordinary” and in some cases use these individuals’ level of literacy as a benchmark to determine their position in the social hierarchy. To the best of my knowledge, Armenian historiography does not appear to have even broached the topic of pre-modern Armenian popular culture, thus making it exceedingly difficult for others to demarcate what “ordinary” and “popular” might mean in Armenian history. For our purposes here, I include in the vague category of “ordinary individuals” and its corollary of “popular culture” members of the peasantry, artisans, and low level merchants engaged in long-distance trade known as *commenda* agents. Only the latter will concern us in this essay.

29 For an excellent and accessible survey of European popular culture for the period see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Ashgate; 3rd Revised edition, 2009). See also the classic work of Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975). With the exception of some Soviet Marxist scholarship of the early part of the twentieth century, much of which relied on a crude conception of “class,” there appear to be no works on Armenian “popular culture.”

30 See works cited in footnote 1.

31 My thoughts here are and below influenced by Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau,” 215-216.

around to be interviewed? Darnton noted the difficulties of such an endeavor over twenty-five years ago:

The task may seem impossible because we cannot look over the shoulders of eighteenth-century readers and question them as a modern psychologist can question a reader today. We can only ferret out whatever remains of their experience in libraries and archives, and even then we can rarely get beyond the retrospective testimony of a few great men about a few great books.³²

A history of reading in the early modern period has proven a formidable task even for historians of Europe who have privileged access to seemingly boundless reams of information and archival sources regarding the early modern period. Consider, for instance, the 50,000 pieces of correspondence left by readers, publishers, and authors stored at the archives of the Société Typographique de Neuchatel (STN), a clandestine Swiss publisher of books in prerevolutionary France, whose records Darnton has been systematically mining since 1963.³³ In the context of early modern Armenian history, there is nothing that even remotely approaches the STN; no archives of Armenian printing establishments or of publishers appear to have survived, leaving aside the important, but still inaccessible, papers of the Mkhitarist Congregation of erudite Armenian Catholic monks in Venice who were one of the leading publishers of Armenian books in the eighteenth century. To be sure, there are many inventories of the es-

tates of deceased Armenian merchants in India preserved in the India Office Records (IOR) at the British Library. Most of these estate inventories pertain to Armenian merchants residing in Calcutta and Madras during the late eighteenth century. A good many of them seem to have fairly detailed breakdowns of books, by title and genre, owned by the deceased that were later put up for auction. Since none of these papers appears to have been studied with the objective of writing a cultural history of Armenian merchants in the Indian Ocean world, we cannot and should not underestimate their value. Work on these inventory papers will probably enable future scholars to create serial lists of the titles and genre of books owned by early modern Armenian merchants in various locations around the Indian Ocean and in European cities, wherever such documentation exists, and thus shed important light on the *mentalité* of elite merchants who happened to own their own private libraries. However, while this macro historical approach can tell us *what* books merchants owned and therefore possibly read, they cannot tell us *how* they read or interpreted these books and how their contact with the printed book possibly shaped their mental universe. For instance, we know from the estate papers of one Armenian merchant from Calcutta that it was probably not uncommon to find copies of Emin's *Life and Adventures* in merchants' libraries.³⁴ Estate papers, how-

³² Darnton, "Readers Respond," 217.

³³ Darnton's great work, *The Business of the Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopedie*, (1979) represents a culmination of many years of reading the STN archives.

³⁴ The merchant in question is Owenjohn Petrusse, who passed away in 1797 leaving behind over a hundred books in his private library including one copy of Emin's *Life and Adventures*. For Owenjohn Petrusse's name in the list of pre-paid subscribers of Emin's book, see *Life and Adventures* (1918), xv. For

ever, do not indicate how owners of Emin's book actually read him and what they made of his Enlightenment-inspired ideas. Thus, given the scarcity of personal papers, diaries, letters, and so forth for early modern Armenian history, what type of sources from the period might allow us to "penetrate the minds" of ordinary Armenian readers and understand how they actively construed meaning from printed texts?³⁵

I do not pretend to have access to a mother lode of archives for eighteenth-century Armenian reading or an Armenian version of Darnton's *Société Typographique*. There is, however, one surprisingly overlooked source that promises to contain a rich vein of previously untapped information: the first Armenian monthly periodical in the world, entitled *Azdarar* (Intelligencer) and published in Madras in eighteen consecutive issues from 1794 to 1796. In what follows, I would like to present a small dossier of previously unpublished papers concerning Emin's book from what we might today easily refer to as the "letters to the editor" section of *Azdarar*. The dossier consists of three separate documents dating from the closing years of the eighteenth century. Needless to say, I do not pretend that these documents are a kind of Holy Grail for the history of early modern Armenian reading or that the views they represent are reflective of the "typical" Armenian or other reader from the

his inventory dated July 4, 1797, see British Library, L/AG/34/27/81. I thank Liz Chatter for supplying me her transcription of this valuable document.

35 For a discussion of the place of these general questions in the history of the book, see Darnton, "What is the history of Books?" and "First Steps toward a History of Reading."

eighteenth century, even if there were to be such a thing.

Azdarar and the Origins of the Armenian Periodical Press in Madras

Azdarar, the journal in which a "reader response" to Emin's now famous text appeared, had only a total of twenty-eight local and as many as three overseas subscribers in the Russian Empire when it was launched in September-October of 1794.³⁶ Its primary readership, that in one fashion or another had access to the contents of the paper,³⁷ consisted of about two hundred and eighty Armenian residents of Madras, the vast majority of whom were merchants from the once opulent commercial suburb of Isfahan known as New Julfa. To understand how this newspaper came about and what purpose it served for the tiny Armenian community of Madras, we need first to consider briefly the introduction of printing and print culture in Southern India and say a few remarks on the origins of Armenian printing there.

The history of the origins and development of printing in South Asia appears to have directly mirrored the spread of European mercantile and missionary networks following the arrival of the Portuguese in the region with Vasco

36 The first issue of *Azdarar* bears the Julfan month of "Tira" which falls between September 17 and October 16. For a calendric tables converting Julfan dates to Roman ones, see A. G. Abrahamyan, *Hayots Gir yev Grchut'yun* (Armenian letters and writing), (Yerevan: 1973), 118-119.

37 Although the number of subscribers was only twenty-nine, Armenian readers in Madras could have borrowed copies of *Azdarar* from friends who were paying subscribers or could have accessed the paper's contents by listening to others read the paper.

Da Gama. Portuguese Jesuits in Goa set up the first printing press in the subcontinent in 1556.³⁸ The same missionary connection is evident on the Coromandel Coast in the East, where Lutheran missionaries established a press in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in 1711.³⁹ In the course of the next twenty years, with the support of the Danish Crown and later with the London-based Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), the Lutherans managed to print more than a hundred books including the first ever Tamil translation of the Bible as well as works in German, Dutch, Latin, and Portuguese.⁴⁰ To support the work of Jesuit missionaries that had been interrupted with the arrival of Protestant missionaries and the Dutch and English East India Companies, the French imported a printing press to their settlement of Pondicherry in the mid-eighteenth century. This press served the basis for printing in British India when Sir Eyre Coote, the British admiral leading the fleet that conquered Pondicherry in 1761, towards the end of the Seven Years War, confiscated it as booty from the governor's palace and, along with some types and a French printer, transported it to Madras. The press was set up at the Vepery suburb of

Fort Saint George, Madras, and given to the SPCK missionaries, who used it to print English as well as Tamil books, including a new translation of the New Testament in 1772. That same year, Shahamir Shahamirian, a wealthy Armenian merchant residing in Madras but originally from the Isfahan suburb of New Julfa, established an Armenian press in the compound of the city's Armenian church of Saint Mary.⁴¹ The Shahamirian press, published the first of its nine books in 1772, the above-mentioned *Nor tetrak vor kochi hordorak* condemned by Emin's archrival the Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi, and continued to operate until 1789. Its management appears to have been transferred during that same year to Harut'iwn Kahana Shmavonian, an Armenian recluse, deacon, and one-time member of an Iranian Sufi brotherhood in Shiraz, who had arrived in Madras in 1784, fleeing misfortune in his native Iran.⁴² By the time Shmavonian had set up his press, the three British presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras had already over twenty English-language newspapers between them, the majority being in Calcutta. Madras alone had at least two newspa-

38 See J.B. Primrose, "The First Press in India and its Printers," *The Library*, 20/3, (1939): 241-265. For a general introduction, see Kaka Anant Priolkar, *Printing press in India, its beginnings and early development, being a quatercentenary commemoration study of the advent of printing in India in 1556* (1958).

39 Priolkar, *Printing press in India*, and Shama B. Kesavan, *History of printing and publishing in India: A story of cultural reawakening* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1984)

40 Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), 47.

41 The press was run under the name of Shahamir Shahamirian's son, Hakob, whose private tutor in Armenian was Movses Baghramian, a relative and erstwhile collaborator of Joseph Emin. For background on the press, see Hakob Irazek, *Patmut'iwn hndkahay tba-grut'ean* [History of Indo-Armenian printing] (Beirut: 1986), 47-95.

42 On Shmavonian, see the discussion in Irazek, *Patmut'iwn Hndkahay*, 96-141, and Mesrovb Setiants [Seth], "Hariwrameak mē" [A Centennial] in Teodik, *Amenun Taretsoyts*, (1925): 315-317; idem, "Ter Harut'iwn Shmavonian, himnadir hay hraparakagrut'ean," [Ter Harut'iwn Shmavonian, Founder of Armenian popular press], *Handes Amsorea* (Vienna: No. 5-6, 1923) 237-241.

pers, the *Madras Courier*, established in 1785, and the *Hircarrah* [The Messenger] of 1793-1794. In addition to serving essentially as “gossip column[s] for [Madras’s] European community,”⁴³ both English-language weeklies carried official government notices, advertisements, essays on morals, news clippings from various parts of Europe, as well as information on trade vital to Madras’s merchant community.

In October of 1794, at around the same time that the English weekly *Hircarrah* was going out of business, the newly arrived Shmavonian set his sights on printing an Armenian-language newspaper on his newly acquired press. Entitled *Azdarar* or *Intelligencer*, the new Armenian newspaper would be a monthly modeled on the preexisting English newspapers in the city. In the “Preface” to the first issue of *Azdarar* that appeared in October of 1794, Shmavonian refers to “the well-organized Englishmen” who he writes had begun “printing a pamphlet a month ago” containing “essays on the lives of famous men from among their nation,” some historical works, along with “the notable writings of some [writers belonging to their nation].”⁴⁴ In addition to the essays on morals meant to encourage public civility among readers, as well as news clippings about the latest developments in Europe, what struck the Armenian editor most appears to have been the business news that was publicly conveyed in European papers of the time. According to Shmavonian, the founders of Madras’s English newspapers, with the intention of making the work of their public “pleas-

ing,” “print, at the conclusion of their pamphlet, the prices of various commodities for sale in this place [i.e., Madras] and the timetable for arriving and departing ships.”⁴⁵ It is difficult to tell whether the newspaper or pamphlet alluded to by Shmavonian was the *Hircarrah* or the *Madras Courier* (both of which, unlike *Azdarar*, were weeklies of five to six pages in length).⁴⁶ What is beyond doubt is the fact that English-language newspapers in India and their print culture would serve as the prototype of the first Armenian newspaper in the world. Shmavonian explains,

Taking this pamphlet [an unspecified English newspaper] as an example to me, I determined first to print here some words of counsel, either translated from [the works of] other nations (with which those who share with me the joy of this project and the youth of this place have promised to help) and or some tomes lifted from the writings of our own [nation]. I have also striven to acquire news from the Armenian homeland [i tanē Hayots’] and from Persia, such news that you may not have heard, and such news from gazettes printed in various places that is necessary to retain and be pleasing to many (leaving aside the detailed news accounts in the same gazettes which are never necessary, or some of which you would have previously heard about before the appearance of this pamphlet, the repeated reading of which might not seem pleasing to you, thus rendering the work of the writers in vain). Also as a valuable service, I will print the prices of commodities sold daily, as this will be helpful to the merchants. I will also print a calendar for each forthcoming month, indicating the religious hol-

⁴³ Ibid., 77.

⁴⁴ *Azdarar*, (Tira, 1794), 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ On the *Courier*, see H. D. Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640-1800* (London: Indian Records Series, 1913) vol. IV, 440-453.

idays, the periods of the lunar cycle, the days of fasting, the festival days of the English as well as of other nations, particularly placing all this before you, and if possible an account of all incoming and outgoing ships.⁴⁷

Azdarar's main mission was to provide a public sphere for Madras's overwhelmingly Julfan mercantile community. As the passage above demonstrates, it sought to do this by offering community members information about the prices of various commodities, timetables of arriving and departing ships in the city's bustling port, reporting on news concerning political and economic developments in India, Manila, Canton (China), Iran, the Caucasus, the Russian Empire, and, of course, Europe. Interestingly, the "hottest" international news covered in its pages concerned the French Revolution as it was rapidly unfolding in Europe during the years *Azdarar* was published.⁴⁸ Also, like the English gazettes that were beginning to appear in Madras and Calcutta to the north, *Azdarar* devoted space for the publication, in serial form, of various literary and historical works written or translated either by local literati in Madras or their counterparts in Julfa or Saint Petersburg in the Russian Empire, where the journal maintained several overseas "correspondents."

Most important perhaps, the periodical contained a specially designated segment where Madras's less literate Armenian merchants could publish

their own writings, ranging from their views on Robespierre, translations into Armenian of European works, to "advertisements" concerning the commodities they wished to sell to the public, from various grades of raw silk and Indian textiles to oil painting portraits and ceramic statues of the leading lights of the French revolution. Occasionally, *Azdarar* served as a "diasporic public sphere" for its subscribers or those who may not have afforded a hefty annual subscription fee of twelve Madras *hoons*, but acquired copies that were passed around from other subscribers or heard the paper read out loud in private gatherings or coffeehouses.⁴⁹ In fact, as the brilliant Soviet Armenian historian, Tadevos Avdalbekyan, claimed long ago, *Azdarar's* "journalists" engaged in the first-ever public political debate in Armenian history, one that directly concerned the relevance of the French Revolution and its ideals for the Armenians.⁵⁰ They did so because the journal was specifically designed to attract public contention and to foster what Jürgen Habermas, writing about the notion of the "public sphere," termed "rational public debate." To solicit literary and, as we shall see, not so literary contributions to the journal and, therefore, to promote an atmosphere of public engagement in debate and discussion, Shmavonian as editor encouraged local community members to submit their "com-

47 *Azdarar* (Tira, 1794), 4.

48 Robespierre, Mirabeau, Rousseau, Thermidor, are all mentioned and at times heatedly debated in *Azdarar's* pages. See Tadevos Avdalbekyan, "Fransakan Mets Heghapokhut'yunn u Zhamanakakits Hayerĕ," [The great French revolution and its Armenian contemporaries], *Hayagitakan Hetazotut'yunner*.

49 We know next to nothing about how and where *Azdarar* was read. For the annual subscription rate, see Tadevos Avdalbekyan, "Hay Andranik Parperakanĕ u nra Khmbagirĕ," [The first Armenian periodical and its editor] *Hayagitakan Hetazotut'yunner*, (Yerevan: 1969), 247

50 *Ibid.*, 250, and idem, "Fransakan Mets Heghapokhut'yunn u Zhamanakakits Hayerĕ," 237.

munications” by having them dropped off in a box or chest (*snduk*) kept at the foot of the bell tower in the courtyard of Madras’s Saint Mary’s Armenian Church.⁵¹ In the second issue of the monthly, *Azdarar’s* editor explains how his periodical went about soliciting contributions from ordinary members of Madras’s predominantly Julfan mercantile community:

We have established an enclosed chest and placed it at the foot of the bell tower of our holy church [of Saint Mary’s]. The wooden board that covers the chest has an opening much like a money- or treasure-chest. And we have appointed [a board of] editors⁵² [to the journal], so that if there are some [readers among you] who have written submissions and wish to have them printed in *Azdarar* and do not desire to have your identities revealed or want to bring the submissions incognito yourselves or have someone else bring them to be dropped inside the box, you may do so. We will open the box every day and whatever we find in it we will hastily send to the appointed editors, who upon finding whatever among the submissions wor-

thy shall send them to the printer for them to be printed. For this reason, we ask the public that whoever has news and so on that he wishes to have printed should either send it to the printer or have it thrown into the chest. And I hope the public will understand that the editors reserve the right to refuse publication to any written submission that happens to be unsuitable, unlawful, or impolite.⁵³

It is thanks to this little drop box at the foot of the bell tower of Saint Mary’s church that we are afforded a glimpse into the mental world of an ordinary Armenian reader in Madras.

51 See Irazek, *Patmut’iwn Hndkahay Tbagrut’ean*, 448.

52 In addition to Harut’iwn Shmavonian’s role as editor in chief and founder, the periodical also had several Madras-based Armenians working as editors on an editorial board consisting of Shmavonian himself, as well as Madras-based individuals who worked in his printing press, including Ter Tateos kahana Soginian and a few others. For a general discussion, see Artashes Karinyan, *Aknarkner Hay Parperakan Mamuli Pat’mutyun*, [Surveys of the history of the Armenian periodical press] vol. 1 (Yerevan: Haykakan SSR GA Hratarakchut’yun, 1956), 203. For the use of the term *verakatsuk* to mean board of editors, see also Irazek, *Hndkahayots Tbagrut’iwn*, 444, and Leo (Arakel Babakhanian), “Haykakan Tbagrut’yun” [Armenian printing] vol. 2 in *Yerkeri Zhoghovatsu* [Collected Works] vol. 5, (Yerevan: Hayastan Hratarakchut’yun, 1986), 568.

53 *Azdarar*, month of Dama, No. 2 (October-November), 76. I have relied on the facsimile edition *Azdarar* published in Lisbon in 1970 by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. I would like to thank my colleague Merujan Karapetyan for placing a full transcription of *Azdarar’s* first volume at my disposal after large parts of this essay were already written. The transcription below is from the transcribed copy, but all other transcriptions and translations are my own. “Սնդուկ մի փակեցեալ հաստատեցաք եւ եղաք ՚ի զանգակատան սրբոյ եկեղեցւոյն մերոյ որոյ վերարկու տախտակն ցելեալ է որպէս զանձանակիւ եւ ՚ի վերայ սոյն սնդկիս կարգեցաք նաեւ զվերակացոս, զի եթէ ունիցին ոմանք գրուածք ինչ եւ կամիցին տպել զայն ՚ի յԱզդարարին եւ ոչ կամիցին զի յայտնեացի յումնէ իցէ գրեցեալն կամ ինքեանք թագուստ բերեալ եւ կամ ձեռամբ այլ ունեք առաքեցեն արկանել ՚ի սնդուկն այն մեք բանալոց ենք զսնդուկն ամենայն ատոր եւ զոր ինչ գտանիցենք անդ գրեցեալք յողարկելոց ենք վաղվաղակի առ ՚ի վեր կարգեցեալք վերակացոս որպէս զի նոքա վերահասու լեալ գրուածոցն զոր ինչ ՚ի նոցանէ հարմար վարկցեն առաքեցեն ՚ի տպարանն զի տպեցուք, որոյ վասն խնդրենք ՚ի հասարակութենէ զի ով ոք ունիցի որոք յորք եւ այլն որոյ տպելն ցանկասցի կամ առաքեցէ ՚ի տպարանն, եւ կամ արկցէ ՚ի սնդուկն, նաեւ յուսամ արդունատրիլ թողութեան հասարակութեան զի եթէ իցէ ՚ի գրեցեալն բան անհարմար եւ կամ արտաքոյ օրինաց եւ քաղաքավարութեան որք ոչ գտցեն զհաւանութիւն վերակացուսն զանցենք առնելոց զայնպիսիս տպելոյ.”

Reading a Reader's Response to Emin

The first mention of Joseph Emin's book makes its historic debut in the December/January edition of the monthly. It is a brief announcement, tucked away toward the end of that issue. The author is none other than the journal's founding editor, Shmavonian, who introduces Emin's recently published book to his readers and reminds them of Emin's much-publicized departure for the "mountains of Armenia" and his subsequent visit, in 1772, to Madras, the memory of which must have been fresh in people's minds. Surprisingly, Shmavonian says very little regarding the book's actual contents, save that he has not had the time to examine it and promises to inform the public on a later occasion. As we shall see below, the few passing remarks Shmavonian does make on Emin's work indicate his complete unfamiliarity with the book, which he confidently but mistakenly anticipates to be a "history of our nation and about the victories of our kings that also expresses its gratitude to the present protectors of our forlorn nation."⁵⁴ Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. It is hard to tell whether Shmavonian was all too familiar with Emin's controversial book and disliked it so much that he chose to put sarcasm to good use or simply carried out his responsibilities as an editor by informing the public of the book's full title, author, place of publication, and quick summary of its contents, which turns out to be entirely incorrect. It seems that the latter possibility is more tempting, since only a few pages after his "notice," in the "letters to the editor" section and bearing

the date January 4, 1795, there appears a short opinion piece about Emin's book that opens with the following strange anecdote:

Yesterday evening [yerek yaraku] I went to visit a friend, and instead of finding him in his customary happy and glad disposition, I saw him sitting there reading a book and weeping. When I kindly inquired about his welfare, he wiped his tears and gave me quite an evasive [zantsarakan] response and resumed his reading. Again, I asked him kindly as to why he was weeping, and he did not answer. And after inquiring numerous times, he struck the book [with his hand] and said: "I am weeping on account of the unwise deeds [araroghutiun] of our nation." I pointed out to him that that book is written in a European language [frankevara]; what could it possibly have to do with our nation?

Three things soon become clear from this curious tale. First, the unidentified European-language book the "friend" was pounding on with his fist with outrage is none other than Joseph Emin's memoirs, a fact that our writer does not seem to comprehend. Second, the book had provoked the ire of the reader in question because of Emin's narcissistic self-image at the expense of his Armenian countrymen, as well as because of what we would call "washing dirty laundry in public":

the book was written in English by a certain Armenian [min khayi grats'], who instead of sowing his seeds on his own soil and counseling his own nation directly, recounts the bad reputation of his nation, [relating] perhaps all the wickedness that he had come across throughout his travels, according to his own fancy and in the language of others. And in the same imprudent manner, he has thought by declaring, in a foreign tongue, his nation and his parents ignorant and only himself as intel-

⁵⁴ *Azdarar* (Aram, 1794), 182.

ligent, he may become worthy of respect.

Third, perhaps the most fundamental objection this reader has to the *Life and Adventures* is the book's call for an armed uprising against foreign rule and the "establishment of an [independent] state," which this anonymous reader finds "naïve," "infantile," [mankamtatsakan] and "ridiculous" [tsitsagheli]. This last point seems to be the most important aspect of the way the reader in question appears to have read Emin's work. Although we do not possess direct testimony from him about his experience of reading Emin, it is more than probable that our reader's experience reflects the larger rejection of Emin's Enlightenment conception of Armenian nationhood by both the upper levels of the Armenian Church such as Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi as well as some members of the merchant class including the ones Emin chastises in his memoirs.

The author of this submission to *Azdarar* is a semi-literate local Armenian merchant, who fails to name either Emin or the title of his book. In fact he does not seem to have the faintest idea that his friend's agitations and convulsions were a direct result of reading Joseph Emin's book:

And I, a contributor [*banakatar*] of the *Azdarar* of the Armenians, seeing [my friend's] agitated look [kharnats demk] and hearing his affronted voice, forgot to ask him any more questions. I have studied what he said very clearly, as I have written above, but until now I do not at all understand who has written the book and why it was written. I will ask him about this after he calms down and regains his composure. [hed handart gkhartsanem].

To help straighten matters and so as not to confuse the journal's overseas subscribers, it is likely that Shmavonian decided to run his initial brief notice on Emin's *Life and Adventures* only after he and his team of co-editors (*verakatsuk*) had decided to print the submission on Emin's book they had come across while sorting through the various papers that had found their way to the bottom of that specially designated chest in the courtyard of the church.

The author of the short submission to whom I alluded above initially signs his letter with the initials A.B. As with other letters to the editor, the language of A.B.'s modest contribution to the Armenian monthly is not the literary language (*grabar*) used by elite members of Armenian society, that is the clergy, the literati, and some members of the wealthy mercantile class, but the vulgate and more specifically the Armenian dialect of New Julfa extensively used by Julfan merchants throughout their settlements in Europe, India, and the Indian Ocean. But who exactly was A.B. and what kind of an education did he have? Regretfully, we know next to nothing about his background, not even his real name, exact profession, age, or whether he could read books in English. Various clues he provides in his contribution, however, allow us to reconstruct, in part, his identity. We may surmise from his writing that he is a Julfan resident of Madras, unable to write in the literary language (*grabar*), and scarcely literate enough to read literary texts. That is why he asks the editor of the journal, with some measure of embarrassment, to "submit [his contribution] to the board of editors [verakatsuatsn] for correction so that it may be written in the literary lan-

guage.” “Otherwise,” he notes, “print it as it stands so that the public [hasarakut’iwnn] will become aware as to whose writing it is and will forgive me for writing in the vernacular.”⁵⁵ We also know that A.B. was most likely a subscriber and avid reader of *Azdarar*, since he confesses to “having read *Azdarar* for quite some time,”⁵⁶ unless, of course, he had access to *Azdarar* through borrowing copies from other subscribers. Moreover, as we shall see below, he seems to have an irrepressible urge to make use of the novel forum created by the newspaper or monthly to become a public persona, and obviously has a sense of humor and relishes telling a good tale. After apologizing for being unlettered and unable to write in the literary language, A. B. indicates in his first submission that he is no master grammarian or intellectual. In fact, he is barely schooled. “In my entire life,” he confesses, “I have not read anything besides one Psalter. And this writing is not even entirely my own creation; otherwise I too would be astonished at [the level of] my education.”⁵⁷ Given that Psalters were widely used as textbooks in Armenian elementary schools for the purpose of promoting literacy in the Armenian language, we can deduce from this admission that A.B. had indeed attended primary school in his younger days, and most likely matriculated from a business school in New Julfa where low-level merchants like him, usually known as *commenda* agents, were trained in business correspondence, the keeping of double-entry accounting ledgers, and

mathematics – skills that were indispensable for success in the trading world of the Julfans.⁵⁸

Some brief remarks here about printing and its impact on early modern Armenians may be useful in helping us to understand more fully A.B.’s background. By the time A.B. was penning his anonymous contribution to *Azdarar*, approximately 1,300 separate titles (or roughly 650,000 copies of books) had been printed in Armenian since Hakob Meghapart’s first booklet saw the light of day in Venice in 1512.⁵⁹ Annales historians and Elizabeth Eisenstein in particular have long expounded on the power of this novel technology in introducing “new forms of sociability” in the early modern period. Writing about the “communications revolution” ushered in by print culture, Eisenstein explains how the typographic era weakened local community ties and “changed

58 For the wide use of Psalters as textbooks, see Raymond Kévorkian, “Livres imprimé et culture écrite dans l’Arménie des XVI et XVII siècles,” *Revue des études arméniennes* (1982), 353. The use of Psalters for literacy education explains why such works had print runs into the thousands. The business school in New Julfa was run by a master named Constant of Julfa and seems to have been located in the compound of Julfa’s All Savior Monastery. See Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 136-137.

59 The figure of 1,300 titles is from a standard bibliographic catalogue of colophons. See Ninel Voskanyan, K’narik Korkotyan, and Ant’aram Savalyan, eds. 1988. *Hay Girk’ë, 1512–1800 Tvakannerin: Hay Hnatip Grk’i Matenagitu’yunë* [The Armenian Book, in the years 1512-1800: A Bibliography of Old Printed Armenian Books]. (Yerevan: Al. Myasnikyani Anvan HSSH Petakan Gradaran, 1988). The figure of 650,000 books is my own and is based on an average print run of 500 copies per title.

55 *Azdarar* (Aram, 1794), 185.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

the sense of what it meant to participate in public affairs.”⁶⁰

The wide distribution of identical bits of information provided an impersonal link between people who were unknown to each other...Even while communal solidarity was diminished⁶¹, vicarious participation in more distant events was also enhanced; and even while local ties were loosened, links to larger collective units were being forged. Printed materials encouraged silent adherence to causes whose advocates could not be found in any one parish and who addressed an invisible public from afar. New forms of group identity began to compete with an older, more localized nexus of loyalties. Urban populations were not only pulled apart, they were also linked in new ways by

the more impersonal channels of communication.⁶²

As his submission to *Azdarar* indicates, A.B. was very much aware of this fact. Having something published in the pages of Madras's Armenian periodical would place his writing in the public domain or the incipient diasporic “republic of letters” that Armenian printers were helping to usher in by the late eighteenth century; he was not just writing a dry business letter to one of his associates (as merchants always did when they corresponded with each other) but was on the cusp of stepping into the public limelight with a clever story all his own.⁶³ This is why he could not contain his eagerness of “fulfilling my desire to make a contribution,” even if it meant recounting what he self-effacingly characterizes as “a common occurrence” involving his encounter with an unnamed friend. He would publish something in *Azdarar* for the entire public to read even if he had to betray his friend by divulging in public what he had been told in confidence regarding Emin's newly published book. As we shall see, in his letter to *Azdarar*, A.B. does not seem to realize that his friend's diatribe and anguish, provoked by a “book written in a European language,” was in fact directed at Emin's *Life and Adventures*.

Let us bear in mind for now that the “reader response” conveyed in A.B.'s letter below is thus not, strictly speaking, his own but someone else's. However, does this diminish its value as a hard to come by “entry point” into the larger issue of how ordinary Arme-

60 Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 95.

61 The notion that printing probably contributed to the weakening of local, communal forms of solidarity rests on the assumption that it accelerated the practice of “silent reading” and promoted what Roger Chartier calls the “privatization of reading” that had already been around during the manuscript age. However, while “silent reading opened new horizons for those who [had] mastered it,” we should bear in mind that as late as the eighteenth and probably into the nineteenth century a large number of “ordinary” people who were illiterate or semiliterate had access to the printed word primarily through communal reading, or the “oralizing” of texts for a public of listeners. See Chartier, “The Practical Impact of Writing,” in *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance* (volume 3) ed., Roger Chartier (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 125. For “oralization” of texts in the early modern period, see Chartier, “Reading Matter and ‘Popular’ Reading: From the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,” in Cavallo and Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West*, 276-277. See also Manguel, *A History of Reading*, 41-55.

62 Ibid., pp. 95-96.

63 For the art of mercantile correspondence, see chapter five of Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean*.

nians in late eighteenth-century Madras might have reacted to the Enlightenment views articulated in Emin's autobiographical work? Hardly. Still we should be cautious before rushing to sweeping conclusions based on a few scraps of writing by a single individual. It is not clear whether the negative reaction, not to mention repugnance, towards Emin's book by A.B.'s anonymous friend was widely if at all shared by other members of the community. Emin's intense hatred of Armenian priests (the "inveterate enem[ies] of the Armenian nation" and the "sole ruin of Armenian sovereignty"⁶⁴) and the Church's equally intense suspicion and persecution of Emin must have been widely known in India even before the publication of his book; after all, it was only in the mid-1770s that Emin's last attempt to raise funds in Madras for a final military expedition into the "mountains of Armenia" was thwarted by a lying, trickster priest from Jerusalem named Hovhannes who persuaded Madras's merchants who had pledged to help Emin with money to give their money instead to the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. All this must have been in the air before Emin's book was even off the press in London. Perhaps more damaging for Emin was his contempt for Armenian merchants and especially for Julfans whose addiction to trade and commerce he also blamed for the "effeminate" manners of his compatriots, who instead of being "masculine" and "martial," like the Europeans and some Asians, were only interested in accumulating more wealth and living in the lap of luxury. The fact that Emin was probably the

only Armenian of his period to cheer on in the pages of his book as Nadir Shah Afshar, who assumed power in post-Safavid Iran in 1736, plundered and destroyed the Armenian suburb of Isfahan in 1747 was not lost on the merchant population of Madras, most of whom were from New Julfa and had, in fact, left their homeland in Iran to live in India as a result of Nadir Shah's looting of Julfa and Isfahan. Addressing Julfans in particular, Emin had also written: "their mean Spirits are only fit, by indefatigable industry, to heap up riches, to give them away to priests in laps-full, and to be plundered by the Turks or Persians!"⁶⁵ As we shall see, such views and outright hostility and contempt for Armenian merchants would make it highly improbable for the ideas contained in *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin* to find wide appeal among many of Emin's contemporary Armenian readers, as they evidently did for his high society patrons in Britain.⁶⁶

In a subsequent issue of *Azdarar*, A.B. makes a second unexpected appearance. Writing under the different pen name of Ch.Z.Ch., he submits yet another letter to *Azdarar's* editorial team. As in the previous letter, this one too is about his anonymous friend's reaction to reading Joseph Emin's memoirs:

There is a proverb that says that when an old woman who had not attended church [for a long time] decided to attend one day, she got bit on the foot by

⁶⁴ Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 587, 588.

⁶⁵ Emin, *Life and Adventures*, 567.

⁶⁶ For the persecutions Emin suffered from the hands of the Armenian Church hierarchy and Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi in particular, see Sebouh Aslanian, *Dispersion History and the Polycentric Nation*.

a dog. Now something similar has happened to me. As I have mentioned before, I had desired without success for a long time to write something for *Azdarar*. When I [finally] wrote something, I was met with the following misfortune. On the morning of epiphany, I went to offer my wishes to my friend and saw him seated reading *Azdarar*. Upon seeing me, he gave me a [strange?] look and I think had it not been such a solemn day, he would have berated me at length. From a distance he seemed angry with me. In any case, I went up to him to wish him a happy epiphany and in return he thanked me. I sat down, and for about five minutes he sat there in silence. Then he asked if I had read [the last issue] of *Azdarar* and I said no. He passed the copy of *Azdarar* he was holding to me and told me to read while he listened. Since it occurred to me that he was somewhat hurt by me, it suddenly dawned on me that it was all on account of what I had written. Try as I did to pretend that I had no idea of what was going on, the racing of my heartbeat, the loss of color on my face, and the ease with which I was reading the text (since it was what I had written, otherwise I read with great difficulty what others have written) betrayed what I was trying to conceal. When I reached the point in the text where it was written "I beg of you if you have time to submit this to the editorial team so that they may correct my writing and render into the literary language," my friend asked for me to return his copy of *Azdarar*, saying it is enough, do not read anymore and on the spot began to say: "Could it be that I (or the editor in chief of *Azdarar*) could not recognize who Mister A. B. was or that you could have been unaware that I too know how to write, and more pleasantly than you, to boot? Why then did you take what I had told you and announced it like this? And even though you used your brain in not signing your name on the submission, and that I do not think anyone has realized that I am the person you alluded to, I

still think that what you have done is imprudent.

It appears that his friend had read the issue of *Azdarar* containing A.B.'s submission and was incensed upon coming across his private conversation, including an account of his weeping over Emin's book, in its pages for the whole public to read. After being severely rebuked by his friend, A.B./Ch.Z. Ch. publicly apologizes to him and attempts to rectify his friend's image by submitting yet another piece. Now we are told that instead of weeping over Emin's book, his friend had meant to communicate to A.B. that the only proper reaction to such an insulting work as Emin's was cold indifference. His friend, we are informed, resorted to a wise Persian saying to explain his reaction to reading Emin: "*Jughabi ablahun khumashi*" or the best response to idiots is silence.

Conclusion

Over the last few decades, Euro-american scholarship on the "history of reading" has suggested that the study of what books people read and, more important, *how* they read them may help historians understand the ways in which ordinary individuals in the early modern period thought about themselves and the world around them. For the most part, most scholars agree that our knowledge of individuals' reading habits in the past can provide us with a fairly reliable gauge for the thoughts they carried in their heads. However, as historians of reading have also demonstrated, for this field of inquiry to succeed it is imperative for scholars to have access to detailed breakdowns of private libraries (most commonly through postmortem inventories of es-

tates listing the books the deceased once owned) as well as rich documentation involving reader response on how individual readers interpreted and read books (usually in the form of *memoirs*, book reviews, or diaries). While such documentation is not always easily accessible for early modern Europe or America where documents have been well preserved, it is nonetheless available for the historian interested in investigating the history of reading in the Euroamerican world. For societies, such as the Armenian one, beyond the margins of the Euroamerican world, however, direct or indirect evidence of reader response has been extremely hard to come by. This in part, helps explain why the history of reading has been a neglected topic in Armenian historiography or the historiography of the non-European world in general.

This essay has been an exploratory foray into the history of reading for early modern Armenians in Madras. It has sought to make two main contributions to scholarship: first, to open up the history of reading as a field of inquiry for early modern Armenian history, and second, to contribute to the current efforts to “globalize” the history of reading as well as the history of the book, expanding their use beyond the Euroamerican world where the history of reading has for the most part been confined. As an exploratory probe into the larger question of how ordinary early modern Armenians in Madras and possibly elsewhere might have thought about ideas associated with the Enlightenment, the essay has focused on a handful of documents that contain indirect evidence of how an anonymous

reader in Madras read and responded to Joseph Emin’s book.

Although the sources on which this essay relies to gauge reader response to Emin’s autobiography are limited, a preliminary study of at least one reader response from the period enables us to reach several conclusions. First, to the extent that Emin’s contemporary Armenians read his memoirs, they appear to have rejected his Enlightenment project of inventing a modern notion of nationhood for the Armenians. Our textual analysis of the evidence also suggests that the reaction of this one anonymous reader was very similar to Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi’s reactionary response to the ideas of the Shahamirian group in the 1770s that were themselves almost identical to the ideas contained in Emin’s autobiographical text. To what extent the reader response we examined reflected the views of other Armenians in Madras is a matter that cannot yet be resolved given the paucity of documentation.

Needless to say, the “history of reading” as it applies to early modern Armenians is at its infancy and needs further work by future scholars before we are in a position to make any more conclusive interpretations about the reception of Emin’s book and the ideas it contained by his contemporary Armenians. One hopes that more direct evidence from the early modern period containing the “reader response” of ordinary Armenian readers will be unearthed. Such evidence promises to help us more clearly understand what the “Enlightenment” and its ideals might have meant to ordinary Armenians in Madras and elsewhere in India.

Appendix

Document 1

The First Public Notice of the Publication of Emin's Memoirs

Azdarar, December/January, 1794/1795

“We consider it necessary to notify the public of our coming across a book in the English language printed in London in 1792 and bearing the following title: *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian*. Since the lack of time did not allow us to read the book, we will provide the public with a quick description of its contents and pledge to offer a more careful account of it in the future. The public already well knows, first, the author's departure for the land of Armenia and [his travels] to almost the entire region there; second, his receiving sustenance among the wise and cultured nations [of Europe]; and third, his natural feelings and compassion for his nation, and especially his experiences regarding the adept nature of his nation and the honor of his country. For these reasons, we do not doubt that this book must be a history of our nation and about the victories of our kings that also expresses its gratitude to the present protectors of our forlorn nation, along with an exhortation and plea to the luminous, foreign kingdoms of Christians, so that with their assistance we may be able to once again enjoy our natural heritage; and we do not believe that our thoughts here are groundless, otherwise why else would the book have been written in a foreign language?

Հարկաւոր համարիմք յայտնել հասարակութեան, հանդիպիլն մեր գրքոյ միոյ անգլիացոց լեզուաւ այսու անուամբ (Կեանք եւ անցք Յովսեփ Էմին հայի միոյ) տպեալ 'ի Լոնդոն յամի 1792 զոր թէեւ զսղութիւն ժամանակի մեր ոչ խոստացաւ ընթեռնուլ եւ այսպէս վաղվաղակի տալ հասարակաց զնիւթ նորին զոր խոստանամք այսու հետեւ առնել ամենայն զգուշութեամբ այլ ոչ երկուայիմք զի (որպէս յայտնի է հասարակութեանն նախ երթալն յեղինակին 'ի Հայաստան եւ յայն կողմ յաշխարհն գրեթէ բովանդակ՝ երկրորդ սնեալն նորա մէջ ազգաց խոհեմից եւ ուսելոց՝ եւ երրորդ բնական զգացողութիւն իւր եւ զգութ նորա առ ազգս իւր, հատկապէս փորձառութիւն իւր 'ի ընդունակութենէն յազքին եւ զպատուականութենէ աշխարհին իւրոյ) լինելոց է գիրքն այն անցեալ պատմութեան] յազգի մերոյ եւ յաղթանակաց թագաւորաց մերոց երախտագիտութեամբ շնորհակալութիւն պաշտպանաց զներկայ անտէրունջ մնալն մեր, հանդերձ աղերսիւ եւ յորդորանօք առ պայծառ թագաւորութիւնն այլ ազգ քրիստոնէից, որպէս զի օգնականութեամբ նոցա կարողացուք վայելել զբնական ժառանգութիւնս մեր, եւ ոչ հաւատամք թէ 'ի վեր մտածողութիւնսմեր լինիցի անհիմն՝ որովհետեւ գիրքն 'ի յայլ լեզու գրելն ոչ այլ ինչ կարէ ստուգաբանել:

Document 2

A.B.'s debut as a writer in the public sphere

Azdarar, December/January, 1794/1795

Yesterday evening [yerek yaraku] I went to visit a friend, and instead of finding him in his customary happy and glad disposition, I saw him sitting there reading a book and weeping. When I kindly inquired about his welfare, he wiped his tears and gave me quite an evasive [zantsaragan] response and resumed his reading. Again, I asked him kindly as to why he was weeping, and he did not answer. And after inquiring numerous times, he struck the book [with his hands] and said: "I am weeping on account of the unwise deeds [araroghutian] of our nation." I pointed out to him that that book is written in a European language [frankevara]; what could it possibly have to do with our nation? He responded with a slightly offended look: "This book was written in English by a certain Armenian [min khayi grats`], who instead of sowing his seeds on his own soil and counseling his own nation directly, recounts the bad reputation of his nation, [recounting] perhaps all the wickedness that he had come across throughout his travels, according to his own fancy and in the language of others. And in the same imprudent manner, he has thought by declaring, in a foreign tongue, his nation and his parents ignorant and only himself as intelligent, he may become worthy of respect. However, in my opinion he has not considered that there are many wise men among that nation [that is, the British], especially those who examine everything and by investigating his unbridled text, would unequivocally

[arants' yerkbayutean] find his naïve and infantile method (which according to what he has written is the only method) of restoring [an independent] state for our nation quite ludicrous. And considering flattering the panegyric (though deserving) of the foreign nation, according to his own confession, prudently thinking (according to the Scriptures, there is no hope from those who humiliate their [own] father and mother) that all laughable things subject to ridicule belong to his own. [??] I also think he has not comprehended the letter written to him by a worthy gentleman from Calcutta, which totally exposes the errors of his judgment and, with a veiled politeness, indicates the superfluity of his vanity; otherwise he would have neither printed his book nor that letter [voch en chitin]. ..." And I, a contributor [*banakatar*] of the *Azdarar* of the Armenians, seeing [my friend's] agitated [kharnats] look and hearing his affronted voice, forgot to ask him any more questions. I have studied what he said very clearly, as I have written above, but until now I do not at all understand who has written the book and why it was written. I will ask him about this after he calms down and regains his composure. [het handart gkhartsanem].

Having read *Azdarar* for quite some time, I too desired to contribute something in writing, and not having found anything, I considered this ordinary occurrence worthy of being recorded. In this fashion, I am also fulfilling my desire to make a contribution. I implore you, if you have the time, to submit the above to the editors [verakatsuatsn] for correction so that it may be written in the literary language. Otherwise, print it as it stands

so that the public will become aware as to whose writing it is and will forgive me for writing in the vernacular since in my entire life I have not read anything besides one Psalter. And this writing is not even entirely my own creation; otherwise I too would be astonished at [the level of] my education.

Madras

20th of Ariam, in the small calendar [of Azaria] 179 (January 4, 1795)

Your lordship's humble and menial servant, A. B.

Առ բանակատար Ազգարարին Հայոց:

Յէրէկ յարակու գնացի մին բարեկամի այցելութեան, եւ փոխանակ ըստ սովորութեան ուրախ եւ գուարճ գտանելէս՝ տեսի նստած մին գիրք էր կարդման եւ լալման, եւ իմ սիրով իւր առողջութիւնն հարցանելէս՝ արտասուքն գազելով մին շատ զանցառական պատասխան տուէց, եւ կրկին սկսեց կարդալ, կրկին սիրով հարցուցի թէ ինչ պատճարի էր լալման, չպատասխանէց. եւ յետ բազմիցս հարցանելէս՝ գիրքն խփէց. «մեր ազգի անխոհեմ արարողութիւնն ամ լալման ասաց, ասացի էգ գիրքն Ֆռանկեւարայ մեր ազգն ինչ բան ունի. փոքր ինչ վիրաւորեալ դէմքով ասաց «էս գիրքն ինկլիզեւար այ եւ մին խայի գրած, որ փոխանակ իւր սերմն իւր գետնումն ցանելէն՝ եւ իւր ազգին առանձին խրատելէն՝ այլոց լեզուաւ իւր խելքի համեմատ վատահամբաւութիւն իւր ազգին ասացել այ, որ կարելի բոլոր վատութիւնն որ տեսել այ՝ իր շարժապտութենիցն կը լինի յառաջացել, եւ միեւնոյն անխոյեմ մտածամբն՝ կարծելով թէ այլ ազգի լեզուաւ իւր ազգին եւ իւր ծնողացն հասարակապէս տգէտ՝ եւ իւրն միայն գիտուն ասելովն համբաւի կը արժանանայ. այլ կարծեմ չի մտածել որ էն ազգումն շատ

խոհեմք կան, յատկապէս քննողք ամենայն բանից, որք առանց երկբայութեան՝ քննելով զանգուսպ բան իւր մտածելով եւ ծիծաղելով ՚ի վերայ մանկամտածական հնարի (այլ ըստ իւր ասիցն միայն հնար) կանգնեցուցանել մեր ազգի տէրութիւնն՝ եւ ըստ իւր խոստովանութեանն մարդահաճութիւն համարելով զգովութիւն (թէ եւ արժանի է) գոր յազգի օտարականի տայ խոհեմապէս մտածելով (ըստ գրոց զի հայր եւ մայր անարգողաց ոչ գոյ յոյս) ծիծաղելոց՝ ծաղր առնելոց եւ անդարդարձն բոլորն իւրնեն համարելոց, եւ կարծում ամ չի խասկացել կալկաթայ մին արժանաւոր պար[օ]նի առ իւրն գրած գիրն, թէ ոչ՝ ոչ գիրքն կը տպէր՝ եւ ոչ էն չիթին, որ բոլորովին իւր դատողութեան] սղալանքն՝ եւ սնափառութեան յաւելորդութիւնն ծածուկ քաղաքավարութեամբ յայտնում այ վերջապէս ա՞խ ինչ գացանեմ: _____ Եւ ես, բանակատար ազտարարին Հայոց, տեսանելով նորա խառնած դէմքն, եւ ասութեան ձէնի վիրաւորութիւնն, չյիշէցի յաւելի հարցումն առնել, այլ իւր ասացածն ըստուք սերտեցի, որպէս վերն գրեցի, բայց ոչ ինչ չխասկացայ ով այ էն գիրք գրողն՝ եւ կամ ինչ այ գրէլ, մինչ այսու յետ հանդարտ կխարցանեմ:

Շատ ժամանակ ես ազգարարն կարդալով ցանկամանի ես էլ, մին բան գրեմ, բան չի գտաման, էս անհասարակ պատահմունքն արժան համարեցի գրել, եւ իմ ցանկութիւնն կատարել խնդրեմ եթէ ժամանակ ունենաս՝ տաս վերակացուացն որ սրբագրեն եւ գրոց լեզուաւ գրեն, թէ ոչ էսպէս տպիր եթէ հասարակութիւնն իմանայ ում գրածն այ՝ կների աշխարհաբար գրելէս, վասն որ իմ կենօք մին սաղմոսից էլ ոչ ինչ յաւել չեմ կարդացել: Եւ էս ալ

ողջ իմ մտկի հնարածն չի, թէ ոչ ես էլ
կզարմանի իմ գիտութեան վերայ:

Մազրասունմն

Արեամ 20 թիւն փոքր:179⁶⁷

Հրամանոց նուաստ փոքր ծառայ Ա:Բ:

Document 3

A.B.'s Second Submission, Azdarar, Ovdan, 1795

Letter to the editor of *Azdarar* of the Armenians:

There is a proverb that says that when an old woman who had not attended church [for a long time] decided to attend one day, she got bit on the foot by a dog. Now something similar has happened to me. As I have men-

tioned before, I had desired without success for a long time to write something for *Azdarar*. When I [finally] wrote something, I was met with the following misfortune. On the morning of epiphany, I went to offer my wishes to my friend and saw him seated reading *Azdarar*. Upon seeing me, he gave me a [strange?] look and I think had it not been such a solemn day, he would have berated me at length. From a distance he seemed angry with me. In any case, I went up to him to wish him a happy epiphany and in return he thanked me. I sat down, and for about five minutes he sat there in silence. Then he asked if I had read [the last issue] of *Azdarar* and I said no. He passed the copy of *Azdarar* he was holding to me and told me to read while he listened. Since it occurred to me that he was somewhat hurt by me, it suddenly dawned on me that it was all on account of what I had written. Try as I did to pretend that I had no idea of what was going on, the racing of my heartbeat, the loss of color on my face, and the ease with which I was reading the text (since it was what I had written, otherwise I read with great difficulty what others have written) betrayed what I was trying to conceal. When I reached the point in the text where it was written "I beg of you if you have time to submit this to the editorial team so that they may correct my writing and render into the literary language," my friend asked for me to return his copy of *Azdarar*, saying it is enough, do not read anymore and on the spot began to say: "Could it be that I (or the editor in chief of *Azdarar*) could not recognize who Mister A. B. was or that you could have been unaware that I too know how to write, and

67 Aream or Aram 20 in the Azaria or "small calendar" equals January 4. A. G. Abrahamian, *Hayots Gir yev Grchut'yun* [Armenian Writing and Literature]. (Yerevan: Yerevani Hamalsarani Hratarakchut'iun, 1972), 118. The Calendar of Azaria was invented by Catholicos Azaria (himself from Old Julfa) in the sixteenth century and was formally instituted in 1616 to replace the traditional Armenian Calendar (known as the "Greater Armenian Calendar"), which began in 552 CE. To compute Azaria dates, one adds 1615 to the Azaria year for all dates after 21 March (the beginning of the year) and 1616 to dates before 21 March. Thus Azaria year 75 (after 21 March) would correspond to 1690 (1615 + 75). It should be noted that Julfan merchants and, especially, priests often employed both the Greater Armenian Calendar and that of Azaria. The Azaria Calendar also had its unique nomenclature for months (thirteen months in all, including a five-day month called Haveleats). To convert Azaria dates to Gregorian ones, see the conversion tables found in Abrahamian, (118-20). Abrahamian's book also has an insightful discussion (115-20) on the origins of the Azaria calendar and its use until the mid-nineteenth century among Julfans, both in Julfa and in its overseas settlements, especially those in India and Indonesia.

more pleasantly than you, to boot? Why then did you take what I had told you and announced it like this? And even though you used your brain in not signing your name on the submission, and that I do not think anyone has realized that I am the person you alluded to, I still think that what you have done is imprudent. My whole point in telling you my story was for your own knowledge; if that were not the case, I could have recounted for you that miserable book in its entirety. And because you are my friend, I can tell you [now] that I did not get hurt by reading this book, but mulled over the wise Persian proverb that says, “*Jughabi ablahun khumashi*” or the best response to idiots is silence. I transformed my anger into ridicule, and the person who reacts to such things in this manner will always remain healthy and calm. I was very saddened by your narrow-mindedness of trying to exchange garlic against onion [meaning perhaps, “to respond with the same weapons”], and I have to say, that is not prudent, though your act is more out of ignorance than of revenge, since you have concluded that you have not understood anything. I hope that henceforth you will listen to me. Even if they curse your father [??] and the accuser is an ignoramus, you should remain silent, and you will always be at peace.

I was sweating so much from shame and guilt that I was not able to respond to [my friend] or beg his forgiveness. And since he said that he was not upset with me according to his nature, but was sad because his views had been publicized, I considered also necessary to publicize my own confession [here]. Now I hope that by writing this I will regain his friendship again.

The explanations of my initials, A.B. were indeed fantastical, for they ranged from Abgar to Avetik and from Bagraton to Beliar, and none of them were correct. Let’s see now how they will explain what I have written.

Your lordship’s menial servant,

Ch.Z.Ch.

Madras,

Ovdan 15, small calendar 179
(January 29, 1795)

*Published in Azdarar month of
Ovdan (January/February), 1795*

Առ բանակատար ազդարարին Հայոց:

Մին առակ կասեն պառաւն ժամ
չգնաց յերփ գնաց շունն ոտն կծէց, այժմ
իմ բանն այ բազում ժամանակէր որ յա-
ռաջ ասացէլ ամ ցանկամանի ազդարա-
րումն բան գրել չէր յաջողման յերփ գրե-
ցի մին տարաբախտոգթեան հանդիպեցայ
էսպէս որ ջրօրհնէք [benediction of the
waters on the epiphany] առաւօտն գնա-
ցի բարեկամիս շնորհաւորել տէսի նստած
ազդարար էր կարգման՝ եւ ինձ տեսանելէն
գլուխն կոռ գծէց աչկէրն խառնած եւ
կարծեմ թէ էնպէս հանդիսաւոր օր չլինէր
կարելի էր՞ յերկարից ինձ վերայ բարկա-
նէր ինչ եւ իցէ գնացի իւր ջրօրհնէնքն
շնորհաւորեցի որոյ փոխարէնն ասաց
շնորհակալ ամ, նստայ իբրեւ խինգ մնուտ
ժամանակ լուռ նստաւ, յետոյ հարցուց թէ
ես ազդարար կարդացել ամ, ասացի չէ,
իւր ձեռնի ազդարարն գէմ ինձ մեկնէց իմ
անխամ գրուածքն բաց, եւ ասաց կարգամ
ինքն լսի, որովհէտեւ ինձ թվաց որ ինձա-
նից ինչ վիրաւորեալ էր, իսկոյն իմացայ
որ էս գրածիս կողմանէ կլինի եւ թէեւ
կամեցայ ինձնում չիմանալ գնել եւ կար-
դալ ապա սրտիս թափ տալն երեսիս գոյն-
քի պակասութիւնն եւ վարժ կարդալս

(վասն որ իմ գրածն էր ապա այլոց գրած շատ ներդրութեամբ կը կարգամ) յայտնի վկայեցին էն որ ես կամեմանի գազըլ յետ խասնելէս էն տեղն որ գրած ալ, խնդրեմ եթէ ժամանակ ունենաս տաս վերակացուացն որ սրբագրեն եւ գրոց լեզուաւ գրեն, բարեկամս ազդարարն յետ ուղեց ասելով՝ բավական ալ, էլ մի կարգալ եւ խսկոյն սկսէց ասել «միթէ պարոն Ա.Բ ես չի ճանաչում ազդարար տպողն կամ միթէ չես գիտակ որ ես էլ կարող ամ գրել կարող եմ յաւելի համեղ քան թէ քեզ ապա ինչ էր պատճառն որ դու իմ ասութիւնն տարար էսպէս հռչակեցիր որ թէ եւ մին խելք գործ ասածել որ անուն չես յիշատակել եւ որ կարծեմ ոչ ով չի իմանալէց թէ ես ամ այլ արարածդ խոհեմութիւնից դուս ալ, իմ բոլոր քեզ յառաջէն ասութիւնս վասն ոչ այլ ինչ բանի էր թէ ոչ քոյ ծանօթութեան որ թէ էսպէս չլինիր արարել կարելի էր էն աղքատ գիրքն բոլորն քեզ պատմի, եւ որովհետեւ բարեկամ աս ինձ, քեզ խորհուրդ տամ մի թէ էս գիրքն ես կարգալով չի վիրաւորվել այլ մտածելով էն խոհեմ պարսիացու առակն որ կասեն ջուղապի աբլահուն խոռմաշի որ է փշախօսից պատասխանէ լռութիւն. իմ բարկուգթիւնն ծիծաղի փոխարկում որ միշտ էսպէս բաներում էս էս բնութիւն բանացանողն հանգիստ կը լինի եւ առողջ, վերջապէս շատ տխրեցայ քոյ կարճամտութեան վերա որ

կամեմանաս սոխին դէմ սխտոր տալ, ապա քեզ ասեմ որ էտ խոհեմութիւն չի, թէ եւ քոյ արարտեն՝ յաւելի իբրեւ տգիտութիւն ալ, քան թէ վրէժխնդրութիւն վասն որ ստացել աս վերջումն թէ բան չես խօսկակացել, այլ յուսամ այս ու յետ ինձ կլսես եթէ քոյ խօրն եւս անիծեն էն բանումն որ դու արժանաւոր չես եւ ասողն տգէտ ալ, լռես միշտ խաղաղ կը լինես:

էս խօսակցութենումն ես ամօթխածութենիցս քրտնէլի, ոչ ինչ չկարողացայ պատասխանել, թէ ոչ ներողութիւն խնդրել եւ մեղա գոչել որ խոստացաւ ըստ ՚ի վեր իւր բնութեան բարկանալէց չի ինձ վերայ, այլ որու հետեւ վասն իւր խօսքն հռչակելէ համարէր տխրութիւնն հարկաւոր համարեցի իմ խոստովանութիւնն էլ հռչակեմ եւ յուսամ այս խոստովանութեամբս նորայ բարեկամութիւնն հաստատեմ:

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ովդան 15 թիւն փոքր 179 (January 29, 1795)

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