

carpet and a Mughal silk velvet used as a cover for the *Tebah* (the platform used by the rabbi) in the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam, rare examples of Persian and Indian textiles used in religious ceremonies in the Netherlands.

Five articles that can be classified as falling under category 4 provide new observations on specific types of carpets and textiles. In Steven Cohen's "The Use of Fine Goat Hair for the Production of Luxury Textiles," he focuses especially on *pashmina* and suggests that sixteenth-century *pashmina*-pile carpets from Khorasan were models for seventeenth-century north Indian *pashmina* pile carpets. Additionally, using historical material and pictorial sources, he demonstrates how a less-known type of felt carpet called a *namad* was used among Muslims in Persia and India.

Safavid textiles, garments, and sashes are the focus of others: Mary McWilliams describes her technical analysis of a specific textile, the Safavid Velvet in the Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston. On the other hand, using contemporary manuscript paintings, Jennifer Scarce divides Safavid textiles for garments into four types by design. Patricia Baker's short but insightful article entitled "Wrought of Gold or Silver: Honorific Garments in Seventeenth-Century Iran" combines information drawn from the early eighteenth-century manual *Tadhkirat al-Muluk*, European travelers' accounts, pictorial material, and the technical analysis of metallic threads of Safavid textiles to reconstruct four items, a sash, a sleeved garment, an over-mantle, and a crown of honor that constitute *khal'at*, or "gifts to acknowledge loyal service." Beata Biedrońska Słota's "Persian Sashes Preserved in Polish Collections" explores how one of these items, the Persian sash, became part of Polish national costume. In order to establish a chronology, she analyzes seven Persian silk sashes, which used to be owned by Polish aristocrats, that are now in the collection of the National Museum in Cracow.

Having reviewed the contents, it is perhaps apposite to return to the introduction, which reads "since the death of Kurt Erdmann in 1964, the serious study of carpets has been somewhat out of the mainstream of art historical scholarship, with few opportunities for study at academic institutions." To the contrary, this book clearly indicates that the study of carpets and textiles has strong potential to provide a plethora of information that can shed new light on society, trade, economics, and cultural exchange. As is apparent from the above brief summaries of the articles contained in this book, the study of carpet and textiles is relevant to various disciplines and would greatly benefit from further collaborative work between art historians and scholars from different fields such as history, trade, and economics. In a sense, this book is an open invitation from art historians to other scholars to undertake interdisciplinary study and come together to do collaborative research.

From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa. By Sebouh David Aslanian.

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Reviewed by Sushil Chaudhury, Royal Historical Society, UK; University of Calcutta

E-mail sushilchau@rediffmail.com

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In this book the author narrates the amazing (his)story of the unique achievements of a small community of merchants who were deported from their home in Julfa in Armenia and settled in a suburb of Isfahan in the early seventeenth century. Here he explores the emergence and growth of a remarkable global trade network operated by the New Julfan Armenian merchant community for about a century and a half from around 1605 to 1747. And it is significant to note that they were the only Eurasian community who operated simultaneously and successfully across all the major empires of the early modern era – Mughal, Ottoman, Safavid, Muscovite Russia, Qing China – as also the

seaborne empires of, especially, the English, Dutch and the French, and that too, unlike the European Joint Stock Companies, without any support or patronage from the State.

It all began after the Persian king Shah Abbas I sacked Julfa and deported most of its dwellers and resettled them in the suburb of his capital Isfahan, subsequently named New Julfa. Though some historians have argued that this was a deliberate move of the Shah with a view to improving Persia's economy with the help of the skilled and shrewd Armenian merchants and manufacturers, the present author holds that the Shah "does not seem to have had" such a "conscious policy". Be that as it may, there is little doubt that the New Julfan Armenians were the driving force behind the prosperity of Persia in the seventeenth century.

One of the main objectives of the book, as stated by Aslanian, is to explore the ways in which the Armenian merchants were able to travel across their various settlements spread over vast areas and create a "hybrid and syncretic" identity that he terms "transimperial cosmopolitanism". The book also seeks to recreate the "ethos of trust and cooperation" between merchants of the same community. It delves, as well, into the particular types of economic institutions such as *commenda* contract and the family firms and their uses in the context of the contemporary world of Eurasia, and aims at demonstrating the importance of networks and communication in the working of long-distance merchant communities.

The book is divided into two distinct but complementary parts, the first (Chapters 2–4) mostly descriptive, provides a broad overview of the growth and development of the trade network of the New Julfan Armenian merchants, while the second, more analytical, discusses the social and economic institutions that sustained the Armenian trade network. In the very first chapter Aslanian makes it clear that the central analytical framework of the book is to "reconceptualize" "trade diaspora" – a term coined by Abner Cohen in the late 1960s and later made popular by Philip Curtin in the 1980s – of the early modern era as "circulation" societies, a term first used by Claude Marcovitz. It is by using the model of "circulation" that he examines the trade networks of the New Julfan merchants.

The book contains nine chapters which are well conceived and well organized. The second chapter gives a broad outline of the origins of the Armenian merchant community and the establishment of its nodal centre in New Julfa, while the third and fourth chapters provide a threadbare account of the Armenian trade network. The third chapter examines the expansion of the Julfan trade network, giving a settlement-by-settlement account of the Julfan presence in Mughal India, Southeast Asia and the Philippines (Manila), while Chapter 4 looks at the Julfan trade network from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, taking up especially the Julfan settlements in Aleppo, Izmir, Venice, Livorno, Marseilles and Cadiz. The next chapter tries to identify the factor which acted as the adhesive that held the Julfan settlements and their network, and discusses the crucial role of correspondence and courier network in "gluing" merchants in different settlements together and the settlements to their nodal centre in New Julfa.

Chapter 6 explores the role of the *commenda* contract in New Julfan Armenian trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by situating the *commenda* within the context of the family firms, especially those of the Shariman family and the Khawaja Minasian family, which were the basic organizational unit in New Julfa. Aslanian holds, and rightly so, that the *commenda* contract was the most significant legal instrument for New Julfan long-distance trade, though he points out at the same time that the *commenda* was ideal in the short term for enforcing "trust" between agents and principals, but it limited the New Julfan network's ability to expand to new markets in the long term. The crucial issue of "trust" and cooperation, which is at the heart of most long-distance merchant communities in the early modern era, is taken up for analysis in the next chapter. The argument here is that rather than taking trust as a given, it attempts to explain trust as a commodity created by merchants largely through rigorous monitoring of merchant behaviour, rewarding

individuals upholding high ethical standards, and sanctioning those who break codes of honour and betray their fellow merchants. As such “trust” can be regarded as “social capital”.

Chapter 9, which is arguably one of the most interesting, delineates the causes/factors which led to the decline and collapse of the trade network of the New Julfan Armenian merchants in the eighteenth century. Finally in the “Conclusion”, the Julfan trading network and its methods of policing trust is examined within a large comparative context by appraising two other principal early modern long-distance trading networks – those of the Multani Indians and the Sephardic Jews. While doing so, it looks into the Julfan network for possible structural flaws and comes to the conclusion that one such flaw was the network’s “privileging” of the *commenda* over other forms of partnerships, a choice that severely limited the network’s ability to expand and diversify into new markets.

There is no doubt that the arguments of the author are well articulated and in a good and lucid style. The most important merit of the book is that it is based on “indigenous” primary sources rather than European “proxy” documents. It is quite true that the overdependence on the European archives for writing the history of trade and economy of Asia led to Euro-centric interpretation in most cases. But at the same time it is a fact that material, especially quantitative, on trade history is hard to come by in Asian sources, which are few and far between. Aslanian is lucky to have access to the Armenian archives. But if one is meticulous and persevering, one can find, with some luck of course, that European archives also can yield interesting information about Asian trade, and this has been shown by some of the scholars who did not fall prey to Euro-centrism.

Again, while talking about the role of “trust” as social capital and cooperation, the author summarily dismisses the arguments of some scholars, which is debatable. Fernand Braudel, awe-struck by the “fabulous success” of the Armenian merchants *vis-à-vis* the more advanced organizational form embodied by the European Joint Stock Companies, was the first to raise the question as to what constituted the key to this success. A few scholars, including the present reviewer, came up with the hypothesis that it was because of their “ethos of trust” that the Armenians were so successful. It was the bond of family and kinship which underpinned the Armenian trade network for such a long time. This is reflected in the fact that none except family and kin, and their own countrymen, were employed by the Armenians in their business enterprises. So it is hardly possible to ignore the “ethos of trust” as an important factor in the success of the Armenians.

As to the decline and final collapse of the Armenian trade network in the eighteenth century, Aslanian rejects the prevailing thesis that this was mostly because of the religious persecution of the later Safavids followed by the Afghan invasion and consequent ouster of the Safavids in 1722. He holds, in line with Edmund Herzig, that the collapse was mainly due to Nadir Shah’s invasion (1746–1747) followed by his extortionate policy of heavy taxation and reckless looting by the victorious Afghan army. But even acknowledging this assessment to be carefully reasoned and nuanced, it can be said that the religious persecution, beginning around mid-seventeenth century, was at least a contributory factor as is exemplified by the large migration of New Julfan Armenians to India, which must have been a fatal blow to their trade network, leading to its ultimate collapse.

But all this does not detract from the merit of the work. Based on archival material collected from thirty-one collections in seven languages in twelve countries, Aslanian presented us with a gem of a book reflecting sound and mature scholarship in every respect. As such the book is most welcome not only to scholars of Armenian studies and trade historians but also to historians and sociologists in general as well.
