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Armenian Studies Program
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

For further information please contact:
Ms. Gloria Caudill, Administrator
gcaudill@umich.edu
(734) 763-0622

Dr. Aslanian Discusses Julfan Trade Networks

Dr. Sebouh Aslanian, a Manoogian Simone Foundation Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, delivered a lecture titled "The New Julfa Merchants in the Mid-18th Century and Their Trade Networks" on November 18. The lecture was held at the AGBU Alex and Marie Manoogian School in Southfield and was sponsored jointly by the Armenian Studies Program at Ann Arbor and the Armenian Research Center at UM-Dearborn.

Aslanian's lecture began with a discussion of the global trade networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa, Isfahan (in the Safavid Empire of Iran) and outlined the three circuits of the Julfan network covering the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and Northwestern Europe and Russia. The lecture drew on archival sources in London, Venice, Isfahan, and elsewhere in examining the role of information networks and commercial correspondence that glued together the Julfan network and facilitated its survival and prosperity.

The lecture focused on commercial letters written by Julfan merchants working in the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean regions and outlined three categories of news that merchant letters circulated across the network including political/social news, commercial news, and news on the reputation of fellow Julfan merchants. It argued that information sharing was important not only for the daily commercial affairs of merchants but also for maintaining the integrity of the Julfan trade network. The lecture examined the stylistic properties of Julfan mercantile correspondence as well as the logistical problems of circulating letters across vast spaces through a courier network that connected the trade settlements of the Julfan network to its nodal center at New Julfa, Isfahan.

Dr. Aslanian's 2007 Ph.D. dissertation, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: Circulation and the global trade networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa/Isfahan, 1605-1747* (Columbia University), received a Best Dissertation Award for that year from the Graduate School at Columbia. He is also the author of the monograph *Dispersion History and the Polycentric Nation: The Role of Simeon Yerevantsi's Girk or koči partavčar in the 18th Century Revival* (in the series Bibliotheque d'Arménologie "Bazmavep"). He is the author of a number of articles in the New Julfa merchants in various academic journals as well.

While focusing on his research for his next book, Dr. Aslanian is currently teaching an undergraduate course on the Indian Ocean trade in the 18th century and the role of ethnic trade networks and will be teaching a graduate seminar on periodization in early modern Armenian history during the Winter 2009 semester.