**The UCLA Minasian Collection of Manuscripts and Archival Materials**

The UCLA Minasian Collection is a diverse collection including a number of different types of materials. This collection reflects the cultural, social and intellectual interactions of Armenian and Persian people through a shared history, and outward looking Armenian community of New Julfa, Isfahan. This collection was largely collected by Dr. Caro Owen Minaian (1897-1973). He was an avid book and artifact collector and has intense interest in Armenian and Persian cultures. He published and translated books on various historical and archeological topics. However, the focus of this presentation is a brief overview of manuscripts in the collection and most importantly, an introduction to the Minasian Collection of Armenian materials (Collection 1632).

The Minasian collection is composed of: Minasian collection of Armenian Manuscripts; Minasian collection of Persian Manuscripts; Minasian collection of Near Eastern Manuscripts, ca. 1100-1899; Minasian collection of Armenian early printed books, 17th-19th century; Minasian collection of Armenian material, ca. 1600-1968; Minasian collection of medical manuscripts and other materials; Minasian collection in Fowler Museum; Exhibit collection, and Possibly other categories that need to be identified.

The collection of the Armenian manuscripts (collection 2089) includes 91 manuscripts making UCLA’s holdings of Armenian manuscripts the largest in the United States (40 of these manuscripts have been already digitized) and almost all manuscripts are described and cataloged by Dr. Avedis Sanjian and was published in his print catalog.[[1]](#footnote-1) The most famous Armenian manuscript in this collection is the Gospels of Gladzor (Գլաձորի Աւետարան) that was the subject of an exhibition at the Getty in 2001 (September 11- December 2, 2001). The Gladzor manuscript was given to Geghard monastery by Vakhakh, an Orbelian princess married to a Proshian Prince in (1393-1404). This manuscript left the Geghard monetary, and was in New Julfa from 1628-1968. The monks in Geghard swore to keep the manuscript forever and wrote in the colophon that “whoever dares and endeavors to remove it shall be judged by God and all the saints, and shall receive the lot and portion of Cain and Judas and the crucifiers, and forever suffer and be tortured even as Satan, and all humanity shall curse and condemn him.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Gladzor manuscript was donated to UCLA in 1968, this information can be obtained from the Minasian collection of Armenian materials. Before Dr. Caro Minasian the owner of this manuscript was Ter Martyros Ter Hovakimian, a relative of Dr. Minasian’s wife who donated the manuscript to Dr. Minasian, and Dr. Minasian in his turn had insisted that he is donating this manuscript to UCLA, without receiving any compensation for it to avoid the curse inflicted by Geghard monks.

There are very important and much talked about Near Eastern manuscripts (collection 1147) as part of Minasian collection in several languages, such as, Persian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Urdu, and etc. There are over 8,500 manuscripts in this collection making UCLA’s collection the second largest in the US after the Beinecke library. However, in this paper I would like to discuss broadly on not so famous collection of Armenian Materials, ca. 1600-1968 (collection 1623).

The value of this collection lies in its diversity of materials. The materials in the collection, ranges from correspondence, photographs, ledgers, postcards, paintings, books, maps etc. [including a receipt from Moliere, the famous French satirist, from 17th century.] The Minasian Armenian Material collection allows us to have a glimpse in the lives of Armenian communities of New Julfa, South East Asia and Europe and their attitude towards books, and education.

The large collection of correspondence, introduce us to everyday life of Armenians in many parts of the world. Most of the letters belong to Ter Hovankimian, Sarkies (Ter Voskanian), Abcar, Aratoon, Bamban families. The Sarakies father (Sarkis Ter Voskanian) was one of famous businessmen of New Julfa and South East Asia. His sons (Martyros, Avedis, Arshak, and Tigran) were the owner of *Eastern End Oirental* hotel in Penang, Malaysia, and the most luxurious hotel in Singapore, *Raffles hotel* which stands today and still is the best hotel in Singapore.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Letters of George Mackertich Bamban discuss many issues with Christian Youth Organization and its close ties with Britain. George was sent for missionary work to Iraq and Africa. His daily dairies and ledgers give us interesting information about his activities in countries he visited and his interactions with the locals. He also gives descriptions of the places he traveled with detailed information about his expenses, and some of his maps are in the Armenian collection.

Through this collection, the untold history of Armenian community in New Julfa, come to life. The Persian and Armenian language laws pertinent to Armenians in Iran, sometimes favorably and often not so favorably depending on the political situation in Iran are fresh and objective sources to the Armenian life and survival strategies they adapted. There are many references to the famine that periodically would penetrate Iran and the Armenian community which was one of the triggers for mass emigration of Armenians to other countries, primarily India. Armenian community and religious leaders often spoke in horror and anger about the mass exodus of the New Julfa Armenian community and its surrounding villages.

The documents and the ledgers sometimes allow us to understand how the trade network, actually worked amongst Armenian communities in 17th, through early 20th century and shade light to why the Armenians in New Julfa were so highly educated.

There is very little doubt that printing increased literacy amongst the population. There are evidence from the correspondence and materials in the Minasian Armenian Collection that women greatly benefited from books to advance in their education and literacy. New Julfa and the extended Armenian communities saw great revival in education and acquiring new languages. The presence of women in the field of education as teachers and community leaders, depending on their social status in the community, is undeniable. Women were encouraged to become educated and acquire western languages to elevate their status within the society, and also help with business dealings in the absence of their men who were travelling to other parts of the world. The correspondence shows the savvy Armenian businesswomen who took charitable work as business, and instead of just donating money to charitable organizations, they created business opportunities for these organizations to take merchandise instead of money and sell them for profit. In one letter a benefactor tells the keeper of an orphanage “I sent you those blue things, you can sell those for higher profit as the market for them is favorable now and use the money for your expenses.” It is not clear what those blue things were, but it is not difficult to guess that they were using code words for items that they did not want to name for variety of reasons. The letters reveal tensions amongst businessmen, and the alliances amongst powerful families of New Julfa through partnership or marriage extending to their off springs in South East Asia.

Print changed the life style of Armenian communities. Announcements were printed in larger quantities and distributed more widely. Newspapers became very popular and main source of general information. Madras was the birth place of the first newspaper published in Armenian. “Azdarar, Ազդարար” started publication on October 14, 1794 and seized publication in March 1796, its publisher was Harutiwn k’ahanay Shmawonean Shirazets’I (Յարութիւն քահանայ Շմաւոնեան Շիրազեցի).[[4]](#footnote-4) There are clippings of Arevelk’(Արեւելք), Alik’ (Ալիք) and other Armenian and Persian newspapers in the Minasian Armenian Materials collection. Through newspapers the publication of poetries and articles flourished. There are news clippings on Armenian Genocide, and other Armenian related topics that would give day to day accounts of atrocities in Western Armenia, organizing assistant to orphans and the newly Independent Republic of Armenia in 1918.

Print was used for personal accusations and cultural announcements. There are escalation of political pamphlets, satire and provocations. The Armenian Church was the leading entity to encourage and make available the resources for early period of publication, and they used this new technology for the everyday life of church and society. Most kondaks (official Church letters to public) were being published instead of handwritten which gave the Armenian Church the ability to distribute more of its Kondaks to general population that was not possible before print, due to limited number of handwritten copies.

The incredible collection of postcards is another treasure of the Minasian Armenian collection. The variety of subject maters and the wealth of information provided in some of the postcards are stunning. These postcards provide us with information about where the Armenians traveled and sometimes explain why they traveled. But there seem to be an interest in collecting such items and stamps in the 19th and early 20th century. The collection of correspondence envelopes with stamps is another interesting group within the collection. The envelopes seem to not have much value, but the stamps were the primary reason for the collection. However, there is some information on the envelopes that might be valuable upon close attention.

Photographs are another focal point of Minasian Armenian collection. The topics of the photographs ranges from family photos, that mostly need identification, most of these pictures were sent to relatives and they did not need to identify themselves. There are plans to digitize these photographs and making it possible for people to identify the persons in photographs. Some of the pictures have historical themes, and some social. There are several albums containing portraits of ecclesiastical people and some about the mass repatriation of Armenians from Iran to Soviet Armenia after World War II (ca. 1946-1948).

The collection of early print books, are invaluable resource to follow the foot prints of Armenian publication history. The first book ever published in New Julfa “Vark’ harants’, Վարք Յարանց’” was published in 1640, in Amenap’rkich’ Vank’s (Ամենափրկիչ Վանք) printing facilities. Eremean mentions that Khach’atur Kesarats’I (Խաչատուր Կէսարացի) organized the first printing establishment in New Julfa with his friends. They carved the Armenian letters and finally published the first book in 1640.[[5]](#footnote-5) This publication was a stepping point not only for the Armenians but also for the Persians, as this book was the first book ever published in Iran.

Dr. Minasian was the archivist’s dream collector and nightmare conservator. He made many notes on the items with valuable information. In one book from 1666, Dr. Minasian wrote a note that there were 110 volumes of this book published, but most were lost in a shipwreck.[[6]](#footnote-6) This note is important not only because it gives us information about that particular volume but the number of books published in Armenian in general. It is no wonder that books were cherished and treated as a valuable commodity. Books were repaired and missing pages were replaced with hand writings and paintings. The exhibition at Young Research Library (YRL) is great gateway to see items from the Minasian collection that gives an opportunity to see life in action of 17th and 18th century Armenians and acts as a bridge between life before and after print for Armenians.

1. Sanjian, Avedis K. *Medieval Armenian Manuscripts at the University of California, Los Angeles*. (UCLA 1999) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mathews, Thomas F. and Alice Taylor. *The Armenian Gospels of Gladzor : the life of Christ illuminated.* (Los Angeles : The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2001. P. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raffles\_Hotel\_Singapore

Eruand, Hrach’. *Inch’ tesay Hndkastani ew Chavayi mej.(*Post’en, hratarakut’iwn “Payk’ari’, 1927)P. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Minasean, L.G. *Iranahay parberakan mamule : Hay arajin mamuli “Azdarar”-I 200 (1794-1796) ew Iranahay arajin mamuli “Shawigh”-I 100 ameaki (1894-1994) artiw.* (Nor Jugha : tparan Sb. Amenap’rkich’ vank’I, 1994) P.14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Eremean, Aram. *Nor-Jugh.* (Nor-Jugha, Taparan S. Amenap’rkich’ Vank’i, 1919) P. [34] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Oskan Erevants’i. *K’erakanut’ean girk’ : hamarotiwk’ tsayrak’agh arareal haghags mankants’.*( [Amsterdam] : [S. Ejmiatsin], 1666?) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)