

*'Transimperial' Strategies of Artistic Patronage: From New Julfan Merchants to Parsi Industrialists*

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Based on limited existing evidence, this paper proposes a comparative art historical analysis of the artistic patronage by the New Julfan Perso-Armenian merchants and the Zoroastrian Parsi industrialists within the broader context of Mughal India and the British Raj. Active between the 1600s and 1750s, Armenian benefactors dotted the vast lands between Singapore and Syria and beyond with architectural commissions of Christian churches, mansions, and educational institutions. In their turn, from the 1800s to the 1920s, Parsi patrons deployed the same strategy of soft power with architectural commissions of Zoroastrian temples, housing complexes, hospitals, and universities. Both of these lay merchant classes emerging from “trade diaspora” communities, doubly removed from their ancestral homelands of Armenia and Persia, understood the political implication of artistic patronage and, thus, turned their economic success into cultural capital through a resolute and visible system of commissions. Significant structural similarity enables this comparative examination. While the single “nodal center” of the Armenian “monocentric” network was set in New Julfa, that of the Parsis was Bombay. Handpicked by the East India Company as “middlemen minorities,” Armenians and Parsis first built their nodal centers during an intense period of rapid construction, only to spread out throughout their respective trade grids. Armenians erected twelve churches during the first fourteen years of their settlement in New Julfa and doubled that number by the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1822, six fire temples adorned the cityscapes of West India. By the end of that century, Parsis had augmented that number tenfold. Each group’s formal and stylistic decisions can be characterized as ‘timely,’ ‘hybrid,’ and ‘transimperial,’ shaping and projecting the minoritarian and cosmopolitan identities of these patrons of the arts.

**Bio:** *Talinn Grigor is a professor of art and architectural history in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century art and architectural histories through postcolonial and critical theories grounded in Iran, Armeno-Iran, and Parsi India. Her books include the award-winning *The Persian Revival* (2021), *Contemporary Iranian Art* (2014), and *Building Iran* (2009). She has received fellowships from the National Gallery of Art, the Getty, Cornell’s Humanities Center, Princeton’s Persian Center, MIT’s Aga Khan Program, SSRC, NAASR, and Persian Heritage and Gulbenkian foundations among others. Co-authored with Hourii Berberian and under contract with Stanford University Press, her current book project traces the history of Armenian women’s organizations in Qajar and Pahlavi Iran from 1870 to 1979.*