Dr. Sebouh Aslanian  
Associate Professor & Richard Hovannisian Endowed Chair in Modern Armenian History  

will give a talk titled:

“Signed, Sealed, and Undelivered: The Voyage of the Santa Catharina and a Global Microhistory of the Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean, c. 1738-1752”

Abstract

In the early hours of the morning of April 30, 1748, at the height of the War of the Austrian Succession, a British naval squadron intercepted an Armenian-freighted merchant vessel called the Santa Catharina in the Indian Ocean on its return voyage from the port of Basra in the Persian Gulf to the Bengali port of Calcutta. Like some “country ships” involved in the port-to-port trade of the Indian Ocean, at the time of its capture, the Santa Catharina was carrying a cargo of about two thousand pieces of business and family correspondence addressed to recipients throughout India and as far afield as Canton and Beijing in China. Along with the rest of the ship’s belongings, these letters were confiscated by the British Navy and sent to London where they were presented as exhibits during a high-stakes Admiralty trial (1749-1752) on the fate of the ship. My presentation seeks to use the Santa Catharina as a container, instrument, and metaphor of Indian Ocean history. It will treat the ship as a micro-historical object of global history and explore the larger social and economic history of the Ocean during the global eighteenth century using the paper cargo of the ship as a traveling archive or a tiny seaborne geniza. Relying on the ship’s financial instruments now stored in the HCA series of the National Archives, the presentation seeks to reconstruct a larger world of contractual and commercial culture in the Ocean, which witnessed a process of cross-cultural isomorphism in the commercial contracts used by diverse communities across the ocean. The presentation also seeks to address the question of whether the Santa Catharina and its cargo were “representative” or “typical” of country ships at the time.

Date: Monday, 2nd December, 2019; Time: 3 – 5 pm

Venue: CSSSC Seminar Room 2, Patuli Campus

Maidul Islam  
(Convener, Seminar Committee)  
All are welcome to attend.