

# THE GLOBAL TRADE ROUTES AND LOCALITIES OF GEMSTONES ACCORDING TO 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ARMENIAN SOURCES

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## Summary

Port cities have long served as key hubs for maritime and overland caravan trade. During the early modern period (app. 1500s–1800s), they saw a surge in the movement of gems, driven by expanded mining activity and rising global demand. Long-distance merchants transported luxury commodities, especially gems, from production centers in Asia to markets across Eurasia and the New World, which in turn solidified the expansion of global trade routes. By the early 1600s, for example, Colombian emeralds had made their way to the Indian subcontinent, where they adorned Mughal court jewels. Though small in size, gems were among the most valuable and mobile early modern commodities. They significantly contributed to global cash flows, linked distant regions, and stimulated long-distance commerce. Yet, despite their significance, the history of gem trade routes remains understudied, largely due to the scarcity and dispersal of archival sources.

We map the major trade routes used by long-distance merchants to transport gems from mining and manufacturing centers to consumption hubs across Eurasia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This includes key West-to-East flows, such as Mediterranean coral reaching the Indian subcontinent and South Indian pearls moving to Basra, two routes often overlooked in historical research. The map is based on two broad sets of archival sources (see *Matenadaran*, *ABMC*, *ASFi*) and illustrates both the maritime routes of European trading companies and the overland caravan routes traveled by merchants like the Armenians of New Julfa, Isfahan.

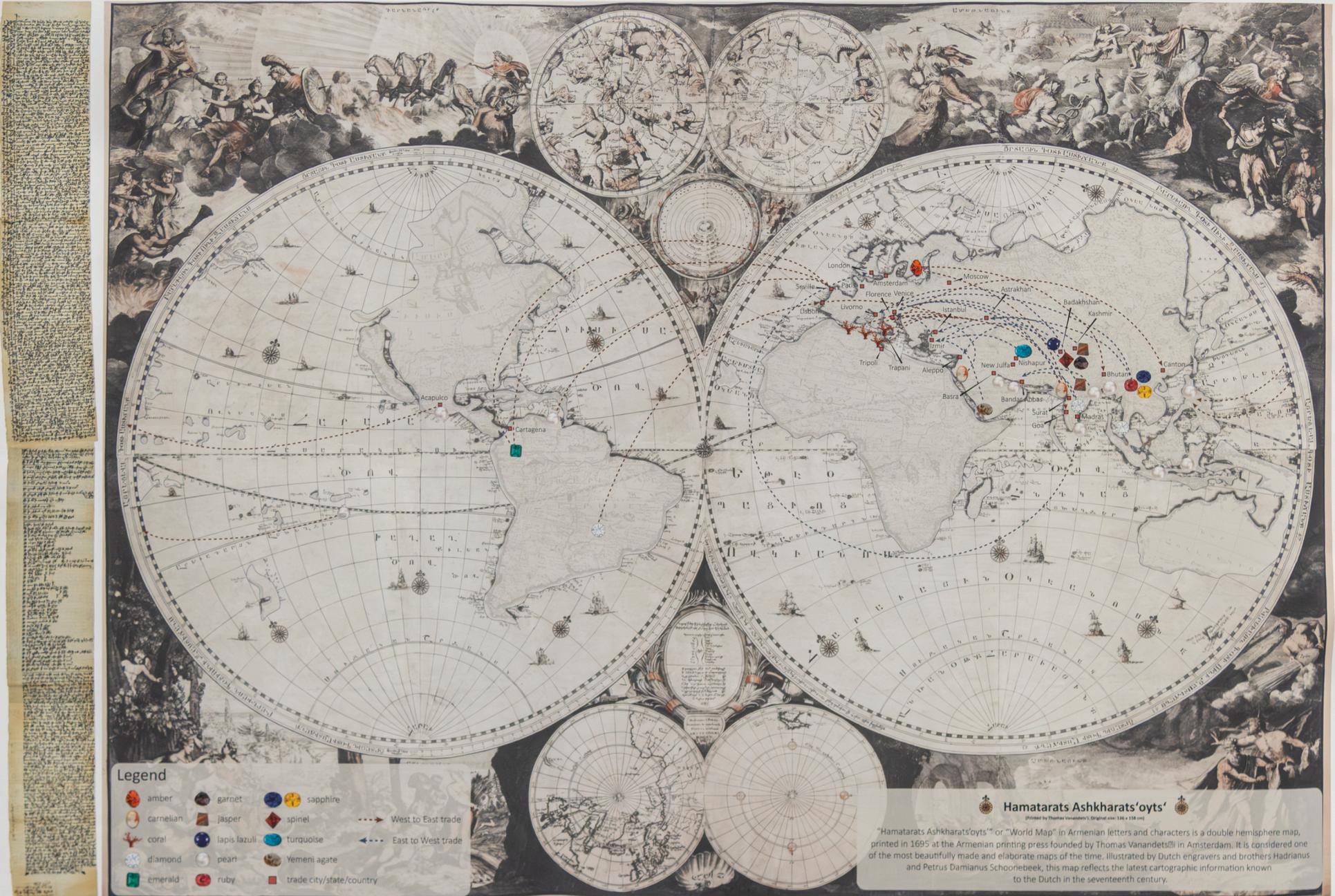
Archival sources reveal that the most sought-after gems in the early eighteenth century included Indian diamonds, Southeast Asian rubies and spinels, pearls from the Persian Gulf, South India, and Sri Lanka, as well as sapphires, turquoise, lapis lazuli, amber, and coral. These gems were traded in global markets such as Surat, Madras, Bombay, and Basra, then transported to centers like London, Amsterdam, and Antwerp for cutting and polishing before reaching final markets in cities such as Venice and Livorno, where they were sold to royalty and the broader public.



Diamond throne (1659), gifted by New Julfa Armenian merchants to the Russian Czar Alexey Mikhaïlovich. The throne is made of sandalwood, gold and silver, studded with 870 diamonds and other gemstones. Currently part of the Armory Collection of the Moscow Kremlin Museums, Russia.



Portrait of a New Julfa Merchant, Oil Painting, ca. 17th Century



## Hamatarats Ashkharats'oyts'

"Hamatarats Ashkharats'oyts'" or "World Map" in Armenian letters and characters is a double hemisphere map, printed in 1695 at the Armenian printing press founded by Thomas Vanandetsi in Amsterdam. It is considered one of the most beautifully made and elaborate maps of the time, illustrated by Dutch engravers and brothers Hadrianus and Petrus Damianus Schoonebeeck, this map reflects the latest cartographic information known to the Dutch in the seventeenth century.

## Archival Sources

The primary source materials used to create this map have been examined in detail for the first time. The information it presents is the product of nearly a decade of original research. The first source is an unpublished eighteenth-century manuscript written in the 1730s by an Armenian gem merchant based in India. This document offers rare insights into the prominent gem commodities of the eighteenth century across the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and beyond, detailing their places of origin, market prices, and consumer preferences for color and cut.

The second source is a collection of approximately 500 documents housed in the State Archives of Florence, catalogued under *Acquisti e Doni, Busta 123*. This set consists primarily of business correspondence among members of the Armenian Khwāja Minasian family firm, which was exclusively engaged in the transcontinental gem trade between the 1670s and 1750s. *Acquisti 123* provides a unique record of hundreds of the family's gem transactions, offering an unparalleled view into the global gem trade of the period.

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