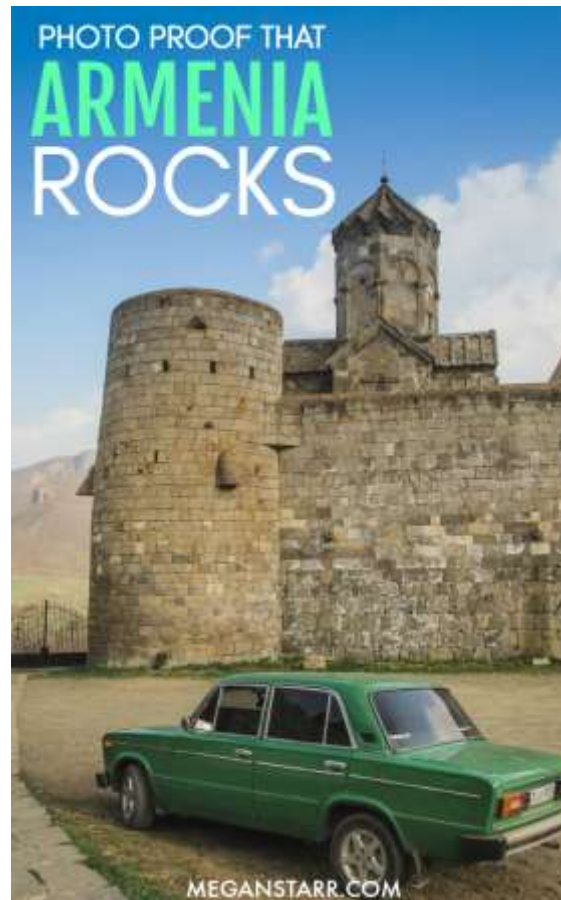


**Construction of Visual Representation of Armenia as a Travel Destination:
A synthesis of tourist and local gazes**



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Student Name: Nane Khachatryan

Student Number: 492704

Supervisor: Nicky van Es

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

This paper studies the visual forms of representation of Armenia as a travel destination since 17th century until today. It reviews the issue in historical progression, finding the transformations, similarities and/or differences in visual messages created by European travelers and local tourism authorities. Exploring the early drawings by western travelers, this paper builds an iconographic tradition for depicting Armenia through the tourist gaze. Its logical continuation is studied in modern and post-modern visuals, mainly photographs, created by tourists (TGC) and destination marketing companies (DMC) in Armenia. Hence, the central research question of this paper answers how the visual representation of Armenia as a travel destination has developed from 17th century until now, and how is this being negotiated by tourists. The case of Armenia is chosen as a newly emerging tourist destination with ancient history that has been transformed from a Silk Road country to a hidden, off-the-beaten track land, as a location to be explored by adventurous post-tourists. Moreover, this region with its different influences from previous hegemonies with Iran, Turkey and Russia, and its ongoing political conflicts, opens up new possibilities in exploring tourism development in the Middle East. Three periods are categorized in investigating this evolution: pre-modern times of first Western exploration; Soviet era of place branding; and post-modern age in construction of destination image (DI). Main data for the research are drawings and photographs created by several generation of travelers found in early travelogues and modern travel blogs, brochures, posters and post-cards promoted by local DMCs and national tourist organizations (NTO). These images were studied through visual and textual content analysis, mise-en-scene and semiotic analysis. The concepts of these images point on several main aspects of representing Armenia, out of which two dominate throughout the development: nature landscapes (mountains, rocks, canyons), and culture (medieval monasteries, monuments surrounded by nature). The combination of photographs and texts construct an affective image of Armenia as a heavily-cultured hidden country, with sublime nature of highlands.

Key words: Armenia, visual, representation, travel, gaze.

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1. Introduction

“To collect photographs, is to collect the world”. Susan Sontag, On Photography, 1978.

Humankind has been constantly moving around and recording by means of various media what it encountered in pursuit of answers about the world and itself. “A picture is worth a thousand words”, the idiom has been fundamental in perception of images as carriers of information or knowledge, while leaving ample ground for interpretations. The power of visual materials has been extensively examined in arts and other sociological discourses, becoming also a research topic for tourism theory. The question of the sightseeing or the eye-witnessing act is argued not to always have been dominant in the arts of traveling (Adler, 1989). Earlier travelers used to write detailed observations about their experience, praising also the educational or enlightening aspect of traveling. The practice of sightseeing developed overtime, when printing culture and later on optical devices changed the way people could experience the world (Henes & Muray, 2016). The role of the eye, the act of gazing became a part of travel performance especially after Renaissance (Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000; Larsen, 2008).

Likewise, traveling as a form of generating knowledge about the world, and image-making as a way of interpreting or representing it, has been systematically shaped in the West. Although early forms of traveling were not limited to the European countries alone, tourism as a new practice of the leisure class was introduced to the West from 17th century Grand Tours onwards to the first package tours by Thomas Cook in 19th century and the development of mass tourism after WWII (MacCannell, 1976; Sharpley, 2018). During this long period, another development was taking place in the field of optical devices, especially the emergence of mechanical reproduction and first photo cameras (Benjamin, 1937; Barthes, 1977; Henes & Muray, 2016). These two fields were and are still interconnected, as image production became a predominant purpose for traveling.

For the western societies, taking pictures of different destinations is also a means of collecting and arranging them into European classification (Osborne, 2000). This representational culture is especially relevant for “the other”, eastern part of the world (Said, 1978), which itself is quite diverse with its historical and cultural aspects. During earlier periods of studying the East, vast territories of the Ottoman Empire were the first oriental lands for

European travelers. Even today, Turkey is represented as “the bridge between East and West” and is viewed as a cultural Orient, whereas another great power in the name of Russia, has gained the position of economic “other” to the West. What is hidden between these superpowers is sometimes marginalized in academic and social discourses, or ignored from the perspective of tourism, depriving the Near East (today known as the Middle East) region from many specificities and cultural layers.

Hence, as claimed by Urry (1990), the tourist gaze is a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon. It can be explained on the example of less known countries in the Middle East, and how their representation evolved during centuries. This paper explores the development of visual representation of Armenia as a travel destination starting from early 17th up to 21st century. The case of Armenia is highly interesting to analyze for its geographical position, occupied back and forth by Safavid Persia, Ottoman Turkey and later on Russia, which is an exceptional historical situation for a country trapped in between. All these three powers have been in the focus of the West for centuries. Referring to the concepts of Orientalism and “otherness” (Said, 1978; MacCannell, 1976; Munt, 1994; Macfie, 2002), how the Western countries gazed these regions has changed depending on the regional hegemony. Therefore, it can be argued, that the gaze is also politically and economically constructed to perceive the places of interest. In this mainstream or generalizing interpretation, the visual appropriation and depiction of Armenia passed through a unique development, which is the main topic of this research.

Whether this country subjugated by its neighbors, or has an independent image in the eyes of western beholders, can uncover many aspects of nation building processes both internally and internationally. What factors influence the appropriation of Armenia and how they are interpreted, is another important aspect of this issue. Thus, the central research question of this study explores how the visual representation of Armenia as a travel destination has developed from 17th century until now, and how is this being negotiated by tourists. Also referring to different techniques of depiction, the paper investigates how was the visual image of Armenia historically developed from sketches to photographs, from printed travel albums to online blogs. There are two reasons for following this process from 17th century: first, the illustrated travel accounts came into being in 17th and 18th century in Europe. Secondly, the roots of central themes in contemporary image of Armenia can be traced to the early travelogues, structuring a type of iconography specific for this country.

This research refers to three main time-periods: first part reflects on pre-modern western travels and exploration in Armenia, covering from 17th to 19th centuries. Armenia was represented to the West through the accounts of voyagers from France, England, Germany and very few travelers who came from Italian, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese descent (Vartoogian, 1974). Their accounts became an important research subject by Armenian and later on European scholars (Vartoogian, 1974; Bock, 1984; Karapetian, 1986; Maranci, 2001; Baghdiantz, 1999; Tajirian, 2012). These early travelogues are important not only for their historical, anthropological and archeological data, or for the illustrations depicting monuments that have long vanished, but they first of all demonstrate the early mode of representation of Armenia by the West (Maranci, 2001). These lithographs are unique documents and visual evidence for Armenian and international political discourses. They represent territories as a part of historical name of Greater Armenia, some of which are now disputed areas between current neighboring countries like Turkey and Azerbaijan. Therefore, including these travelers in this research may stir more discussions in other academic and socio-political disciplines.

The second period focuses on the soviet representation of Armenia in 20th century. It shows the transition from the visuals created by travelers to the ones selected and projected by local actors. Being a subject of the Russian Empire from the beginning of the 19th century, Armenia was Sovietized in 1921. For the sake of economic development, soviet authorities created regional destination marketing organizations (DMO) that carried out the marketing of touristic potential of each republic. Armenia was here promoted under a regional identity, it maintained some national features, but it predominantly served to enrich the destination image (DI) of the soviet region as a whole. During the soviet period Armenia first time was branded from within, represented through visuals like artistic posters or analogue photographs. This second phase explores the issue of how the projected DI of Armenia developed throughout the last century, creating a new dimension in representational tradition.

The third period reflects on the post-modern Armenia with a new wave of international tourism in 2000s. Creating an internal contemporary image can cause some tension between projected and perceived messages about destination. This chapter investigates the dialogue between DMO and TGC (tourist-generated content) dealing with the question of how the negotiation between projected and perceived images can contribute to the overall representation of Armenia. Fifty non-commercial, independent travel bloggers' websites were studied with their

photographic content. This chapter stands as a logical continuation to the previous two, showing the differences and similarities in this expanded tradition. Similar studies have also been conducted for other countries like Romania, Peru, Palestine, Seoul, Taiwan, etc. (Akehurst, 2008; Cakmak & Isaak, 2012; Hunter, 2012; Mak, 2016; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2012; Tudor, 2013). However, none of these papers studied the development of the DI in such an extensive manner, as this research did. Moreover, previous studies focus either mainly on top-down practices, investigating and suggesting strategical tools for DMOs, or they study the TGC in order to understand tourists' expectations. This paper brings these two perspectives into dialogue, making an effort to understand the co-creative process of destination image.

The relevance of this paper has another unique point due to the chosen case. The countries on international trading routes and especially on the Silk Road were one of the first travel destinations in late medieval ages. In art historical discourse of the 19-20th century Europe, Armenian culture was introduced as “mixed arts” – *Mischkunst* (Woermann, 1905), inferior to the “other” - Byzantine and Eastern (Arabic, Persian) cultures. Therefore, it was gazed upon as a “sub-other” culture with orientalist perspective (Azatyan, 2012; Said, 1978), and considered as a representative of Eastern Christian world. On the one hand, this “in between” position is another dimension for Armenian case, as it does not stay on the simplistic level of dualism of East versus West, but presents a mixture, a bridging platform, where these two poles meet and mutually influence one another. On the other hand, this intermediary position limited recent research about Armenia on international level.

Moreover, a landlocked country with closed borders on its west and east, and ongoing regional conflicts, makes this particular case even more revealing. It can yield new sociological studies, as well as give insights about possible ways of development of tourism in similar geopolitical situations. There is a lack of academic analyses on tourism phenomenon in Armenia. The early visuals representing Armenia were studied for ethnographic, sociological and wider historical purposes (Vartoogian, 1974; Bock, 1984; Karapetian, 1986; Maranci, 2001; Baghdiantz, 1999; Tajirian, 2012), leaving out the tourism aspect from research. A number of studies were carried out about soviet propaganda in the field of tourism (Richmond, 2003; Gorsuch, 2011; Gorsuch & Koenker, 2013). However, this period and its impact on Armenia has not yet been studied through the case of visual representations.

Ongoing tourism marketing, as a new developing sphere for independent Armenia, requires an in depth research about the strategies of using images in DI promotion. The national tourism organizations (NTO) do not carry out systematic analysis on TGC due to the lack of financial means and human resources. A local tour agent Sona Hakobyan mentioned in her interview that she considers travel bloggers to have a quite narrow audience and hence little impact on the destination image of Armenia. This paper brings together images from different periods created by travelers and by local actors, analyzing them through tourism related theories. The bloggers' photos fill in the gaps of local promotion, highlighting what is being missed and devalued, therefore revealing the tourist gaze and needs. The social relevance of this paper can be achieved through its findings. It is important for the local actors working on creation and promotion of Armenian tourism image, to be aware of the TGC. This may help to understand what can be changed in local promotion policies through this dialogical approach, finding potential ways to improve the country's image in future. Therefore, this paper can open a discussion for alternative policy tools used by NTOs and DMCs in Armenia.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Development and impact of visual materials

In her extensive work *On Photography* (1978), Sontag analyses the perception of the world through images, where the picture, primarily the photograph, has been so successful in representing the world, that the medium itself soon became the standard of the beautiful, constructing general notion of how the world should look like. Human race has always been reproducing the surrounding world and seeking the truth about it through images. Before the invention of photography in 1839, artisanal images in a variety of forms, have been accompanying people in interpreting their experiences. The word image comes from the Latin word *imitari* – mimic, copy, resemble, which means it contains a system of signs for constructing representation or “the copy” of the object of gaze (Barthes, 1977; Urry, 1990; Van Leeuwen, 2011).

Due to the technological development, manually created images – drawings, are opposed to the mechanical reproduction – namely photography, as the former has a cluster of symbols, it is codified, whereas photography is considered to be “a message without a code” (Barthes, 1977, p.17). This nature of the drawing is firstly connected with rules and codes of transposition, which are constructed historically, like the introduction of perspective during the Renaissance. Secondly, this act of coding is selective, as it points out the significant part from the less important one. Drawing can transpose only very little, depending on what kind of message or gaze the artist wants to construct. Today we may argue that photography can also choose its subject of significance, using various programs and gadgets even a photograph can be codified (Larsen, 2008), however it cannot intervene into the object, except for some trick effects. Drawing has a style, which makes its denotation less objective than that of the photograph.

The meanings attached to the visual imitations or the message, are culturally constructed codes, how the artist sees the world, what they choose to transpose and in which way. If in the case of photography, as a pure, unbiased and uncoded medium (Bazin, 1967; Barthes, 1977; Sontag, 1978; Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000; Larsen, 2008), the relationship between denoted and connoted messages is between nature and culture, then in case of the drawings it is held between two cultures. Therefore, there is a different ethics for drawing and one for photography. Thus, visual semiotics (Barthes, 1977) should be examined in line with iconography (Van Leeuwen,

2011), as the former only examines image in itself, treating cultural meanings as an existing reality which is shared by everyone who is acculturated to popular culture and thus image consumption. Whereas, iconography also brings in the question of the context where and how the image was created and how its representation was historically built. This representational meaning can be explained literally and visually when combined together in illustrated books.

Other studies consider photography to be social and historical rather than realistic or mere technical discourse (Berger, 1972; Burgin, 1982; Larsen, 2008). Photographs are also man-made and dictate certain ways of seeing, hence they are also doing it through internal codes. This means that the photographic medium with its connoted message is not radically different from the early images, as it is more important what meaning individuals and societies ascribe to the image, rather than its actual material (Larsen, 2008). Moreover, image production as well as photography has technological, semiotic and social hybrid-ness, depending on the human and technological actors involved in its creation, in other words, its impact can be studied through actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005), with a specific hybrid of “networked-camera-tourist” (Larsen, 2008). Therefore, the meaning of the photographs are open to infinite interpretations and reflections, allowing the viewers to dream into it, turning it into something individual to their own associations and memories (Osborne, 2000).

2.2. Image creation and tourism

“As soon as there was photography there was travel photography”, Peter Osborne, 2000; p 3.

The scientific progress after Renaissance opened up lots of questions about the surrounding worlds, creating emptiness and uncertainty. To overcome the anxiety of this age, a need of self-discovery became an important source of dynamism (mobility, traveling) and creativity (image-creation, narratives). As if creating images could bring meaning to those vacant spaces, thus making them more significant and easier to possess (Osborne, 2000). It is essential to mention the parallel development of new means of transport, together with the improvement of travel writing forms and, most importantly, the new advanced techniques of visual recording: etchings and woodcuts, lithography, photography and stereoscopy, panoramas, dioramas, and the cinematograph (Henes & Muray, 2016). All these devices made it possible for the world to be

represented as a picture – a framed visual display laid out for the spectator. Heidegger even called this reconfiguring gesture through the human perspective as a founding act of modernity, an era that he called “age of the world [as] picture” (Heidegger, 1977: p. 128-30).

Photography as an accompanying or even attributive part of tourism became a subject of numerous studies (Sontag, 1978; Albers & James, 1988; Rojek & Urry, 1997; Osborne, 2000; Hunter, 2007; Larsen, 2008), being extensively analyzed through the concept of “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1990), which describes tourism as a predominantly visual practice. Though Urry (1990) does not undermine other senses involved in tourism experience, it is important to mention that setting up necessary conditions for visual practices is much easier (owning a camera, creating photo-stops, photo-tours) than for other aspects (Osborne, 2000). The gaze is itself constructed through signs, and tourism industry in turn works through cluster of signs. Travelers seeking for sights to be captured and framed, become semioticians themselves, appropriating everything as a sign of its own (Urry, 1990). He categorizes objects of gaze in terms of romantic-collective, historical-modern and authentic-inauthentic. These dichotomies are important for understanding the social construct of the gaze and how it changes as a consequence of history, tourism practices and needs, globalization and standardization.

The ascribed truthful nature of photography appears to serve as an evidence that something exists or it happened somewhere, thus turning into an object of gaze (Urry, 1990; Burke, 2001). These pieces of evidence are separate consistencies of the world, a medium for transcribing the reality. However, as photography functions through the human and non-human network (Latour, 2005) the object of the gaze is selected, structured and edited. It can interpret the world in an idealized or romanticized frame. This technology also democratizes all aspects of human experience, as it both turns everything into photographic image and allows anyone to photograph it (Urry, 1990). Unlike the hand-made drawings, which require apprenticeship, photography enables everyone to interpret the sights or objects of gaze. Modern photography created by tourists is more a process of confirmation than of a discovery, as their gaze is preconditioned by previous images seen, creating a “hermeneutic circle” (Albers & James, 1988; Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000; Burke, 2001; Larsen, 2008). This constructed mental image makes tourists find those sights to reaffirm their existence in reality, to find its original or authentic source. Even the early photographers selected and composed their subjects in a way that echoed

paintings, woodcuts and engravings (Burke, 2001) which were disseminated by illustrated travelogues and guidebooks.

2.3. Illustrated travel books

The channels for spreading images were closely linked to the book industry before the emergence of modern web. The mass production of the book started from 1830s and it progressed after the emergence of more advanced printing techniques (Myers & Harris, 1999; Hall, 2011). The sense of amusement caused by images that were now incorporated into books brought wider promotion to this industry. Topographical books, which were also called “view-books” (Hall, 2011) with series of steel engravings of maps, cultural monuments and landscapes, became highly popular among the middle class. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries steel engraved books dominated the market. The images went through another long chain of production from the artist’s design (sketch) to the engraving by another master and then to the printing process. It is here that the distortion of the initial message of the image can be traced to.

England and France were remarkably active in production and trade of illustrated books since the sixteenth century (Bohls & Duncan, 2005; Youngs, 2006; Fraser, 2008; Henes & Muray, 2016; Mainardi, 2017). By the end of the 18th century woodcut had become less popular in France, instead copper plates came into extensive use. Printing of the copper plates was a difficult process, therefore etchings were preferred as they were made faster. The stages leading to the printing process involved several specialists who draw, transferred, designed, matched and edited the prints. The art of engravings was closely intertwined with the fine arts and was influenced by the 17-18th century Dutch graphic masters (Hall, 2011). In France the 18th century fiction books and even genres like poems contained engravings, guaranteeing high sales for these books (Griffiths, 2003).

Eighteenth century was a groundbreaking era for European geographical expansionism, which was accompanied by huge growth of the publishing industry, including travel accounts where images had an essential role. Earlier illustrations of topography from 17th century were mainly done for military purposes and national defense. Depicting the places on the spot by soldiers and sailors was perceived to be more reliable than the written accounts, therefore whoever in the forces could draw, had a great value for the expedition. As Britain began to

establish colonial outposts, topographical draftsmen became crucial, accompanying the voyages of Captain Cook (1768-79) and Lord Macartney's embassy to China in the 1790s (Bohls & Dunkan, 2005). The aesthetic part of topography was developed in later decades, when they were perceived as works of art on their own (Haskell, 1993; Burke, 2001). Up until 1850, prints were also a major feature of various travel accounts, from archaeological documents to picturesque albums. This led to the illustrated travel accounts becoming an established genre by 1820 (Fraser, 2008). Another important aspect in the rise of illustrated travel accounts was the invention of lithography, which “transformed drawing from private into public art” (Mainardi, 2017, p. 13), ensuring that the lithographs will no longer stay in artists’ portfolios, but will be available for a wider public. Lithography was at the time considered the 19th century media explosion, just like photography a few decades later (Mainardi, 2017).

The interconnectedness of book industry and traveling was already apparent at the end of the 18th century, when travel accounts and topographical prints benefited from the development of the Grand Tour (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990; Myers & Harris, 1999; Hall, 2011). The English aristocracy as a token of status tended to decorate their noble halls with etchings of Venice and Rome produced in 1740s and largely intended for the consumption of cultural tourists. These images were rather visual souvenirs than forms of high art and were a part of cultural baggage of the English Grand Tourists (Hall, 2011). But with the decline of the Grand Tour, these sightseeing journeys – visual observation (Adler, 1989; Sharpley, 2018), also were taken over by mass tourism. The rise of modern tourism began with the opening of Continental Europe to British travelers that happened after Napoleon’s defeat in 1815 (Youngs, 2006). Thomas Cook’s tours with preset itineraries and attractions, with the growing use of guidebooks led to uniformity and control. However, soon many travelers began to distinguish themselves from mass tourists, giving preference to “non-ordinary” travel activities and destinations (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990; Rojek & Urry, 1997). Therefore, not only European and Mediterranean countries became object of interest, but soon far-away lands of Middle East also attracted new travelers’ attention (Osborne, 2000; Hukford-Jones & Roberts, 2005; Youngs, 2006).

2.4. Gazing the Other

Travel writers known between the 16th to the beginning of the 19th centuries were missionaries, diplomats, merchants, explorers, colonizers, and scientists (Bohls & Duncan, 2005). Up until the 20th century travel writing was vastly identified with interest of European societies who wished to bring the non-European world into the position where it could be controlled and influenced (Youngs, 2006). This inclination should be understood both as indications of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the beginnings of global consciousness (Mainardi, 2017; Hukford-Jones, Roberts, 2005). 18th century travels and records brought trade capitalism together with national interests in imperial expansion of Europe. Unknown parts of the world were explored with the aim to find potential profit, exploitable real estate and also scientific knowledge. The latter also increased the national and personal prestige of the traveler (Bohls & Duncan, 2005). The cultural limits for European tourists inside Europe were bounded by Venice and Vienna, followed to the east by the territories of Christendom's main antagonist, - the Ottoman Empire (Bohls & Duncan, 2005).

Traveler-explorers recorded the East as "Other" world with its nature, culture and race, which could be explained as a multi-cultural approach, a recognition to the diversity (Said, 1978; Urry, 1990; Youngs, 2006). However, it can be argued, that the interest in less progressive countries was reinforcing the position of the West that had passed through the medieval or primitive phase, in which the other regions were believed to be stuck in. Levi-Strauss (1958) called it "false evolutionism", when the representation conformed the stages of human development to the Western model. Europeans tended to see in the East the very same development stages which they had already overcome and not merely in terms of aesthetics, but also regarding politics, requiring an urge to connect the civilized part of humanity and their cousins struggling in backwardness (Youngs, 2006). This historical gaze from the heights of the imperial power pervaded at all levels of the travelers' representational practices.

These topics about the peripheries of European metropolitan and the cultural limits of Grand tour, exploring the gaze on the Near East are explained through the concept of orientalism (Said, 1978). Since antiquity the Orient has been perceived as a place of romance, exoticism, memorable experiences and traditions. Since the above mentioned illustrated book industry was dominant in France and Britain, the perception towards Orient and its representation in European

experience was especially lively in these countries. It was less so among the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Italians, the Swiss, Russians and Germans, the latter, as will be discussed below, gave rise to another attitude towards the East through the Aryan myth. Europe established itself as a contrasting image of the Orient, positioning it as the Other. Introducing the East into European traditions, creating a peculiar type of knowledge (which carried political weight) about it, was another Western way of domination. By showing the backwardness or as Youngs (2006) puts it, the childhood phase of the Orient, the West sets itself against it, representing it as a surrogate and even inferior self.

That same era of traveling to the East coincided also with the Romanticist movement in arts, where the poets and artists praised the sublime nature, sunsets and landscapes (Urry, 1990; Haskell, 1993; Burke, 2001). Tourism inherited the sense of reverie and urge to experience the sublime from Romanticism. Travelers were looking for simplicity of forms and the absolute remoteness of places or monuments. The perception of immense and powerful qualities of natural phenomena, limitless space, height or depth, as well as wild authenticity of remote cultures and individuals were in the core of the sublime. Behdad (1994) uses the expression “desire for the Orient” to describe the romantic impulse that guided the travelers to the East. However, the pursuit of authentic, unspoiled by over-civilization, romanticized East, comes also to reinforce the image of a static, decaying Orient (Youngs, 2006). The decay of the East is reflected by the depictions of ruins, as the most preferred element in travelers’ representations. Studies show that ruins were associated with the sublime for their monumentalism, their old age, standing in solitude and wilderness (Osborne, 2000).

The constructed notion of Orient encompassed the countries in North Africa all the way to the Ottoman Empire and the Far East. After the Second World War it also referred to Russia and the communist countries of the Soviet Union, turning into “a politically armed Orient” contrasted against the United States (Said, 1978; p. 104). As for the early travelers to the East, their gaze and representation of those lands were very much modulated of the hegemonic powers of specific epochs. Since the eighteenth century with the decline of Ottoman power and incapacity of the Persian state after military conquests of Russia in the nineteenth century, Middle East even attracted more attention from the Western political powers (Youngs, 2006). This tendency was also reflected in travel accounts with the increase in the number of copies and the development of more scientific approach. In fact, the Western illustrated book market had

been saturated with the views on the Middle East by 1842 (Hall, 2011). After Napoleonic invasion in 1798, Egypt became the most popular destination in the Middle East for European travelers, archeologists and scientists. Through thousand illustrations depicting monuments and ruins, Egypt was as if re-discovered by being represented and recreated in terms of European gaze (Osborne, 2000). Thus, the latter constructed a refined knowledge to be employed for understanding Egypt by successive visitors. Images made these new, unknown lands available putting them at the disposal of the viewer.

2.5.Middle East and Armenia

The European gaze was mainly studied vis a vis the great political powers and reflected their claims over the East. The emergence of Eastern Question in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire is hence analyzed from the perspective of dominance by Britain or Russia, leaving aside the specifics of subordinate territories of Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and Armenia. The latter entered the European political arena as “Armenian Question” after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (Suny, Göçek, Naimark, 2011). The political positioning of European imperial power against the declining fame of Ottoman Empire also enabled the European travelers to interpret these eastern destinations accordingly.

Travel accounts about Armenia are known from the early seventeenth century and there are a number of voyagers who included Armenia in their great journey to the Middle East or even farther (Tavernier, 1675; Chardin, 1686; Le Bruyn, 1714; Tournefort, 1717; Ker Porter, 1817; Dubois, 1839; Texier, 1842; Curzon, 1854; Brosset, 1860; Deyrolle, 1869; Tozer, 1881; Lynch, 1901). Many travelers had rich descriptive texts in an apparent effort to transmit their visual experience through words. Some travel accounts also contain impressive illustrated parts, which have so far been viewed and analyzed only as a supplement to the text and not as independent messages. These travel accounts became a subject of studies in art historical discourse, to reveal the representation of Armenian architecture and art (Strzygowski 1918, Maranci, 2001; Azatyan, 2012; Khachatryan, 2014).

Art history as an academic discipline formed in Germany employed visuals as one of its main research mediums. Therefore drawings and photographs done by the European travelers became a great source for the early art historians to learn and position other cultures (Schnaase,

1844; Kugler, 1848; Woermann, 1900; Neuwirth, 1921). Azatyan (2012) explains this as an expression of cultural nationalism, which was an important tool for constructing a nation-state whenever political nationalism alone was too weak for that purpose. The beginning of the 19th century was a time of reinforcing the foundations of Prussian state, it was possible to bring all the parts of the nation together under the umbrella of a united nation-state by reviving the ethnic, religious, linguistic and aesthetic past. Handbooks of art history presented a compilation of different “worlds” shown through illustrations and photographs, represented in a way to evaluate and distinguish their own culture from the rest.

German scholars came up with another European construct of the Aryan myth in the early nineteenth century based on the linguistic foundation of a common Indo-European language (Said, 1978; Youngs, 2006; Azatyan, 2012). Through this concept language and race became strongly intertwined, separating “the good” and “the bad” Orientals, hence India fell under the former characterization while the rest of Asia, North Africa and Islamic countries were labeled inferior (Said, 1978). This Aryan connection led many foreign travelers to gaze on and interpret the “Other” cultures inhabiting in the regions of Safavid Persia and Ottoman Empire. Among these countries and cultures Armenia gained the position of the “sub-other” (Azatyan, 2012), a culture classified after Byzantine, Arab or Persian Others. Its culture was thus described as an “intermediate link” between metropolitan arts of East and West (Azatyan, 2012). Through these concepts Europe developed a complex tradition of gaze towards Armenia, which underwent a number of transformations together with the political and economic impacts in the region.

2.6. Projected images for place branding

The institutionalized travelogues and academic publications were, in fact, the first resources for spreading awareness about different parts of the world and hence promoting those destinations before the advent of localized marketing strategies. Recent studies analyze the destination image (DI) to have been initially created by local actors and afterwards being re-interpreted by travelers, differentiating images into projected from within the country and

perceived by the tourists (Pike & Page, 2013; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Hunter, 2012; Mak, 2017; Molinilo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez & Buhalis, 2017; Li & Deng, 2018).

However, early foreign representation can also lay in foundations of newly developing destination promotion, turning the previously perceived images into projected DI for modern times. The twentieth century became the time for Armenia to construct its own image to be perceived by others. Thus, the foundation of contemporary projected DI of Armenia by national tourist organizations (NTO) can be traced back to earlier and predominantly to the twentieth century visualizations, revealing a complex representational tradition.

Therefore, before exploring the photographs created by the modern travelers, it is necessary to have a look at an important change in the development of Armenia's visual image due to the geopolitical transitions. This change that covered almost the whole twentieth century, then served as a foundation for contemporary representation of Armenia in the 21st century. In 1920 Armenia became a part of the newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The region fell behind the "iron curtain", which as promptly put by Winston Churchill, "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic...descended across the Continent" (Richmond, 2003: p. 8). For the economic reasons and competing politics with the West, Soviet Union also invested in development of domestic and international tourism (Richmond, 2003; Gorsuch, 2011; Gorsuch & Koenker, 2013). Domestic tourism was perceived as a tool of self-improvement and socialist state-building by encouraging patriotism. International tourism was given another boost with the foundation of the Soviet international tourist agency of Intourist in 1929. The institution was initially designed for Soviet citizens to travel abroad and compare their capitalist system with their socialist reality, which was agitated to provide a better quality of life. However, Intourist also encouraged visits of western tourists in order to ensure an inflow of foreign currency to the region (Gorsuch, 2011).

Developing tourism was one of the ways of competition between capitalist West and socialist East, and organizing good package tours, providing quality accommodation aimed to reinforce the power of Soviet states. In order to attract customers and have a better image of a reliable organization, Intourist modeled itself after western tourist model of Thomas Cook. However, tourism was too important as a political and social-economic tool to be left to private sector alone. Information provided to the tourists was strongly regulated, although in late 1950's during the "Thaw" initiated by Khrushchev, the regime relaxed the control over the information

exchange. Soviet guidebooks promoted knowledge-based travel focused on cultural tourism with many historical facts and less or even no discussions on restaurants, shops and other leisure activities. Guidebooks, brochures and postcards highlighted architectural accomplishments and economic achievements, representing cities as open-air museums with architectural symbols exhibited as art objects (Gorsuch & Koenker, 2013).

The spatial component was also added to the representation of Soviet states, making rivers, lakes, mountains and ancient ruins a part of regional identity. Visuals were particularly highlighted by the state: amateur photographers were encouraged to go to the field to frame the natural landscapes, famous buildings, folkloric dresses and local faces, making the beauty of the land a public treasure, represented for the delight of a wider audience. It is noteworthy, that Soviet ideology in its representation style had the element of forgetting or excluding certain landmarks and focusing instead on other symbols that promoted the glory of the city. The latter was preconditioned by the regime's leaders, reflecting the authoritarian system (Abrahamian, 2003; Gorsuch, 2011; Gorsuch & Koenker, 2013). This policy of reshaping the history can be traced in photographs and other visual materials of Soviet tourism promotion.

The soviet propaganda of nearly seventy years obviously influenced the contemporary perception of independent Republic of Armenia. It was represented as a part of a larger regional entity, as a manifestation of socialistic values and investments. Things changed after the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Since the 2000s tourism industry was pronounced a developing economic sector in the independent Republic of Armenia (Tovmasyan, 2016). The promotion of a country, its place marketing and creation of its positive image or reputation, is argued to be an important function of the governments in the era of competition between states (Dickinson, 2007; Balakrishnan & Kerr, 2013). In this age of globalization, the world became one huge market, where each region, country or city has to compete with every other for its share of the world's commercial, political, social and cultural transactions. To do so, it is critical to develop a brand image, to work on branding the spaces (Anholt, 2010; Moor, 2003). To be observed as a spatial entity, the space needs to be branded: branding determines space (Sonnenburg & Baker, 2013). Place branding should create a unique destination image that identifies and differentiates particular destination by selecting a consistent brand element mix (Cai, 2002; Qu, Kim, Im, 2011). Therefore, place marketing and destination branding plays an important role in tourism

market. It is acknowledged as a pillar of the future growth and sustainability of touristic destinations in ever expanding competitive market (UNWTO, 2011).

The main bodies and strategic leaders in charge of this process are NTOs and DMCs, which coordinate all the elements that construct a destination (marketing, attractions, amenities, access, and pricing) (UNWTO, 2007). Brand elements in the basic level can be understood as the place symbols, which make the destination identifiable and different from other places. Moreover, symbols create the tangible, visual image of the place, providing it with a recognition value. In order to succeed in tourism economy, it is important for these destination symbols to be visually differentiated from their competitors (Balakrishnan & Kerr, 2013). It is argued, that the environments, which are visually distinct are more likely to be consumed than the places with standardized views (Urry, 1990).

Apart from the visual factor, these images should also be “charged” with meaning, they should connote a message, which will help in creating a special DI. Successful DMOs present their places through stories, which nowadays have become more and more multi-dimensional. With the emergence of first organizations responsible for place marketing in as early as 16th century (Pike & Page, 2013), it was believed that stories and messages representing the places were owned and solely done by the local authorities. However, with the advent of technologies and digital age, everyone became a storyteller and a photographer, making the destination marketing and image branding a co-creative process (Sonnenburg & Baker, 2013).

Destination image can be defined as a cluster or sum of beliefs, perceptions and impressions that a person constructs around a destination, or which are applied to it by the local promoters (Mak, 2017). In today’s media field, projected online destination image is built by special identity of the destination and by the local actors’ marketing strategies. Projected DI affects the tourists’ imagination, it pre-shapes and directs their gaze when they travel. These projected icon-images also play a huge role in opening up a hermeneutic circle of representation (Urry, 1990). In its essence, DI is the strategy of generating a singular and iconic representation of a place or highlighting its best elements. Therefore, projected destination image is an intentional marketing effort targeting the consumers - the tourists (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Hunter, 2016; Mak, 2017). There is a lack of studies that compare the projected images with the photographs produced by the tourists, who are considered to be the perceivers of promoted destination image. Whether there are similarities or differences between these two images, it is

useful to consider both of them in studying the overall representation of a particular destination. Moreover, since the production of photographic images is a circular process, there are no clear borders between the projected and perceived images, they complement, re-affirm and transform each other over time.

However, if we examine a projected DI for understanding the modern visual representation of a country – henceforth Armenia, it becomes necessary to mention the concept of synecdoche as one of the main theories of destination image. In tourism, synecdoche is a re-imaging tool, a mechanism condensing the identity of a city or even a country by focusing on one or several highly visual elements of the natural or urban landscapes (Smith, 2005; Hunter, 2016). The synecdoche can be a newly constructed or restored monument, a special district or a major event shaping the identity of the destination. These are specially or strategically selected meaningful symbols, which in addition to providing the destination with identifiable visual elements, also manifest the political and social messages invested in these photos. Therefore, photographs are charged with denotative and connotative features (Hunter, 2016). Denotative elements are analogical to reality and are interpreted or coded literally according to their position and importance within the photo. For example, the snowy mountain is here viewed for its elevation and huge proportions. Whereas, connotative elements are supplementary to the actual reality and are interpreted theoretically. They are read through markers, signs and symbols in the context of visuals (Albers & James, 1988; Larsen, 2008). The high mountain can connote the grandeur of alpine landscapes and supreme beauty. Understanding the denotative elements enables the analysis of connotative message of the destination image. These messages may refer to urban transformation, progress, regeneration, that might influence visitors' experiences. Hence, connotative interpretation of visual elements may uncover the main promotional strategy adopted by DMCs.

These symbols or attributes create a particular attitude among the travelers. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) study destination image based on two dimensions: cognitive and affective. The cognitive aspect is the rational or knowledge-based perception of a destination, whereas the affective dimension refers to feelings or emotions provoked by certain representation of the place. Both images are formed through the projected information both by local actors and by other travelers. However, it is important for the DMCs to consider these dimensions in creating

and exploring process of DI, to develop a more comprehensive brand for demand and supply (Molinilo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez & Buhalis, 2017; Qu, Kim, Im, 2011).

When branding spaces and developing the destination image, desired symbols linked to positive DI can be created by the local actors. It is mainly achieved through architecture, which can be purpose-designed or even staged for the sake of better image. Since semiotics is central in tourism, travel photography and place promotion, architectural icons have gained great popularity for their representational role (Konrad, 2010). Architectural monuments become tourism icons, when they are associated with the destination in a unique way, giving it an international acknowledgement (Balakrishnan & Kerr, 2013). Smith (2005) states, that architecture used to play a highly significant role in *iconomy* – image economy, providing the destination with key markers or synecdoche. Of course, there are places that historically inherited architectural landmarks, which still attract visitors for their grandeur or for their underlying meaning (Great Wall of China, Pyramids of Giza, Eifel tower, etc.). Not surprisingly, DMC produces materials like posters, guidebooks, brochures, postcards and online materials that depict mainly architectural monuments, thus enriching their role in representational chain of DI.

Various studies were carried out researching the projected visual and textual content of NTOs and DMCs in different countries such as Romania, Peru, Palestine, Seoul, Taiwan, etc. (Akehurst, 2008; Cakmak & Isaak, 2012; Hunter, 2012; Mak, 2016; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2012; Tudor, 2013). These countries as emerging travel destinations referred in literature as “other”, off-the-beaten track places to visit (Munt, 1994). They are perceived to have so far maintained their authentic, primitive spirit and are not yet corrupted with the negative impact of mass tourism (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 1979). This arouses romantic or nostalgic feeling among travelers to go and explore those unknown places. A country like Armenia that was in the shadow of Soviet Union for decades suddenly becomes available to independent Western travelers. In the phase of collecting information about a country, travelers are mainly influenced by online media shared by other travelers and printed brochures or guidebooks published by local tourist organizations.

Tourists as semioticians (Urry, 1990), are not only guided by cognitive synecdoche, but they are also influenced by the affective features of visual material, that is attained by photographic mastery. Studies in visual content analysis proved, that compositions and angles affect the perception of the viewer (Mak, 2017; Villarejo, 2007). Shot scales may express the

human experience and emotions derived from one particular area of vision (Deleuze, 2013). Close-ups in travel photography generally indicate deeper engagement with the subject, hence arousing affection. Medium shots, on the other hand, give more cognitive knowledge about the surroundings, having one or several focuses in the frame. Shot angles (eye-level, high, low and bird-eye view) also indicate the extent of “reality” of the subject, where eye-view has more credibility and other angles are considered to be more manipulative (Pan et al., 2014).

2.7. Perceived destination image in travel blogs

The visuals selected for guidebooks by the editors should look professional and striking, meanwhile appear simple enough to persuade would-be tourists that they could have also taken those photos. These promotion prints, therefore, speak the language of the tourists, affecting their decisions and expectations (Osborne, 2000). Tourists expect to see what the advertisers have intended for them to see, thus the tourist is both a consumer of those images and their producer. This dualism is especially discussed in the discourse of post-tourism, where tourists look for “other” opportunities in consumption of services, destinations and promotion (MacCannell, 1976; Munt, 1994). Today post-tourists are aware of the offers shaped for consumption, they engage with it critically and can oppose to that, as an act of “postmodernist resistance” (Munt, 1994). The concept of the “other” in post-modern period thus manifests itself as a strive to differ from the rest of mass tourists by choosing alternative tourist practices and destinations (MacCannell, 1976; Munt, 1994; Jansson, 2018).

The information age and modern web has a predominant role in this change. In tourism studies, the advent of technology has led to classification of tourists into institutionalized and non-institutionalized types (Cohen, 1979; Sharpley, 2018). The first type can be explained by modern values of clear divisions between home and away, work and leisure, nature and urbanism. The prepackaged tours with fixed itineraries, official guidebooks and popular attractions are most descriptive attributes for this group. Whereas non-institutionalized travelers, like post-modern rebels as mentioned above, tend to arrange their own routes making use of the vast information nowadays published freely on the web. However, academics referring these liberalistic tendencies to post-modern era with technological progress (Munt, 1994; Jansson, 2018), seem to compare it mainly with previous, modern concepts of tourism, failing to make

connections to pre-modern state of travel types and practices. Considering that travelers from the 17-19th centuries were not supported by developed tourism infrastructures and lacked broad information about chosen destinations, this condition nevertheless granted them certain independence, turning them into discoverers of the unknown lands. If non-institutionalized post-tourists were called explorers and drifters (Cohen, 1979), then more commonalities can be drawn with them and pre-modern travelers rather than with the modern time tourists. The post-modern tourists, as if nostalgic of the old traveling styles, choose adventurous and independent ways to carry out their journey.

One of the differences between pre and post-modern explorers is their means of transportation and recording devices. Manually created pre-modern travelogues have their post-modern version in the open web. Photographic manifestation of this post-modern tourist gaze now fills up the online platforms, especially the travel “diaries” or blogs, sharing their stories and memories through them, thus endowing their journey with a deeper meaning (Albers & James, 1988; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Mak, 2017). These narratives are personalized and mostly non-promotional, which tend to be perceived more trustworthy than the commercial messages created by NTOs and DMCs (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Mak, 2017). Travelers’ images, their “online word of mouth” affect and challenge the official DI of the countries. Therefore, it is crucial for local marketers to be aware of the TGC, to understand whether that perceived data is consistent with the projected DI, hence improving and updating the overall image.

Travel blogs are web diaries having traveling as a central theme. They have existed since 1997, but only in recent years their growth became exponential (Akehurst, 2009). They are collection of texts, photographs, videos and other mediums representing the tourists’ experiences. Travel blogs can be personal websites or they can be hosted by different providers such as blog sites, guidebook publishers, travel agencies, etc. (Larsen, 2008; Mak, 2017). In this list, the travel bloggers who are unpaid and independent tend to own more credibility among fellow tourists – the future consumers. In sociological terms, we are faced here with the two etic and emic approaches, and the differences between business to business (B2B) and customer to customer (C2C) messages (Banyai & Glover, 2012; Volo, 2012). The latter mainly consists of personalized texts and affective images, representing the emotions evoked by the destination, as revealed by previous studies (Akehurst, 2009; Pan, Lee and Tsai's, 2014). This makes C2C blogs

provide an emic understanding of the travel experiences and the main attributes of the DI for the tourist gaze (Mak, 2017).

These studies of travel blogs, make it possible to suggest that blogging itself is a post-modern tourism practice, as it allows people to be on the road and simultaneously be at home informing their family and friends about their adventures. This interplay of home and away, near and distant, time-space compression can be examined in travel blogging phenomenon (Urry, 1990; Larsen, 2008). Moreover, tourist photography is itself a performance of tourism, as well as a manifestation of the traveler's self, who choosing a different, "other" destinations, frames that otherness in his photographs, and exhibits his heroic, romanticized self (Urry and Larsen, 2011; Lo & McKercher, 2015). This re-affirms the romantic aspect of tourist photography, contributing to the content of the images to be more affective than cognitive, as is found in projected DI.

NTOs create their visual messages through idealization of the destination, whereas the TGC, looking for otherness, may reflect various realities. This may bring to image incongruity with the projected desired DI, opening up the negotiation process: some tourists would adhere the official representation, while others may totally divert from it and create their own interpretation. If it was previously suggested, that photogenic features of the destination is a successful tool for tourist consumption (Urry, 1990), now it can also be added, that the level of consensus in visual messages between place production and place consumption, provides another pull factor for the place (Young, 1999; Lo & McKercher, 2015). The mass produced NTO and DMC images thus encounter independent content generated by the tourists, who may as well focus on non-aesthetic or socially critical topics. Being aware of what is served and staged for them to see, tourists feel the urge to resist it and to see something beyond, a site that was not manipulated or mass reproduced.

This choice represents the victory of individual subjectivity, that is, freedom from mass reproduction or the search for authenticity (MacCannell, 1976; Osborne, 2000). What is not considered in these previous studies, is the stage of development of visual policies for emerging destinations. These arguments are mainly based on commercialized tourist destinations, missing out the places where tourism is not the leading sector of economy and still has not developed a certain DI through promotions. Therefore, they may still maintain the archaic, naïve actualities, which do not yet stage themselves for the tourists, a situation one can find in Armenia.

3. Methodology

This paper studies a wide range of visual and textual materials for understanding the development of the holistic image of Armenia from early travelers in the 17th century until today. This is a qualitative research focusing on visual representation, analyzing etchings, drawings, image posters and photographs depicting Armenia as a tourism destination. The underlying theories for investigating the chronological development of visual depiction of this particular country are examined through the Urrian theory of culturally and socially constructed gaze. This concept is also intertwined with the theories of orientalism together with the Aryan myth (Said, 1978; Azatyan, 2012), and post-modern tourism tendencies of “otherness” (Munt, 1994; Jansson, 2018). Due to the multiple and wide aspects covered by these concepts, it became possible to implement them for studying the case of Armenia in this discourse.

Armenia as a travel destination has changed its political borders throughout centuries, being divided between Safavid Persia, Ottoman Turkey and Russian Empire, later on becoming a part of the Soviet Union. Studying the historical development of visual appropriation of Armenia, shows how it was interpreted as a part of one of these powers and how it is gazed as an independent entity today. This reveals how larger cultural regions affect the perception of its separate consisting parts. Focusing on only one part of this entire process, may remove the wider context and fail to uncover the complete conjunctures of the modern destination image. The main time periods studied in this paper are:

- Pre-modern western travels and exploration in Armenia, referring to the 17-19th centuries.
- Soviet representation of Armenia in the 20th century.
- Post-modern Armenia and international tourism in the 21st century.

The data was collected by working in the archives of the libraries with early travel albums, and through online google search results for modern tourist blogs. Ten travelogues were studied, out of which eight were selected for this paper with the images. Around sixty lithographs and photos discussed here belong to European travelers from 17th to 20th centuries (Tavernier, 1675; Chardin, 1686; Tournefort, 1717; Ker Porter, 1817; Dubois, 1839; Texier, 1842; Brosset, 1860; Lynch, 1901). Their diaries and picturesque albums are kept in the National Library of Armenia and the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts of Yerevan. The choice of these particular travelers is explained by these publications to include prints representing the landscapes, cultural heritage and local people. Unlike many other travelogues, these selected ones stand out with their visual

observations, artistic or scientific gaze, thus giving rise to an iconographic tradition of depicting Armenia. Some travelers had respectful status as gem merchants (Tavernier, 1675; Chardin, 1686), or scientists, missionaries and writers. Their authority back in their countries also made their journeys attractive for vaster audience, hence spreading knowledge about other, Oriental countries. These were the first visual promotions of Armenia developed by travelers, nowadays known as tourist generated content (TGC).

To show the changes in political and economic sphere in this region, it was necessary to refer to the establishment of the Soviet Union and its largescale propaganda. Armenia as a part of it was now represented through the official tourism marketing organizations of Intourist. Therefore, the brochures, posters and postcards with two hundred illustrations analyzed for this section focus particularly on Intourist publications. However, this promotion was heavily biased and had a clear social-realistic ideology, the messages were strongly regulated to fit the state propaganda of the USSR. This aspect is hence considered for analyzing respective data. The latter is kept in the National Library of the Academy of Science in Armenia. All these hardcopies were scanned, and the recurrent shots were selected as representing the desired DI of the country. These materials show their similarities and contrasts with the previous, early travelers' depictions, fitting into the pictorial line of Armenia. As the modern internal representation of Armenia, the official tourism website (www.armenia.travel) and brochures of 2018 were examined.

The modern tourist gaze upon Armenia is investigated through travel blogs that were selected through google search. The combination of key words *travel bloggers about Armenia* yields twelve million results, out of which first hundred findings were chosen. By filtering out the commercial sites of travel companies, the study focuses on independent, unpaid bloggers. This helps to understand the similarities and/or differences between the place production and place consumption, how it is projected by local actors and in which way the DI is perceived by voluntary travelers. The blogs are written in different languages, primarily English, few also in French, Italian, German and Polish.

This study is conducted through qualitative methodology, adopting four approaches that are the most relevant to work with pictorial materials combined with texts: visual and textual content analysis, mise-en-scene and semiotic analysis. Like the written text, pictorial material can also be content analyzed, as in cultural and semiotic studies images themselves are viewed as

“text” (Barthes, 1977; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Visual content analysis is an observational, systematic method that investigates the way the study object or phenomenon is represented (Bell, 2001). It breaks down the picture into its consisting elements based on what it depicts and analyzes it as it appears. In general, content analysis divides the data into categories or attributes, making it possible to make classifications. Through this method open coding was done to reveal the overarching themes of the visual materials common in this chronological development: nature/landscapes; urban/townscapes; architecture/monuments; local people; food and drinks.

By combining visual and textual content analysis, it becomes possible to understand the images together with their immediate caption or description, to reveal the cognitive and affective sides assigned to the visuals. In similar studies (Pike & Page, 2013; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013; Hunter, 2012; Mak, 2017; Molinilo, Liebana-Cabanillas, Anaya-Sanchez & Buhalis, 2017; Li & Deng, 2018), two ways of content analysis were applied for studying the connection of NTO and TGC visuals. However, relying only on content analysis methods may lead the research into a more quantitative side. Therefore, the other two approaches were largely used to complement and reinforce the qualitative data.

Mise-en-scene analysis, deriving from the theatrical terms, studies the positioning and relation of the elements within the picture, how the objects within the frame make sense through composition, lighting and shot angles. The mise-en-scene decode the image focusing on its setting design, shot density, shot scale and shot angle (Pan et.al.,2014). Shot scales may express the human experience and emotions derived from one particular area of vision (Deleuze, 2013). Close-ups in travel photography generally indicate deeper engagement with the subject, hence arousing affective feelings. Medium shots, on the other hand, give more cognitive knowledge on the surroundings, having one or several focuses in the frame. Shot angles (eye-level, high, low and bird-eye view) also indicate the extent of “reality” of the subject, where eye-view has more credibility and other angles are considered to be more manipulative (Pan et al., 2014).

Unlike these methods, which see the picture through its consisting parts, semiotic analysis reviews the image as a whole, trying to understand the intended messages through its signs and symbols. The focus is not on the content that is denotative and is read by separate elements at face value, but rather on the message. Semiotic analysis is more valid when combined with other methods, like the ones mentioned above, as it also uses the written narratives to link it with the holistic message prescribed to the visuals (Barthes, 1977; Albers &

James, 1988; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). This approach is especially important for studying the projected and perceived destination images, as the creators can put a kind of a message in the picture, which will be understood differently by the consumers (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004). This shows the interpretive feature of this method, open for reviewing the visual message both from the perspective of spectators and of the creators themselves.

Therefore, to understand the modern photographs from the emic perspective, four interviews were conducted, two with representatives of Armenian tourism marketing sphere, and the other two with independent bloggers. The interviews were done in Yerevan, Armenia, in December, 2018 and January, 2019, with written consent to mention their names and use their blogs. The interviews were analyzed through open coding method that expresses the data in the form of concepts (Flick, 2009) and served as a background information for this paper. In the semi-structured expert interviews done with the head of State Tourism Committee of Armenia Hripsime Grigoryan and the director of Terra Armenia tour agency Sona Hakobyan, central topics that were discussed referred to the construction of projected image of Armenia, its developments in the last twenty years and future projects. The open questionnaire used during the interview with the travel bloggers focused mainly on their motivations to visit Armenia, what images affected their decision to come and what is their own photographic interpretation of Armenia after their experience.

Nevertheless, chosen methodology has its limitations in case the results are reviewed as strategic or policy-making tools. For this reason, the paper could have benefited if a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was done. As stated by Hripsime Grigoryan, a new device with artificial intelligence has been developed, that will analyze and count specific themes of TGC, to understand the tourism experience and feedback. This, in turn, will lack a qualitative analysis to distinguish affective and cognitive aspects of selected photographs and the motivation to share them in their blogs. Thus, the balancing of these two methods could achieve more complete results in exploring the visual DI.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. *Pre-modern western travels and exploration in Armenia*

The early travelogues with picturesque albums about Armenia encompassed a period of over three hundred-year from the 17th to 20th centuries. By studying the differences and similarities in representational traditions, it is possible to group these travelers in two historical stages: from the 17th to the late 18th century, and from the middle of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century. The first group were traveling to Armenia, which was back then divided between Safavid Persia and Ottoman Turkey. Whereas the second group of travelers visited Armenia during the supremacy of Russian Empire and Ottoman Turkey. The culturally and politically constructed gaze expressed itself differently based on this power dominance.

The first stage is studied through three main travelers: Jean Baptist Tavernier (1676), Jean Chardin (1686) and Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1717). Tavernier's descriptions about Armenian monuments, settlements or people are rather superficial. This general gaze can be traced in his only two plates depicting Yerevan, as the capital of Armenia and the biggest caravan stop along his way. As a tradition of the 17th and 18th century travel books (Bohls & Duncan, 2005), the main object of gaze or the central settlement (Yerevan in this case) was depicted in topographical methods. On the conditional map of Yerevan, the river divides the town in two parts – orchards and urban side, showing the settlement around a big mountain, residential part, citadel with the fortress, and the roads connected with other big caravan stops of the Silk Road. With these highlights Tavernier as if showed the area's strategic position. Therefore, Yerevan becomes the main theme for early depictions as the biggest settlement, Silk Road stop and a strategic base.

He also depicted the panorama of Yerevan with the caravan on the front plan, and with the fortress and mountains in the background (Appendix C, plate 1). Though the traveler mentions several other locations on his way, he only “granted” Yerevan with visual representation. Based on the analysis of several descriptions and details, Karepetian (1986) claims that Tavernier refined his engraving during his next trips to Yerevan, therefore this extraordinary image is a dynamic, interchanging perception of the city between 1632-1668. After a strong earthquake hit the town in 1679, these engravings have a great historical value as an evidence to understand the general layout of the city during that period.

Moreover, these pictures opened up a hermeneutic circle (Albers & James, 1988; Urry, 1990) that was followed by Chardin (1686). Early travelers from Europe were quite aware of each other's works and past journeys, they referred to their travelogues and sought to take similar routes. He represented Yerevan with more detailed description about the places previously mentioned by Tavernier. Although his picture is simplistic, one can still distinguish the buildings of citadel, churches and orchards. Unlike Tavernier, Chardin is more precise in depicting the outline of the city surrounded by mountains. Vartoogian (1976) even suggests that Chardin also depicted Ararat biblical mountain on the background. In addition to being more realistic, this work incorporates townscape together with its natural surroundings. Hence, urban theme is combined with the landscape. This plate created in 1672 is arguably the source of later, as well as the modern depictions of Yerevan – overlooking the city from the hill, showing the mountains around it and the valley of Ararat (fig.1). Hence, it sets a representational tradition for Yerevan. The duality of nature and culture (urban setting) are intertwined in this frame, presenting these two aspects in unity.

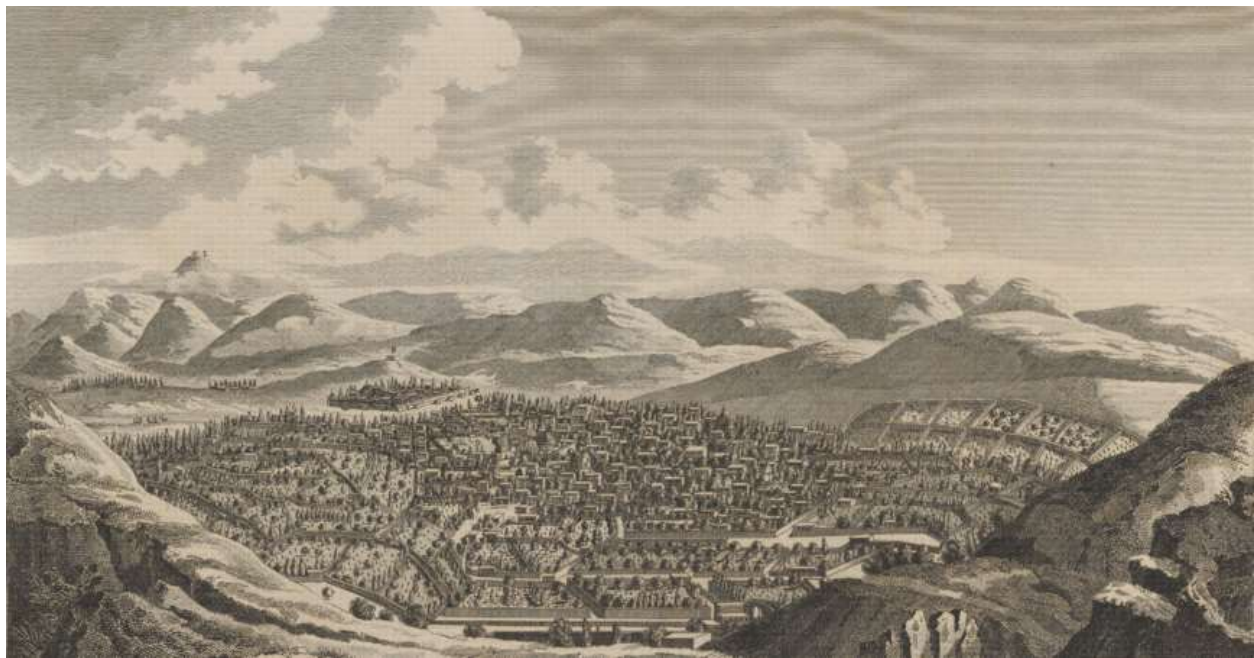


Fig. 1. Jean Chardin (1686). Yerevan, from the travelogue *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin en Perse et aux Indes Orientales par la Mer Noire et par la Colchide*, Paris. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan 2018.

Following Tavernier's "guidebook", who mentioned about his journey to Etchmiadzin – the holy see of Armenian Apostolic church, we see that Chardin also depicts the town with its

churches. The image is frontal, with strict perspective lines, placing the mother cathedral in the center and showing the walls and empty landscapes around it. This depiction style was typical for Chardin, as we see the same point of view in other architectural engravings. What is interesting is another, separate engraving of sole standing mother cathedral from the southwestern angle, with the architectural plan hovering above it (plate 2). The cone-shaped domes are stylized as towers of French medieval castles, standing alone in an open field. This is quite a scholarly approach by a traveler to the ways off representing Armenian heritage. Architectural plan is the foundation of the church, the idea of the monument, which reflects the general cultural context of Armenia, the model of its artistic essence. This gaze from the southwestern angle turns into an iconographic chain for the Etchmiadzin Mother Cathedral, as it is reproduced by future travelers up to the beginning of the 20th century (discussed below). Thus, the theme of monuments is introduced to visual representation of Armenia as an object of cultural or historical gaze (Urry, 1990).

The landscape theme, however, underwent the biggest development. By the eighteenth century, Armenia had already gained an image of a country of high mountains and deep canyons through number of travel accounts (Rubruck, 1253; Marco Polo, 1300; Jordanus, 1329). Tournefort (1717) traveled from Yerevan to Etchmiadzin to meet the patriarch and find guides for his ascension on mount Ararat. The latter had a fame of a biblical mountain on which Noah's ark descended. Travelers referred to Ararat as a great marvel, immense in its extent and height, and impossible to access to the summit because of the eternal snow. This concept together with the notion spread among earlier travelers, about Armenia as a Terrestrial Paradise (Genesis 2: 10-15), shaped the image of this land, as a mystical, exotic, holy place, where all three biblical rivers flow forming a unique "heavenly" landscape. Not surprisingly, out of Tournefort's several engravings of Armenia, the most striking one is the panorama of Ararat with the churches around it (plate 3). As a romantic description Tournefort states:

"Ararat seems so very high, is, that it stands by itself, in form of a sugarloaf, in the middle of one of the greatest plains one can see" (1717, p.350).

This image as a reflection of the above mentioned beliefs, continued to be an iconic view for all other travelers, a must-see and a "must-depict" frame. Landscape was praised for its significance,

it was an important object to gaze on for the special meaning it was prescribed with, not because of its independent visual effect (Osborne, 2000).

In 19-20th century the second group of travelers brought another dimension in visualization of Armenia. With the abovementioned representational baggage, the 19th century European travelers were setting out on a journey with a preconditioned or framed gaze. In 1817, a Scottish traveler Robert Ker Porter set out on his three-year journey to Georgia, Persia, Armenia and Ancient Babylonia (1821). In comparison with his previous fellow travelers, his depiction of Ararat is the most realistic (fig.2). The same cluster of signs gazed before construct this image: people in the front plan, river, fortress on the far left side, church on the opposite side and the mountain rising above all them. Although, he does not focus on populated areas as his predecessors did, but he directs our gaze at the idyllic landscape. The urban side is seized by nature, leaving empty spaces for the roaming eye. The great search for the sublime, vast open spaces, high, snowy summits and deep canyons in lush valleys, this is how Ker Porter developed another iconographic stage for representation of Ararat. Romantic gaze thus reached and included Armenia in its tradition (Osborne, 2000; Youngs, 2006).



Fig. 2. Robert Ker Porter (1821). View from the fortress of Yerevan and Mount Ararat, from the travelogue Ker Porter R.(1821). *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia during the years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820*. London. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan 2018.

Through this historical development from townscapes to combined landscapes, to observant depictions of monuments and independent natural panoramas, another theme of the ruins was introduced. Ker Porter drew the basaltic valley of central Armenia in the wilderness and sublime. The caption says: “View of a basaltic valley, and Tackt-i Tyridates”, which is the Farsi name for Roman-age fortification and temple. He directs the viewer’s attention by mentioning the name of a monument, which occupies only a small part of the engraving’s left margin. What is more interesting is that Ker Porter shows the ruins of a once big fortress, ruins that look more like piles of stones. Besides showing the nature as a powerful force taking over the civilization, the image shows the sense of time, the ephemeral essence of life. Osborne (2000) would connect this with the search of reverie and nostalgia among European travelers, whereas Youngs (2006) would see the favored Orientalist discourse of depicting the decay of the East. It can be claimed that these two notions are combined in this picture, representing Armenia as a mixture of depiction themes, like its position in the intersection between the East and West.

This love for ruins becomes more dominant in the representations of Armenia from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Ker Porter was one of the first ones, who included two illustrations inside his text apart from doing two full-sized engravings (plate 4). Barthes (1977) claims that the images designed into the texts become dependent on the connotations of the words, not the image “realizes” the text, as in the separate, full-sized engravings or later on for photographs, but here the text comes to “sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image”. These two illustrations of tombs in ruins are accompanied by expressions like “vacant ruins”, “moldering monuments”, “transitory nature of all human greatness”, “forgotten solitude”, “imperial empires rose and crumbled into the dust”, “infancy of the world”, “melancholy spot” (Ker Porter, 1821, p. 612-615). These detailed illustrations are themselves texts, connoted with the Western romanticized representations.

One of the bright examples of the new generation travelers was French antiquarian Frederic Dubois de Montpereux. In his five-volume *Voyage autour du Caucase* (1839-1843), he dedicated around thirty full-sized lithographs depicting Armenian landscapes, cultural monuments, architectural detailed plans and even his own reconstructions to them. Thus, his works greatly contributed to shaping scientific knowledge about Armenian art and culture. Like the previous travelers, Dubois was also interested in biblical and Christian past of the country. His lithograph depicting Ararat continues the representational chain of this site, with the river,

caravans of camels, Yerevan fortress, bushy greens that hide some ruins of ancient buildings, and the two peaks of Ararat in the distance (plate 5). The widespread belief of Noah's ark being there, took Dubois' exploration even further to the lands of Nakhichevan, where he depicts the tomb of Noah in ruins. The river, mountains and snowy tops again give this picture a sense of vastness, away from over-civilized west (plate 6). The decadence of this land is emphasized here not only through ruins, but also depicting an old man in the center of the composition, which can be interpreted as a symbol of aging nation.

His engraving of Djoulfa with the ruins of Armenian cross-stone plates, shows another site with melancholic ruins. However, this selective approach "visually ruined" whatever was not relevant for the West, meanwhile reconstructing the ambitious cultural expressions of Armenia. Interested in Christian history of Armenia, Dubois visited the patriarchate, where he appeared to be frustrated "not to find an entire city in medieval ruins" (1839, vol.III, p.359), but instead discovered a great cathedral, which he thoroughly inspected. He made his own version of reconstructions, suggesting some architectural changes to the building. Maranci (2001) claims this, as an antiquarian's enthusiasm for classical forms, instead of the original building, trying to domesticate the cathedral to the western cultural style. Though Dubois adds, that from the later renovations the classical details were removed because they did not fit to the "Armenian style". This is the first time, that a traveler introduces the concept of a national, Armenian style, against the popular Greek or Roman styles (Maranci, 2001; Azatyan, 2012; Khachatryan, 2014). He reinforces his argument with analyzing another church of st. Hripsime, stating that the Armenian style is seen in these building's massiveness, simplicity and grandeur.

The Armenians stayed faithful to this ancient oriental genre, to luxurious ornaments and carvings, to massive forms that one observes in the porticos of Persepolis, the tombs of the kings and the forms, which are perhaps only the echo of the monuments of Egypt. (Dubois, 1839; vol I, p. 407).



Fig.3. Frederic Dubois de Montpereux, (1839-43). Mother Cathedral of Etchmiadzin in Greater Armenia, from the travelogue *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Georgie, en Armenie et en Crimée*, (1843) Paris. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan 2018.

Connecting this style to cultural expressions of Egypt as an orientalist act (Osborne, 2000), Dubois however describes Armenian style as something unique and distinct, thus asserting to this culture an ethnic identity, where they do not need to imitate the Greeks, as they have their own forms of expression (Maranci, 2001). We see that the uniqueness of Armenia's destination image starts to develop in this period.

As another traveler enriching the western representational "vocabulary" of the Orient, Dubois frames the monumental cathedral from the southwestern angle, the same angle that Chardin used around two centuries ago. Dubois' engraving is detailed, depicting all laced ornaments, niches and volumes (fig.3). Unlike Chardin, he places the monument in its original environment, surrounded by the monastic complex, garden and members of clergy. The old representational style has changed: instead of isolating the monument and objectifying it, thus dislocating it from its cultural, spatial and temporal context, we see here that the monument turns into a subject of wider representation. Nature, people and architecture are in equal position, complementing and reinforcing their interconnectedness. The culture belongs to a specific ethnic group, who lives and creates in highland territories.

This nation with its creative potential became the center of another discourse, which occupied western scholars for several generations since the 19th century: the relation between Armenian and Gothic architecture (Strzhygowski, 1918; Maranci, 2001; Azatyan, 2014). This concept was triggered by travelers' notes on Armenian architectural styles, which was particularly studied by the voyager and architect Charles Felix Marie Texier (1842). If previous travelers compared Armenian monuments with other Oriental artistic traditions, Texier resembles the façade, columns and pointed arches of the Ani cathedral with Italian, Roman and Gothic expressions. The exterior is linked with Italian medieval architecture of the tenth century, the epoch when the cathedral is dated. However, Texier is confused by its interior, which appeared to him more advanced in its architectural forms thus being similar with the Gothic style. Though he expresses his suspicion about the correct age of the monument, he also questions the authority of the Western creation of the Gothic style and introduces the opinion of it originating from Armenia.

To be on the safe side, he depicts the building from outside, veiling the “risky” interior. The exterior of mother cathedral is done from the southeast angle, with demolished dome, other structures in the far and deserted landscape (plate 7). It is located in specific context, it demonstrates a belonging to its surrounding, like the Etchmiadzin church depicted by Dubois. These two images became iconic with their contribution to the representational chain of current monuments.

In his thirty-five lithographs of Armenia, Texier also included some landscapes, out of which the reproduction of Ararat comes to add a different perspective on the mountain (plate 8). It becomes apparent, that throughout these centuries Ararat was perceived as a “must see” pilgrimage site for these travelers, referring to its biblical significance. Texier saw and depicted the mountain from the western side. The romanticism of this picture is emphasized with a trick used in the fine arts and later on also in photography: Urry (1990) describes it as a gaze facing away from the camera or the artist, as if praising the supreme beauty of nature. The locals, caravans or his porters are as if contemplating this sight, inviting the viewer to stand by and join this rite. However, this can also be a demonstration of the collective gaze (Urry, 1990), where Texier showed people in this frame to create an atmosphere or a “sense of place” (Hughes, 1995) where the travelers can reaffirm their physical presence.

Ararat had its first color drawing by a British traveler Robert Curzon (1854) (plate 9). Unlike other travelers Curzon did not believe in the legend about Noah's ark and Ararat, however he showed Ararat from the valley, rising high in the vastness. As he eliminates the biblical significance from the mountain, one can state that this is the pure image of Ararat as a natural phenomenon only, without connotation of holiness and mysticism. Ararat stands just a sign for itself (Barthes, 1977; Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000). The horizontal panorama denotes an empty vast area, with no people in the frame. His melancholic gaze is more apparent in his choice of the front page of his book: a small woodcut illustration of a ruined Armenian church near Erzerum, connoting to the culture and once a glorious kingdom in decay (pic.20).

“Armenia, the cradle of human family...has from the beginning of time been a bone of contentions between conflicting powers, scarcely has it been acquainted with the blessings of tranquility and peace with the mediation of Great Britain, than again it is to become the theatre of war...” (Curzon, 1854; preface, p.vii-viii).

Osborne (2000) attaches educational aspect to the ruins. Acquaintance with the decline of Other experienced worlds, decaying ancient empires was of a special importance for the imperial Europe, where the ruins symbolized, as Said puts it, “the fall from classical greatness” (1990, p.233). This act of recording and interpreting lost imperium, endowed Europeans with being in contact with greatness, which as if infused their own identity. By mentioning Great Britain as a powerful empire who “acquainted Armenia with the blessings of peace”, Curzon as if declared the British inheritors of the current state, where objects, monuments and people were depicted or recorded to be visually salvaged from future destructions (Osborne, 2000).

We thus see several representational styles on Armenia, from romanticized sketches up to scientific accurate engravings and architectural plans. All these images have one thing in common, which is the intervention of the artist in codifying the representations. The one medium considered objective in its depiction manner, was photography, the “message without a code” (Barthes, 1977, p.17). The representational chain of Armenian monuments entered a new phase due to the British traveler Henry Lynch (1901). His numerous photographs depict landscapes, monuments, people in their usual habitat, thus representing a lively and multi-perspective image

of Armenia. Lynch's narrative is quite subjective rather than scientific, it is more like an extensive diary of an adventurous traveler.

Based on the image and notions of Armenia constructed before him, Lynch explores the architectural monuments of Armenia, where he connects the artistic expression with ethnic origins. With the new and fast visual technology and his enthusiasm, Lynch depicted many new landscapes, monuments and architectural details, which were known by previous travelers, but were not granted with images. However, Lynch himself relied on previous sources and images he saw in different travel accounts. He also urged to see and depict Ararat with panoramic view. The phenomenon of hermeneutic circle (Albers & James, 1988; Urry, 1990) is apparent in his photographs, as in some cases we see him directly recreating the angles and compositions of earlier illustrations.



Fig.4. Henry Lynch (1901). Etchmiadzin cathedral (on the left) and the Mother Cathedral of Ani (on the right). From Lynch H.F.B. (1901). *Armenia: Travels and Studies: The Russian Provinces*. Green and Co, London. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan 2018.

Two examples are particularly striking, as they construct the images of the most important mother cathedrals of Armenian Christian history: the cathedrals in Etchmiadzin and Ani (fig.4). The Etchmiadzin cathedral is depicted from the southwestern angle, the same way as in Chardin's illustration in 1686 and Dubois lithograph of 1839. The same approach is evident in the photograph of Ani, where the cathedral represented from southeastern angle, as in Texier's 1842 engraving. The compositions, elements included in the frame have almost the same

position. These photos re-create the gaze of the previous travelers, continuing the chain in new representational medium. This visual message or code (Barthes, 1977) creates a desire to find and confirm the images made by predecessors, closing the hermeneutic circle (Caton & Santos 2008). As if the identity of the monuments is expressed in that particular perspective. Changing the angle would mean to break the iconographic chain of the object. The image of the monument becomes its sign, its identification symbol that confirms its existence.

Therefore, all these medieval monuments and landscapes, are not just places or objects by themselves, but due to these visual representations they are familiar, renowned sights worthy of the gaze. Lynch opened up a new phase in the sphere of travel photography of Armenia. It could have had a productive continuation if the geopolitical atmosphere had stayed peaceful in this region. Unfortunately, the beginning of the 20th century was full of terrors both for the world and for these lands in particular. Photographs created in this period were mostly depicting wars, deprivations and genocide. The shifting of world powers after the First World War, created a new reality also in representational process and culture of henceforth Soviet Armenia.

4.2. Soviet representation of Armenia in the 20th century

Looking through the visuals of tourism propaganda in the Soviet period, it can be stated that the cognitive elements of photographs representing Armenia dominate over the affective side. The main focus is on raising awareness about the rich culture of the country, newly built structures for administrative and cultural purposes, as well as representing the industrial progress brought forth by the socialist system. The importance of visual promotion was acknowledged from the very beginning of the tourism industry since 1929. Many artists were involved in creating official posters and brochures representing all sixteen states of the Soviet Union. Social realism was the dominant style in fine arts and in general artistic expressions. However, it turned out to be unsuitable for attracting Western audience, thus artists began to practice in the style of Art Deco, which was then typical for the tourism promotion in Europe and America (Sudakova, 2013).

Prominent artists were tasked with the creation of series of posters in 1930's, which were spread and hung in foreign embassies and tourist offices in the West. Sergey Igumnov's poster of 1935 representing Armenia is a unique example of this series (fig.5). Bold with bright colors, this

composition includes the main symbols of Soviet propaganda, where trains represented progress for soviet citizens, but where perceived as convenient transportation for the western tourists (Sudakova, 2013). The train goes over the high bridge with wide open arches, under which a car resembling the first motorcar NAMI-1 created in USSR in 1927 can be traced. Hence, the Soviet industrial and technological achievements are on the foreground of the poster. Behind the arcades, which in general view look like grey bars captivating a mountainous land, Ararat dominates over a settlement, presumably Yerevan, as a main symbol of Armenia. Back in 1930s Yerevan was still a provincial town with many churches and oriental structures left from the Persian period. Therefore, the settlement in the poster looks like a peaceful village with hay bales



over the roofs. As in the engravings of the 17-18th century early travelers, we still see the representational tradition of the biggest city facing the mountain maintained in this new iconography, with a new layer of sovietization (industry, progress) added and highlighted on the front plan. These symbols depict Armenia as a part of the wider, soviet region, establishing a more regional rather than national identity through this representation. This is also emphasized by the huge caption of the poster announcing “Soviet Armenia”

Fig. 5. Soviet Intourist poster of Armenia by Sergey Igumnov (1935). Retrieved from: <https://retours.eu/en/39-intourist-USSR-posters/>

As an artistic expression of a DI, drawings or posters show their content in stylization, which is absent in photographic messages. Intourist brochures after 1960's were a collection of photographs depicting various aspects of soviet reality in Armenia: urban architecture, landscapes, historical and soviet monuments, roads, agricultural and industrial aspects, traditions and local people. Photographs of Yerevan with its new buildings in neo-classical style were dominating in projected images, as architectural synecdoche so typical for soviet representation styles (Konrad, 2010; Balakrishnan & Kerr, 2013). Opera house, central railway station, museums, parliament building, university, squares and avenues were the main symbols of Soviet Armenia, a term used mainly by Russia. Because of the socialistic regime and atheism, Armenian Christian heritage was neglected until 1960s. Afterwards it was included in tourism promotion for displaying the ancient origins of the country. In photographic representations, this Christian element is pushed out from Yerevan and located in distant regions of the country. Considering that this promotion was targeting western audience who sought for ruins and authentic culture, soviet marketing found the solution through the following tactics: Yerevan represented as developing cultural face of the country, with peripheries full of ruins and old monuments. However, cultural heritage was limited to only several sites, some of them even reconstructed by the state, mainly for touristic reasons.



Fig.6. Soviet Intourist brochure pages, 1930s publication. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan 2019.

These two hundred images have several themes in representing soviet Armenia: urban (predominantly Yerevan); landscapes; monuments; industrial life; regions; locals; tourist services. The dominance of Yerevan urban photos can be explained first of all as a capital city with the most state investments, secondly as the city with the main airport and railway station. Moreover, Yerevan was developed as a cultural capital, whereas other two big cities had military and industrial purposes. Yerevan was not represented as a Silk Road stop anymore, it was not a town of orchards or a settlement with a big fortress. It was now framed as an organized, active city with all essential elements for a metropolis (fig.6). The only symbol that was transmitted from the previous iconography of Yerevan, was depicting Ararat mountain on its background. This style of depicting Ararat's panorama has been enrooted in representational chain for this mountain up to now, as kitschy artists still reproduce the same composition of Ararat from eye-level view, with trees and a river on the foreground.

Industry and agriculture were one of the unique subjects of soviet representation, as an economic and socio-political aspect of the republics. Chemical factories, hydroelectric power plants and the production of brandy were among the most active industrial activities in Armenia. Brandy was the most photogenic theme for tourism representation, a product for consumption by upper middle class locals and tourists. Besides the images of brandy factory, brochures show people cultivating the vines and collecting grapes, an agricultural scene together with elderly man leading the herd of sheep (plate 10). This naïve representation of peasant life is another tool for meeting tourism expectations, who search for something authentic or sublime, which is arguably found in agrarian simple lifestyle (Tzanelli, 2004).

Representation of ruins also had its part in this collection. However, these were "purposeful ruins" or as MacCannell (1976) puts it "staged authenticity"; parts of ancient monuments, which were excavated and reconstructed with financial support of the state. They were also in close peripheries of Yerevan and convenient for a day-trip visit. Both the ruins and active monuments were shot in medium scales, locating the object full sized in the center of the composition and showing its immediate surrounding. This made the visuals look like museum objects displayed in a catalogue, re-affirming the soviet tendency of representing the countries as open-air museums. This objectification of the places made them look more controllable, they were presented as an evidence inside the brochures or guidebooks, which also offered tours to those sites. Therefore, selection and portrayal of particular monuments were done to convince

the readers about their validity, which meant that it dictated only one understanding of the past. The guidebooks were mostly done with black and white editions, which provided a documentary feel. This seeming completeness of text-image promotion reinforced the authority of the state in tourism industry, and somehow blocked the tourists' quest for alternative explanations to the presented reality (Gorsuch & Koenker, 2013). This ideology together with the political regime shattered in 1990's and gave way to new approaches for symbolic representation.

4.3. Post-modern Armenia and international tourism in the 21st century.

What symbolized socialist regime and the Cold War till 2000s, was soon transformed into nostalgia towards the past times. Soviet symbols like motorcars, medals, various labels, statues and other products are now promoted as vintage items, though certain efforts are made to avoid the soviet period in contemporary marketing of Armenia. To stay competitive in world economy, Armenian tourism organizations are now working hard to create a modern image and brand for this newly developing tourist destination. The head of State Tourism Committee of Armenia Hripsime Grigoryan mentioned that to attract tourists they do a marketing mix, presenting Armenia with its various aspects, instead of focusing and promoting only one main image. Maintaining the marketing of 2000s' such as "The First Christian Nation" or "The Land of Noah", though not stressing it as before, now Armenia is also presented with its open landscapes, adventure tourism possibilities and diverse cuisine. As mentioned by a tour agent Sona Hakobyan, for promoting Armenia they use images to create a photo-collage, representing the various aspects of the country. Due to technological progress, there are more photographic tricks to represent the country. Bird-eye view through drone photography captures the overall, wide-angle panoramas of urban and nature landscapes.



Fig 7. Official tourism brochures of Armenia 2017-2018, printed by State Tourism Committee of Armenia. Photo scan by Nane Khachatryan, 2019

The front page of official tourism brochure of Armenia for 2018 has the image of medieval ruins with Ararat on their background. The culture is intertwined with nature, having both symbols in the focus of composition. Ararat is presented also on the second version of the brochure, as a silhouette background of night Yerevan (fig. 7). The opening paragraph in these brochures state:

Armenia. A modern country connecting East to West with an ancient history spanning across thousand years. Wild nature, sanctuaries neighboring hidden temples nestled in emerald green forests, boutique hotels and skyscraping mountain tops all rest in one place, waiting to be discovered!

This manifestation of a country located in between the two geographical entities, declares about its rich nature and ancient history, inviting travelers to uncover it as a hidden destination. In comparison with soviet static representation, modern images of Armenia are more dynamic

with their chosen subject (people in action) and composition (low and high shot angles, extreme long shots). The modern tendency of experience economy is considered in constructing the new DI of Armenia. Photographs with locals and tourists dancing together or involved in some actions, represent Armenia as a country for not mere gazing, but an engaging, lively place. These scenic photos printed in brochures and shared online, create an idealized image of a mystic country hidden somewhere in the highlands. The main themes of DMOs' photos are: a) nature (volcanic mountains with snowy peaks, canyons, green valleys, waterfalls and lakes, that relate to eco-tourism products); b) culture (tangible and intangible heritage); c) people (tourist-host encounter); d) food (mainly natural, organic, healthy food and local drinks, referring to the notion of "Armenia: the land of warm hospitality"); e) urban scenes (highlights from the modernized capital); f. adventures and travel services.

The modern visual depiction of Armenia is mostly built by incorporating historical monuments with nature: a church in front of the mountain or facing a canyon, prehistoric monuments in open fields, etc. Natural landscapes with lush greenery or snowy mountains connote on untouched sceneries, waiting to be discovered and "conquered" by the gaze of tourists. Ararat is still the main symbol in representing Armenia. It is portrayed on the background of modern Yerevan, medieval ruins of temples or some adventure activities, as a foundation of new destination branding process. It can be claimed that after decades of soviet branding, post-modern marketing of Armenia is making a return to the pre-modern representation of western travelers, where main descriptive elements were beliefs about Noah and old Christian traditions. The biblical and religious contexts are thus restored for contemporary Armenia, presenting it as a cradle of ancient history.

As stated by NTO representatives, there is not any elaborated procedure for selecting photographs. They are chosen based on their aesthetic values, which, on the one hand, gives simplicity to the visuals, and on the other hand, it makes the promotion quite shallow. However, even if there are no determined steps for creating a demand through photos, some examples from other countries are considered. The head of the State Tourism Committee Hripsime Grigoryan particularly named the case of Japan, which represents the country through close-up photography, focusing on national peculiarities, showing the contrast between urban space and nature. Not surprisingly, one can recall many touristic photos of the holy Mount Fuji, one of the symbols of Japan. Mount Fuji is also depicted as a background for townscapes or nature scenes,

as well as its presence throughout the early representations of traditional woodblock engravings, shows some commonalities with Ararat and Armenia. As Grigoryan mentioned about the newly developing tourism brand for the country, these icons contribute in generating an overall image for Armenia that can be recognized internationally (Smith, 2005; Balakrishnan & Kerr, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is important to relate to semiotics, where the projected message can be read differently by its consumers (MacKay & Couldwell, 2004; Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Armenia is rich with medieval heritage, which predominantly shapes it as a destination for cultural tourism. This heritage is what is being photographically exported or represented to international tourism to the greatest extent. Then again, a country building up after a collapsed economy is also trying to veil its many imperfections behind the careful selection of desired symbols. The urban architecture that was the main theme in soviet promotion, is now pushed aside, bringing the nature and ancient history to the front. Meanwhile, these tactics has led to exclusion of the whole soviet heritage that interestingly has retained share of attractiveness for the travelers.

The travel literature today, both by local and international tourism organizations, represents Armenia as a part of wider geographical region of the Caucasus. For mass tourism packages, this is a convenient approach, as the commercial tours include Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in a combined itinerary, offering the customers an opportunity to travel throughout a whole region in two weeks. These mass tourism routes also affect the choice of independent travelers who either look for cheaper ways to travel to these places or they are radically opposed to the “official” route and plan their own, off the beaten track itinerary. These two types may also fit into the categorizations of individual mass tourists and independent travelers (Cohen, 1979; Sharpley, 2018), or likewise considered as “other” post-tourists (Munt, 1994; Jansson, 2018). The choice of the travel type is also reflected in the travel blogs that some of these travelers have. The common motivation among many travel bloggers is connected with Armenia being unknown to the world. As written by some authors:

Armenia is a tiny country, oft-forgotten by travelers due to it being tucked away behind Turkey and its more popular neighbor, Georgia. It's an ancient and mystical land, and a country still unspoiled by the crowds of mass tourism, even though there are many things to do in Armenia. (lostwithpurpose.com).

Why Armenia? We think this country is not very well known, certainly there isn't tourism yet. That was one of the reasons we decided to go check it out. (madlovelyworld.com).

Armenia is one of the most undiscovered countries I've ever traveled to...It's rare hidden gem filled with breathtaking landscapes, ancient history, and some of the best food I've ever eaten. (hellojetlag.com).

To understand how the dialogue between projected and perceived images can contribute to the overall representation of Armenia, a study of fifty travel blogs from the last five years was conducted. It shows that it is possible to categorize these blogs by the traveling or tourist types. Blogs can have very flexible structure and may vary in their content. Among these fifty blogs we may distinguish 1. itineraries with traveling tips; 2. guidebooks with historical information; 3. blogs as photo albums, and 4. online diaries, that are a balanced mix of all these approaches, turning the narrative into an ethnographic study. In all these types, we can see photography used mainly in two ways: photography as a supplement to the text, and photos as independent narratives. By combining the travel types with the way travel bloggers gaze and reproduce the sites, we can make a crude division between passive gazers who look for popular views, and independent bloggers who critically engage in visual representation practices. This in its turn corresponds to the concepts of cognitive and affective messages of photos (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Mak, 2017), which will be the main ways to analyze the images in this chapter.

As stated above, travelers who write or represent a destination through their blogs, become a producer of the place on their own (Osborne, 2000). But what kind of producers are they and how do they represent their object of gaze as a product? The first category that focuses on travel tips may have titles like “Ten things to do in Yerevan”, “Five unforgettable monasteries in Armenia”, “Eight places to visit in Armenia”, “Three days itinerary”, “A quick guide to the Eurasian pearl”, etc. These are easy, catchy ways for a fast read with brief and supposedly necessary information, where the latter is the main product of the blog entry. In their blog (travelsfabookpacker.com) Rohan and Max suggest “Armenia Itinerary: Tips and Ideas for Travel to Armenia”, stating the usefulness of their article, as it is difficult to find timetables of public transportation even from information centers. By giving the names of the places they

visited, the bloggers use detailed texts per each spot and use one photo for representing the destinations. Some of these photos uncover a perception that was initially framed by popular images of Armenia, or put in other words – demonstrate a postcard view. Medium shots locate monuments in the center of their natural surrounding. They denote the text as a cognitive supplement to it, monuments are photographed as objects, squeezed into a frame (fig. 8). Their itinerary is also similar of that offered in the official guidebook, which mainly includes the same classical destinations. Thus, their route is based on the set tour plan but combined with their own findings and impressions. This type of blogs serve as non-commercial remakes of the local offers, as well as these images complete the hermeneutic circle (Albers & James, 1988; Urry, 1990).



Fig.8. Geghard monastery. Retrieved from travelsfabookpacker.com.

Most of the blogs also have a particular theme that they follow based on the preferences and hobbies of their authors. Some bloggers focus on historical monuments (historyfangirl.com), others prefer to talk about food and wine (savoredjourneys.com), reveal the hiking opportunities for adventures (tomallen.info) or visit the top touristic places inside the country

(agirlandabaldtraveller.com). Nick and Laura are certified wine experts and food specialists who have been to over sixty countries and their blog is focused on shaping the perfect food vacation (savoredjourneys.com). Apart from presenting some popular spots inside Yerevan photographed in a postcard view, the couple uses photos of the various food and drinks one can find in Armenia. Food photography itself has become a specific subject on photography sites like Instagram or Pinterest. Even if the food is the main theme of this blog, the photos are amateur and unedited, making them look more like a documentary image with no photographic skills and effects applied.

This refers to many other blogs as well, where the main content is condensed in the text and photographs are merely a visual supplement to the word of mouth, a kind of approval for what they write. This type of photography is mainly unedited, amateur, following the hermeneutic circle and a list of popular things to see. However, this does not mean that these blogs attract less audience, than the ones led by more professional photographers. On the one hand, the raw look of these images may even be perceived as more realistic and less-manipulative, it can motivate future travelers to find the same sight and make a similar or even better shot. These frank images speak about the democratization of photography and traveling, showing that both are achievable by everyone (Urry, 1990; Larsen, 2008). On the other hand, the quality and extent of how aesthetic the photograph is, may also not do enough justice to representing what the country is about and has to offer to the world.

Some bloggers rely heavily on the text, offering detailed description about the place and its setting, but using a shot where the object is out of focus, in shadow, with no basic composition followed. Backpackers in stingynomads.com give tips about where to go and how to reach there, so their main theme is giving directions. Hence, the destinations are just the final spots of the journey, what is important here is the process, not the result. Though the bloggers may share positive experience and impression connected with Armenia, but when scrolling down their photo collection, the viewer develops her/his own mental images based on the affective elements. Therefore, it is interesting to understand to what extent photos need to be manipulative.

Many travelers use mobile photos in their blogs, editing them with popular filters and other effects, sometimes trying too hard and ending up with extremely retouched photos. In the blogs heartmybackpack.com and chopsticksandcarryons.com, the photos are edited with HDR or

warm filters to a degree that they look like oil paintings (chopsticksandcarryons.com). Though these filters may add an affective layer to the photo, they can also lead to incongruity, if what they evoke will not be found during the actual traveling of other bloggers. On the other hand, these fake images can play with the postmodern resistance mood (Munt, 1994) of the travelers, who will specifically visit places to discover the original object. In all these cases, it is possible to suggest, that the approach to photography also determines the values given to traveling by different bloggers. Paying less attention to the quality of images, may show the bloggers being more concentrated on their personal experience, rather than unveiling the destination country. The ones using extreme retouch, focus on their self-expression, establishing themselves as adventure-seekers taking “cool” photos. In both cases, these narratives speak more about the individual performance of the blogger and less about Armenia.

This tendency is mostly apparent in travel blogs led by Filipino tourists from the Arab gulf. There are many cheap flights and package tours for a three-day travels from UAE to Armenia and Georgia. These commercial tours find their approval or blog interpretation by the Filipino tourists who come either alone or with friends. The main pull factor for them to this region is also the chance to experience winter and see snow. They can particularly focus on this feature while representing their stories: *Armenia: Perfect Off-Beat Destination in Winter* (thewanderessdiary.com). Their blogs tell about regular sequence of their itinerary, with some impressions and experiences (piggybeartravels.com, wanderwithmi.com). The main theme of the photos are them in front of the popular monuments or landscapes, as if confirming that they have been there (Sontag, 1978; Larsen, 2008). Studying Filipino blogs, it can be stated that they visit the same places, accepting what is offered to them and just enjoying the sceneries. Osborne (2000) would call them the perfect tourists for NTOs. The question of photography and quality shots here is more about their status. They all visit the same places, but the way they represent it demonstrates their possession of technical equipment and their personal skills as a photographer.

Most of the bloggers are budget travelers, who look for affordable options to stay, eat and move around. As claimed by many of these travelers, tourism infrastructures in Armenia are still under-developed, hence foreigners can see Armenia out of the “tourist bubble” (Cohen, 1972; Sharpley, 2018). It is noteworthy how they perceive these different, less-touristic offers, whether they share a public transport with locals, eat in a place not customized for tourists or visit places other than recommended spots. Apparently, the official promotion of Armenia tries to represent

the country in an idealized or romanticized manner, carefully hiding away the abandoned soviet heritage, non-photogenic landscapes, less attractive architecture and poor-looking rustic lifestyle. How these commercial messages influence the tourist gaze is quite contrasting. One group of travelers or the “passive gazers” just look for the popular shots, not noticing the different, uncultivated side of the country. What is not included in the official promotion, does not hence attract any attention by this group of travelers, they do not find it significant to be photographed. Moreover, these bloggers also tend to idealize their photos to gain more appreciation from their followers. An abandoned truck will not motivate these bloggers to publish it in their blog. We may say that NTO and DMC mission is succeeded in this way.

However, the other group of travelers who are critically engaged with their experience, with the objects of gaze and the popular ways to see, have a special focus on non-promoted, ignored or intentionally concealed sites. They are the ones categorized as the “other” tourists (Munt, 1994), who even differentiate themselves from fellow travelers based on the way and the object of their gaze. A demolished monument will evoke their interest to photograph it, share it online and thus become a discoverer, “an Indiana Jones with a camera” (fig.9). In this travel blogging sphere, gaze turns into another medium of “intellectual snobbism” (Sharpley, 2018).



Fig. 9. Urban exploration in the north of Armenia. Retrieved from www.lostwithpurpose.com.

The abovementioned, in turn shows the postmodern search for the authentic (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000). The travelers escaping from mundane, advanced industrialized cities, praise the naïve lifestyle of Armenia, even if it is expressed with underdeveloped tourism infrastructures. This as if liberates these foreigners from the restraints of being a tourist, giving a chance to fully immerse into the natural routine of the country: “Armenia isn’t a “tourist ready” country, but that’s probably just another thing that makes it even more interesting”. (*traveldrafts.com*). These story-tellers not only photograph popular sites, but they tend to go beyond and make their own narrative about Armenia, one that stands in contrast to NTO version. The key words used to describe Armenia in these blogs, help to understand what the main perceptions in both NTO-supportive and opposing blogs are (Table 1).

Features describing Armenia for traveling		Features referring to visual perception
Off the beaten track	Hidden	Rich in stunning sights
Underrated	Rare	Photogenic
Heavily cultured		Mystical
Safe		Rustic
Ancient		Beautiful
Forgotten Corner		Breathtaking

Table 1. Descriptive key words about Armenia in foreign blogs.

Based on what the country offers and what different travelers look for, the central themes of photographs are: landscape, monuments, urban architecture, people, food and drinks, traditional objects, adventure opportunities, soviet heritage. As shown above, the blogs that write about itineraries or give historical description like in guidebooks, tend to use photographs as cognitive messages. Therefore, these images can be unedited, shot without any basic photographic skills, they are textual supplements, or as put by Barthes (1977), texts on their own. The photographic image of Armenia becomes more diverse when studying the photos as independent narratives or “photo pour photo” approach in blogs (3rd and 4th types). In *hellojetlag.com*, the author makes a separate post entitled *20 Pictures of Armenia That Will Inspire You to Add it to Your Bucket List*. Likewise in *meganstarr.com* a similar post claims: *Take a Trip to Armenia Through These 30 Road Trip Photos!* In these types of blog posts, images cover all the main themes listed above but do it through effects that aestheticize these photos (plate 11).

In photographic terms these type of photos achieve affective features by working with light and shade, color tones and composition. In comparison with medium scale shots, where monuments look like museum objects, these affective photos depict the sight in large scale or wide-angle shots, giving a vast area for the eye to roam, triggering the imagination. In case of landscapes, these photos avoid shooting the scenes in direct sunlight, which leaves crude lines of shadows, and does not transmit a fairy-tale mood. Instead, these photos use sunset light, which is softer and gives warmer tone to the nature. Monuments are also placed in wide-angle composition as a part of a natural surrounding as if showing belonging to the particular place. Travelers also play with different angles, manipulating with low-angle shots or bird-eye views. Another trick is to capture cloudy skies from a low-angle, creating dramatic background. More professional photographers also include some night shots with starry night or long-exposure effects with rivers (hellojetlag.com). Close-ups are something very rare in travel photography; they show deeper engagement with the place (Pan et al., 2014). Main close-ups in these blogs are pictures of food, souvenirs and flowers, something that can eventually be possessed by the travelers.

Another important feature for affective photos is the artistic style of some bloggers. The modern trend of minimalistic photos or abstract style that became dominant in photography and film culture (as influences of works from Andreas Gursky and Wes Anderson) interpret the scenes in straight lines, or simple curves, colors, objects in clear parallel strips, as compositions with food, urban or industrial areas (wander-lush.org) (plate 12). Nevertheless, the romantic gaze is dominant in all these styles. Travelers who travel independently, backpack, camp and hitchhike, have that feeling of resisting the consumer society (Munt, 1994), they find their travel choices to be more immersive, adventurous and closer to discovering the authentic essence of the chosen country. This travel style also suggests opportunities to interact with locals, make connections and enrich personal experience. Thus, the places they assume to be revealed by them become a photographic setting for their contemplating act: gazing far away into strangeness, which they found and henceforth possess. This photographs can also be compared with the Romantic artworks from the beginning of the 19th century, where the pursuit of the unknown was opposed to the rational and order (fig.10).



Fig. 10. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), Romantic movement (on the left). Retrieved from www.artsy.net

Travel blog about Armenia: Why Travel to Armenia (on the right). Retrieved from www.lostwithpurpose.com

Based on the three dichotomies that Urry (1990) puts forward, we can also derive another critical gaze towards the social reality of tourist destinations. We can conditionally refer to it as a social gaze, which is apparent in some blogs and photos. Heading off-the-beaten track in thijsbroekkamp.com, the traveler represents locals in their daily routine, mainly in distant villages, with idyllic surrounding (collecting hay, herding sheep, making honey, playing chess), and avoiding any sights from modern urban environment. This is in some way a mixture of romantic and historic gazes, representing mainly the social conditions of Armenia. Likewise, many travelers are extremely keen on finding and documenting the soviet remains of the country. These are ruins of decayed empire that are now represented as vintage or retro items. Soviet buses, cars such as Lada, Gaz that are still in use in Armenia, soviet residential buildings, memorials erected during the communist era, are unique objects of romantic social gaze of young travelers.

These elements enrich the journey not only with spatial but also temporal dimension, as if people travel back in time, finding themselves in the worlds of old newspapers and books (lostwithpurpose.com, agirlandabaldtraveller.com, mywanderlust.pl, odysseemit73ps.wordpress.com). Especially for western travelers finding soviet heritage is directly connected with the history of their countries, where capitalism was set in contrast with

socialist economic regimes. Therefore, these items are not only parts of Armenia, but also magnets to which these travelers can in various ways relate their homelands' history, or to put differently, to understand how their reality perceived this region. As was told in the interview of the Italian blogger Eleonora (paineroute.it): "...from one side a very ancient story, from [another] side very quick modernization, very quick industrialization under the Stalin era and, I mean...it's really weird for me." (24, female, Italy). For the West and especially for the generation of her father, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan are "still stuck in 90's" (Eleonora, 24), where there is war and tension. Thus, finding symbols of this mental image make it possible for these bloggers to find evidence or confirmation to their pre-framed gaze (fig.11).



Fig.11. Abandoned soviet monument. Retrieved from odysseemit73ps.wordpress.com

Today this past is carefully veiled by local DMCs and NTOs, as it would not be prestigious to promote an independent country through its soviet heritage. Nevertheless, if these layers of history attract certain type of tourists, then it can be advantageous for the local actors to think of repurposing the abandoned or ragged soviet remains into another cultural product that can also be beneficial for tourism. This questioning and transformation of popular places, not

only shakes the structure of official promotion, but it even changes some iconographic traditions from centuries ago. Landscapes with Ararat, Yerevan and churches are also a part of modern representation with new aspects added recently. What was maintained in this image chain is depicting Yerevan with Ararat behind it. Ararat still keeps its leading role, but the focus of the gaze has been changed.

Due to repetitive mechanical and then digital reproductions, this mountain now stands as a sign of its own (Urry, 1990; Osborne, 2000). It is not connoted for its biblical significance, as it was in old images, it is a reality in its own right, a copy of the copy, a *simulacra* (Baudrillard, 1994). In new online travelogues, Ararat is chosen for its breathtaking view, for its position in relation to the city or historical monuments. The sights replaced the sites. In the same manner, the patriarchate of Etchmiadzin with the mother cathedral, which was one of the main objects of representations for early travelers, has rarely been mentioned by the modern bloggers. The reason behind it is not because it lost its significance as a holy center, but rather because it is located in the center of monastic buildings, and has no any scenic backgrounds for a “stunning photo”. It does not even give the average traveler an opportunity to have a large-scale shot with its surrounding, bloggers only take a medium-shot of this monument that can be useful only as a cognitive supplement for their story. In contrast, the monastery of Khor Virap has been the central theme in many touristic photos (plate 13). On the one hand, this monastery became an iconic image of Armenia due to NTO promotion, motivating the tourists to get into the hermeneutic circle. On the other hand, it gained this attention due to its photogenic feature – a monastery with vineyards in front and a huge, snowy mountain in the background.

Therefore, the traditional depictions and their reproductions in modern techniques, still influence the travelers’ gaze. The former can be confirmed or contrasted by the blog photos, but they have always held a bold presence in representing the DI of Armenia. The search for vast, open landscapes unspoiled by mass tourists, hidden places and rustic scenes, motivate the romantic adventurers to interpret Armenia as a friendly, safe and hospitable country. Ancient monasteries and Christian heritage serve as an educative aspect for young generation, mentioning its revelation as understanding western-centric history from a new perspective. Whereas soviet influence and objects are gazed as representations of dramatic past that this country has recently lived through.

The overall picture shows that travel bloggers perceive Armenia as a centralized network, or an “octopus country” – with its headquarters and modern highlights in Yerevan and less developed rustic, heavily cultured regions spread in different directions. This comes in line with early travelers’ depiction of Yerevan as a Silk Road center, with empty peripheries around. It also corresponds with soviet propaganda, with Yerevan as the centralized, vital town and some “staged” touristic attractions in several regions. The role or content of the places have changed, but they are still the central agents of gaze. The modern projected DI tries to decentralize this representation by applying mixed marketing and trying to achieve sustainable development. The “discoveries” and alternative visual representations of independent travelers may be a fruitful source for shifting the dominant attention towards different sides of Armenia. Moreover, these personal blogs have ambitious character to design their best shots as tourism posters, having a more commercial look and competing with the official DI of Armenia (fig.12).

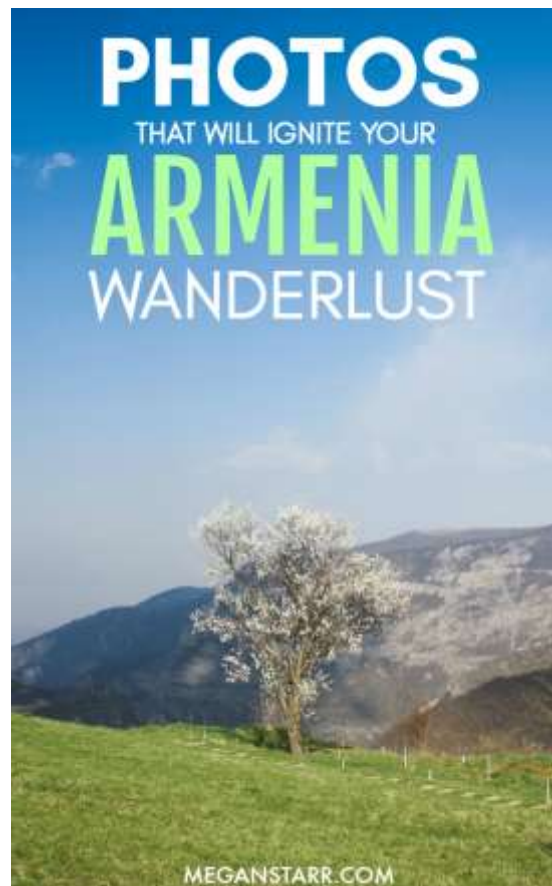


Fig. 12. A poster-frame blog photo, retrieved from meganstar.com

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the construction of visual representations of Armenia in a historical progression, revealing visual traditions developed during different periods. The central research question explores how the visual representation of Armenia as a travel destination has developed from the 17th century until now, and how it is negotiated by tourists. The complementary two sub-questions referred to what the projected DI of Armenia evolved throughout the last century is, and in which way the dialogue between projected and perceived images can contribute to the overall representation of Armenia. Based on these questions, the focus of this paper was to reveal the holistic image of Armenia that dominates today. The main themes for visual representations were mountainous nature and historical monuments, shaping Armenia as a country of ancient history and photogenic landscapes. Moreover, this overall image has been systematically constructed both through projected and perceived visuals. This demonstrates the co-creative essence of Armenian DI by DMOs and TGC, with several contrasting aspects between these actors. Therefore, tourists' perspective on the proclaimed image is quite balanced and constructive at the same time.

This research referred to the theory of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990), with its dichotomies of romantic-collective, historic-modern, authentic-inauthentic gazes. Urry's (1990) statement, that tourist gaze is a culturally and socially constructed phenomenon found its visible manifestation in the case of Armenia. It was necessary to mention theories of semiotic aspect of images as this topic studies the interconnection of travel and photography (Barthes, 1977; Sontag, 1978; Van Leeuwen, 2011). Later theories that evolved around these concepts (Osborne, 2000; Larsen, 2008) also mentioned the recent technological developments due to the digital photography, and its impact on travel narratives. Based on these studies, the gaze was analyzed through the depiction techniques, from manual to mechanical, connecting the sociological aspect with the technical expression.

The change of geo-political powers in the region from the 17th century shaped different expectations among foreign visitors. Whether Armenia was a part of Oriental, exotic world of ancient traditions, or subordinate to the Russian Empire, and later a Soviet republic, transformed the tourist gaze and framed their perception accordingly. Hence, this paper also based its arguments on the Orientalist perspective (Said, 1978; Macfie, 2002). The concept of otherness,

on positioning West in relation to the East, and romanticized notions about foreign lands (Munt, 1994; Jansson, 2018) were also central to this study. Moreover, this and other similar statements (Youngs, 2006), also referred Orientalism to the communist economic power of USSR as a counterpoise to USA in the West. Therefore, these theories accurately encompassed the developments happening in Armenia between mentioned time-period, and made it possible to understand different forms of gaze that stemmed from these transitions. However, the analysis does not mention another significant theory of media tourism (Reijnders, 2011), which could also be used for explaining the creation of places through media (Beeton, 2015) and suggest other aspects of “photo-induced” tourism.

The development of the ways to represent Armenia has undergone striking transformations throughout the 17th-21st centuries. The early travelers interpreted their images through a scientific observation. The objects of the gaze in these visuals were selected based on their significance, the focus was on the content rather than the appearance. This was also the result of drawing techniques, as long as the meaningful object or place could be interpreted in an artistic way through manual intervention. Though it made the creation of travel illustrations to be limited to certain group of people, who had financial means and some drawing skills. The introduction of photography democratized this image creation process, enabling everyone to make their own representations of the country. The development of travel practices are analyzed here through the transformation of the gaze, having Armenia the central case. The observant, scientific vision was replaced with contemplating gaze, the old feeling of discovering new sights turned into a confirmation process in modern times. The meaning was replaced with appearance, sites were substituted with sights, content was reduced to a sign, as in the case of mountain Ararat. It went from being a biblical mystic summit in the early travelogues to a continuously reproduced synecdoche or a *simulacra* (Baudrillard, 1994) in modern era.

These transformations, nevertheless, did not exclude the main themes of representing Armenia. Both travelers and local actors constructed the DI of Armenia through two specific signs: wide, open landscapes referring to the sublime or romantic perception, and ancient monuments demonstrating the historical gaze. These themes and signs were possible to categorize through a relevant methodology used for working with visual data. The four main methods of qualitative method were visual and textual content analysis, mise-en-scene analysis and semiotic analysis. By combining these approaches, it was possible to analyze images

together with their accompanying text, break down their compositional structure and photographic tricks, as well as find their affective and cognitive sides. This methodology was quite relevant for finding the commonalities and differences between the early and modern travelers' images in the historical progression, as well as in photographs projected by DMOs and perceived in TGC.

Though being exceptional in exploring the historical development of illustrative representation of Armenia, this study lacks several aspects of modern representation. The travel blogs selected for this research belong to independent travelers and are analyzed through their photographic content. However, a broader study on contemporary gaze could also reveal the different perceptions based on nationalities. Western travelers prefer to record rural areas, old history and empty landscapes. Whereas some bloggers studied in this paper, focused primarily on urban photography, popular attractions and tourism services. Likewise, bloggers coming from Eastern Europe or Germany paid more attention to communist symbols, soviet cars and abandoned factories, than travelers from the Western Europe or Asian countries. Current results also did not include popular influencers' blogs with bigger audience, where the content can be more commercial or regulated by organizations who pay for these posts. Finally, this paper did not reflect on another aspect of representation of Armenia that is the narratives and photographs created by diaspora Armenian tourists. This has another aspect of homecoming, nostalgia, belonging and search for identity. All these groups have a central role in incoming tourism sector of Armenia, thus, exploring their gaze in relation to one another and with DMOs could uncover a different aspect in understanding the DI creation. These future studies can give insights in managing new tourism products based on various target groups, and contribute to the rare academic researches about representational methods of Armenia.

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Appendix A

1.1 Concepts of photographs from pre-modern, soviet and post-modern phases

Themes	Landscapes	Monuments	Urban	Food	People	Objects
Codes Phase 1 (Pre-modern)	Mountains Rivers Canyons Lakes	Churches Ruins Tombs	Citadel Roads Churches Orchards		Porters Guides Soldiers Peasants Families	Script Ornaments
Codes Phase 2 (Soviet)	Mountains Lakes Vineyards Roads Valleys	Memorials Churches Statues Ruins	Opera Theatre Avenues Residential Monuments Parks	Brandy Fruits Bread	Working class Students Peasants	Arts and crafts Kitchenware Jewelry Souvenirs
Codes Phase 3 (Post-modern)	Mountains Summits Forests Fields Lakes Rivers Canyons	Monasteries Archeological sites Cross-stones Memorials Abandoned places	Statues Museums Cafes Public spaces Parks	Wine Brandy Bread Dishes Fruits	Youth Locals in national garments Kids Families Tourists	Souvenirs Ornaments Arts and crafts

1.2. Data of interviews. Four interviews: two with local DMO representatives, two with travelers.

Name of the interviewer	Occupation	Nationality	Age	Date
Hripsime Grigoryan	Head of the State Tourism Committee of Armenia	Armenian	30	04.01.2019
Sona Hakobyan	Director at Terra Armenia tour agency	Armenian	29	23.12.2018
Eleonora Grampasso	Travel blogger www.painderoute.it	Italian	24	02.01.2019
Lisa and Jonas	Traveler bloggers odysseemit73ps.wordpress.com	German	28, 33	20.12.2018

Main questions for the interviews with the local tourism sector representatives:

- What is the main projected visual message of Armenia?
- What are the main elements constructing this image?
- How much importance does photographic data have for NTO and DMO promotion strategies?
- What changes have been done to the projected DI over the last ten years?
- Do local promoters study and follow-up with the TGC?

The open questionnaire used during the interview with the travel bloggers:

- How did they develop a motivation to visit Armenia, for understanding the push and pull factors and the tourist type;
- What was the image of Armenia before their visit, to find out the stereotypes and expectations;
- Were there any iconic photos that affected their desire to travel to this region, for revealing the DMO influence on their mental image;
- What is the image of Armenia and the main elements that construct that picture for them after their experience?

Appendix B
Fifty travel blogs used for this research

	Name of the Blog	Type of the Blog Post	Photography level	Photo Themes	Link
1	History Fan Girl	Travel Diary	Amateur, edited	Landscapes Monuments People	www.historyfangirl.com
2	Savored Journeys	Travel planner	Amateur, raw	Architecture Food and drink Landscapes	www.savoredjourneys.com
3	Wander with Mi	Travel planner	Amateur, edited	Landscapes Monuments Themselves Food	www.wanderwithmi.com
4	A Girl and a Bald Traveler	Travel diary	Amateur, mobile, over-edited	Landscapes Monuments Tourist attractions Themselves	www.agirlandabaldtraveler.com
5	Katie Aune	Travel diary	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Monuments People/friends Soviet heritage	www.katieaune.com
6	Bambinos without Borders	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Landscapes Townscapes Soviet heritage Food and drink People	www.bambinoswithoutborders.com
7	The Common Wanderer	Guidebook	Semi-professional, edited	Landscapes Monuments Themselves	www.thecommonwanderer.com
8	Adame's Handbook	Travel planner	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Townscapes Food and drink	www.adameshandbook.com
9	We are Travel Girls	Guidebook	Amateur, edited	Landscapes Townscapes	www.wearetravelgirls.com
10	The Wanderess Diary	Travel diary	Amateur, mobile, edited	Monuments Landscapes Food and drink Souvenirs	www.thewanderessdiary.com
11	Marjanne	Travel planner	Amateur, mobile, semi-edited	Urban architecture Landscapes Monuments	www.marjanne.co

12	Leave Your Daily Hell	Guidebook	Amateur, semi-edited	Landscapes Urban Portrait	www.leaveyourdailyhell.com
13	Megan Starr	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Monuments Landscapes Cultural objects	www.meganstarr.com
14	The Solo Globe Trotter	Guidebook	Commercial	Main tourist attractions	www.thesologlobetrotter.com
15	The Gone Goat	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Monuments Landscapes Urbex People	www.thegonegoat.com
16	Wandelion	Travel platform	Amateur, semi-professional	Landscapes Urban architecture Food People	www.blog.wandelion.com
17	Matador Network	Travel platform	Semi-professional, edited	Tourist attractions People	www.matadornetwork.com
18	Bucketlistly	Photo album	Professional, edited	Landscapes Urban architecture Soviet heritage Himself	www.bucketlistly.blog
19	Elizabeth on the Road	Photo album	Amateur, raw	Urban photos Landscapes Abstract items	www.elizabethontheroad.com
20	Tripzilla	Travel platform	Amateur, raw	Winter landscapes Townscapes Travelers	www.tripzilla.ph
21	Chopsticks and Carry-ons	Travel planner	Amateur, over-edited	Landscapes Monuments Food Themselves	www.chopsticksandcarryons.com
22	Tripoto	Travel platform	Amateur, raw	Tourist attractions Himself	www.tripoto.com
23	Wander-lush	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Townscapes Landscapes Soviet heritage	www.wander-lush.org
24	Stingy Nomads	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Tourist attractions	www.stingynomads.com
25	Meet and Greet Me	Travel platform	Amateur, semi-edited	Townscapes Panorama	www.meetngreetme.com
26	Piggy-bear Travels	Travel planner	Amateur, raw	Winter landscapes Themselves	www.piggybeartravels.com

27	Travel Drafts	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Urban Monuments Food and drinks Abandoned places People	www.traveldrafts.com
28	My Travel Affairs	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Monuments Objects – souvenirs	www.mytravellaaffairs.com
29	Heart My Backpack	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Monuments People Urban Landscapes	www.heartmybackpack.com
30	Urban Travel blog	Travel platform	Amateur, raw	Tourist attractions	www.urbantravelblog.com
31	Doc Gelo	Photo album	Semi-professional, edited	Townscapes Urban People Food and drink Himself Soviet heritage Objects – souvenirs	www.docgelo.com
32	Hello Jetlag	Photo album	Professional, edited	Landscapes Urban People Monuments Food and drinks	www.hellojetlag.com
33	Girl About The Globe	Travel planner	Amateur, raw	Tourist attractions	www.girlabouttheglobe.com
34	Thijs Broekkamp	Photo album	Semi-professional, semi-edited	People Landscapes Monuments	www.thijsbroekkamp.com
35	Travels of a Backpacker	Travel planner	Amateur, raw	Monuments Townscapes Tourist attractions	www.travelsofabookpacker.com
36	Hippie in heels	Travel diary	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Monuments	www.hippie-inheels.com
37	Mad Lovely World	Travel diary	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Monuments People Objects	www.madlovelyworld.com

				Food and drinks	
38	Anna Everywhere	Guidebook	Amateur, semi-edited	Landscapes Monuments	www.annaeverywhere.com
39	Lost with Purpose	Travel diary	Semi-professional, edited	Monuments Landscapes Townscapes People-interaction Food Themselves Details in focus	www.lostwithpurpose.com
40	Pain de Route	Travel diary	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Urban	www.painderoute.it
41	Odyseemit73ps	Travel diary	Amateur, semi-edited	Landscapes Roads Soviet heritage People Themselves Monuments Abandoned places	www.odyseemit73ps.wordpress.com
42	Oh My Road	Photo album	Amateur, raw	Silk road – on the route Monasteries, interiors Rustic scenes Food Landscapes People Details Soviet abandoned heritage	www.ohmyroad.com
43	Nina Travels	Travel platform	Amateur, semi-edited	Landscapes Monuments Adventures Urban	www.nina-travels.com
44	Sunrise Odyssey	Guidebook	Semi-professional, edited	Landscapes Monuments Urban People	www.sunriseodyssey.com
45	My Wanderlust	Photo album	Amateur, semi-edited	Urban photos Landscapes Monuments People Soviet heritage	www.mywanderlust.pl
46	Goats on the Road	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Tourist attractions	www.goatsontheroad.com

47	Wild Junket	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Monuments	www.wildjunket.com
48	Hitchhikers handbook	Guidebook	Amateur, raw	Landscapes Roads People	www.hitchhikershandbook.wordpress.com
49	Tom Allen	Travel diary	Professional, edited	Landscapes People	www.tomallen.info
50	Secret Compass	Travel diary	Amateur, edited	Landscapes	www.secretcompass.com

Appendix C. Visuals



Plate 1. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Panorama of Yerevan, from Tavernier J.B. (1676). *Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*, Paris.



Plate 2. Jean Chardin. Etchmiadzin Mother Cathedral from the south-west, from Chardin J. (1686). *Journal du voyage du chevalier Chardin en Perse et aux Indes Orientales par la Mer Noire et par la Colchide*, Paris.



Plate 3. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, Ararat from the three churches, from *Relation d'un voyage du Levant, fait par ordre du Roy*, 1717, Paris.

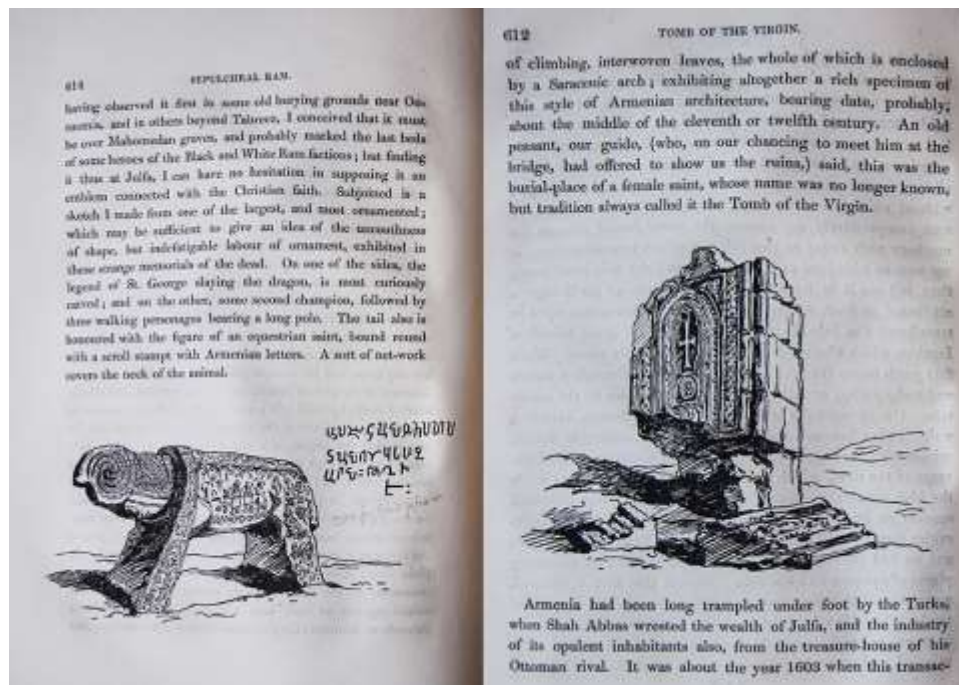


Plate 4. Robert Ker Porter, Illustrations of the text about Armenia, from Ker Porter R. (1821). *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia during the years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820*. London.



Plate 5. Frederic Dubois de Montpereux (1839-1843). The view of two Ararats from nearby of Yerevan Fortress, from Dubois M.F. (1843). *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Georgie, en Armenie et en Crimée*. Paris.



Plate 6. Frederic Dubois de Montpereux (1839-1843). The tomb of Noah, from Dubois M.F. (1843). *Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les Abkhases, en Colchide, en Georgie, en Armenie et en Crimée*. Paris.



Plate 7. Charles Felix Marie Texier (1842). Mother Cathedral of Ani, view from the southeast, from Texier C.F.M. (1842). *Description de l'Arménie, de la Perse, de la Mésopotamie*, Paris.



Pate 8. Charles Felix Marie Texier (1842). Ararat from Bayazed, from Texier C.F.M. (1842). *Description de l'Arménie, de la Perse, de la Mésopotamie*, Paris.



Plate 9. Robert Curzon, (1854). View on Ararat from the valley, from Curzon R. (1854). *Armenia: A Year At Erzeroum, And On The Frontiers of Russia, Turkey, And Persia*. London.

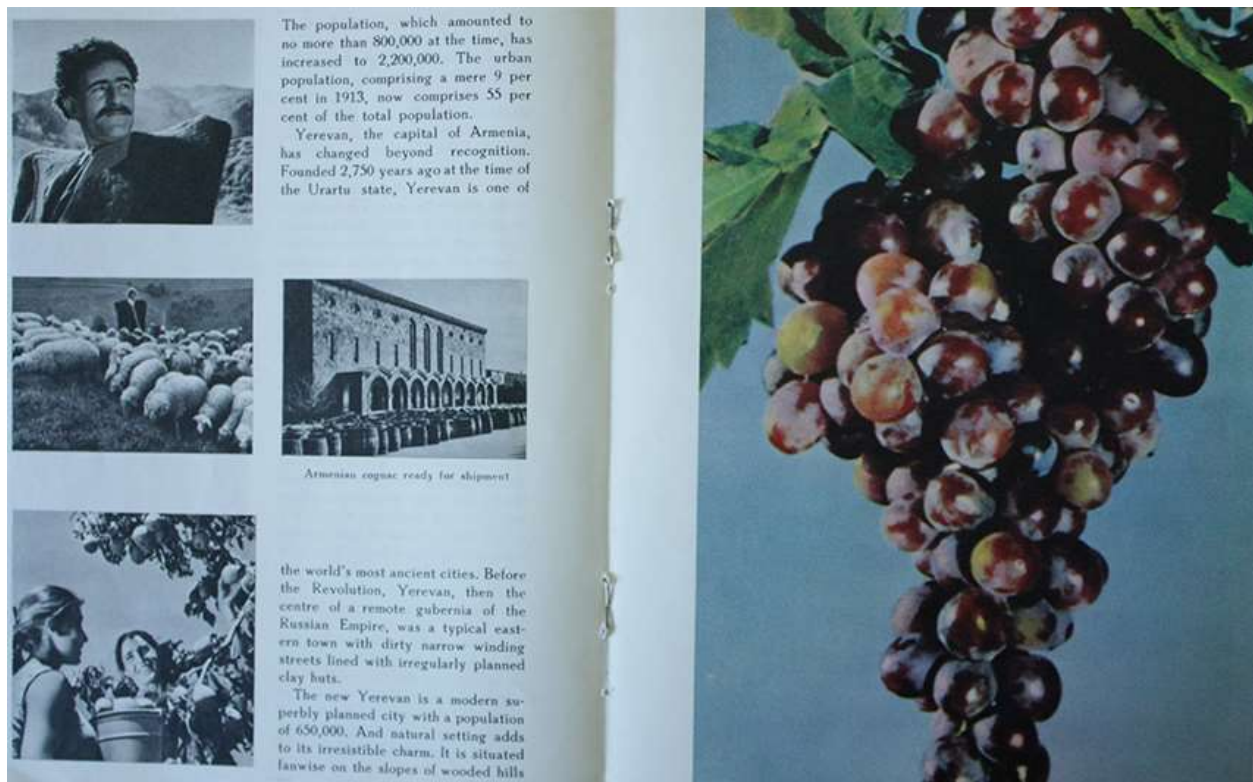


Plate 10. Soviet illustration of agrarian and industrial life of Armenia, from Intourist *Soviet Armenia Album*, 1966



Plate 11. Yerevan during sunset, retrieved from hellojetlag.com/20-pictures-armenia/



Plate 12. Armenian market Goom, retrieved from wander-lush.org



Plate 13. View on Ararat and monastery of Khor Virap, retrieved from www.thecommonwanderer.com