

tanbul (and Izmir), played a major role in improving the economic position of Armenians. No single example illustrates this so well as that provided by Mgrditch *Amira* Djezayirlian, who, upon being appointed *gümruk emini* or “chief of customs,” began a systematic policy of placing Armenians in clerical and other bureaucratic positions in the customs services. One source estimates the number of employees placed by Djezayirlian at 20,000.²⁶ It would, I believe, be a mistake to attribute such an action to mere chauvinism. Djezayirlian was working in the 1830s and 1840s, at a time when efforts headed by other Armenians were striving to bring about some measure of westernization in the Ottoman Empire—in its industries and its bureaucracies. As more recent experience with the westernization of the developing countries has shown, one of the chief obstacles to the rapid achievement of such an objective is the absence of trained personnel. In the Ottoman Empire, the *amiras*’ generosity in endowing schools was responsible in large measure for the early training of many ordinary Armenians in the basic skills of industrial civilization. There were, of course, Turks who had such training, but they constituted a relatively tiny proportion of the Turkish population, and doubtlessly preferred the army and sections of the higher bureaucracy. In situations such as those provided by the customs bureaucracy, the bilingual and multilingual Armenians offered their familiarity with commerce as an added qualification for the job.

While contribution to the educational and cultural fields was a rather recent development, construction and repair of churches were old and traditional practices of the rich since the disappearance of the medieval nakharar dynasties. In keeping with the centuries-old custom, *amiras* devoted themselves to religious charities; the building of a new church or the reconstruction of an old convent represented the best expressions of religiosity, charity and faithfulness to the church. Many an *amira* sponsored the erection of a church, and a number of them, like the Dadians, the Balian, and especially Bezdjian, built several. Bezdjian alone financed the construction or repair of

²⁶ Hnaser, “Niuter Askharhabari,” p. 145.