

amounts of money, and yet such permissions were indispensable because the Ottoman government was particularly unwilling to permit the building of new churches. Thanks to their access to the Palace and to Ottoman officialdom, *amiras* were able to get the *fermans* relatively faster than the norm. Contemporary accounts continuously refer to the *amira* who had managed to obtain the *ferman* for the repair or erection of a church. For example, Davrijetsi mentions that *Hoca Ruhitjan* obtained a *ferman* for the repair of churches and monasteries ruined or damaged by the earthquake of 1648 in Van.³⁵ As to the cost, sources are either tactfully silent or give no specific details.

As the Armenian population of Istanbul increased, the need for new places of worship became acute. Until the mid-nineteenth century the church was more than a house of God; it was the center of all community life. In the early periods, new churches were usually built on the sites of old ones. In the 1800s new churches were erected in new quarters and districts with Armenian populations. This expansion mostly occurred during Mahmud II's reign, partly as a result of his tolerance towards the non-Muslim *millets*, especially the Armenians, and partly thanks to the *amiras'* persevering efforts. *Amiras* recognized the impact that the erection or repair of a church would have on their coreligionists. A few of them might have contributed out of piousness and religious belief, but most tried to enhance their prestige and influence in the *millet*.

At least two *amiras*, Bezdjian and Dadian, seem to have had a finer sense of *noblesse oblige* and a finer diplomatic sense. They made contributions to the other *millets* besides their own. Bezdjian contributed a large sum to the construction of a church at Galata for the Armenian Catholic *millet*, in 1831,³⁶ and to another at Yeni Kapu for the Greek *millet*,³⁷ while Hovhannes *Amira* Dadian donated money for the building of two churches for Greeks, one at Zeytinburnu and the other at Azadli.³⁸ Patronizing other *millets*, they seem to have been acting neither from ecumenical nor philanthropic concerns. Their acts were intended first to raise their prestige beyond the limits of their own *millet*, and secondly, to help

³⁵ Davrijetsi, *Patmutiun*, pp. 352 and 493.

³⁶ A. Berberian, *Patmutiun*, p. 256.

³⁷ Zartarian, *Hishatakaran*, 7:23.

³⁸ Boghosian, *Dadian Gerdastane*, pp. 85-90.