

against foreigners'. It is probable that among them there were those who were cognizant of the decline of the Armenian church and people, and were dreaming of a brighter future.¹⁰

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, *hocas* had grown in number and influence. In Istanbul, they clustered in the well-known *hoca-han* (*han* or *khan* was used to indicate a "caravaasary"), which served as their headquarters as well as the central marketplace. The seventeenth century Armenian chronicler Daranaghtsi, points out in his succinct observation the importance of this *han* as well as the scope of the commercial activities of the *hocas*: "Many Armenian merchants were found there, from all corners of the world."¹¹ Although the *han* burnt down in 1660, a victim of the great fire of that year, even in its half ruined condition it continued to serve the *hocas* for a long time thereafter.

Many colophons, and the few extant chronicles available to us, attest to the noteworthy charitable activities of *hocas*. For example, a chronicler of the period has recorded the names of eleven *hocas* as donors for the repair and reconstruction of the St. Archangel church at Balat, a quarter of Istanbul.¹² In a colophon dated 1656, seven *hocas* are mentioned as "honorable princes and representatives" of the St. Illuminator church of Galata, a section of Istanbul.¹³ In any collection of fifteenth to eighteenth century colophons, one can find many such instances attesting to the generosity of the *hocas*.

Hocas were so dominant in the life of the Armenian people, both in Istanbul and in the provinces, that a student of the subject calls the seventeenth century "the century of the *hocas*."¹⁴ *Hoca* Ruhitjan, perhaps the most influential Armenian of the century and certainly the outstanding figure among his peers, was the Grand Vezir's *kürkçübası* ("keeper of the Sultan's

¹⁰ **Ashot Hovhannisian**, *Drvagner Hay Azatagrakan Mtki* [History of the Armenian Liberational Mind], 2 vols. (Erevan, 1959), 2:38.

¹¹ **Krikor Daranaghtsi**, *Jamanakagrutiun* [Chronicle] (Jerusalem, 1915), pp. 168-169.

¹² **Melkon Asadur**, *Erekdarean Patmutiun Palatu Surb Hreshtakapet Ekeghetsvoy* [A Three Hundred Year History of the St. Archangel Church of Palat] (Constantinople, 1931), p. 58.

¹³ **Papken Giuleserian**, *Kolot Hovhannes Patriark* [Patriarch Hovhannes Kolot] (Vienna, 1904), p. 120.

¹⁴ **Siruni**, *Polis*, 1:477.