

furcoats”).¹⁵ He headed a party in the internecine struggles centering around the Patriarchate. During these internal clashes, he was instrumental in the removal of two patriarchs.¹⁶ The ability to influence the election or removal of the chief cleric of the Armenian *millet* remained the best index of a layman’s power within the community, and of his influence at the imperial court, for centuries to come; it is a recurrent issue during the period of *amiras*.

Certainly Ruhitjan is not the typical *hoca*, but his behavior and actions are not atypical of the entire *hoca* class. Their interests and influence were limited neither to the geographical confines of the capital nor to the sphere of the Armenian church, for

the *hoca* class, holding the leadership of [Armenian] national life, was in close contact with the masses in the Armenian provinces, and was able to exert influence due to the fact that it knew how to put at the services of community life a certain portion of its economic power and immense capabilities. ... In 1671, *Hoca* Alhas and *Hoca* Khatchadur, originally from Van, petitioned the central government in Istanbul and were able to obtain a reduction of part of the tax burden of the people while some other taxes were completely eliminated.¹⁷

Perhaps the best indication of the *hocas*’ attempt to extend their influence by winning the hearts and minds of the people is their ransoming of the Armenians taken prisoner during the long-lasting Turco-Persian wars.¹⁸ *Hocas* would also defray the expenses of the repair of monasteries and churches ruined by frequent earthquakes, and would assist in the repayment of public debts, such as the huge debt of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.¹⁹

¹⁵ **Mrmerian**, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, p. 27.

¹⁶ In the first instance, Ruhitjan and his collaborator were able to remove the unpopular Patriarch Tovmas Beratsi in 1658; the Patriarch had obtained the *ferman* (edict) of his institution to the patriarchate by raising the annual tax from 140,000 to 400,000 *kuruş* and bribing officials.

The second instance relates to the removal of the Patriarch Hovhannes Mughnetsi, in 1655; a group of influential leaders, headed by Ruhitjan, forced the Patriarch to resign. See **Ormanian**, *Azgapatum*, 2:2513; 2518-2521 and **Asadur**, *Polsoy Hayere*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁷ **Anasian**, *Azatagrakan Sharjumnern*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁸ **Hagop Garnetsi**, *Teghagir Verin Hayots* [Topography of Upper Armenia] (Vagharshapat, 1903), p. 34.

¹⁹ **Daranaghtsi**, *Jamanakagrutiun*, pp. 324-326.