

te and distinct class at best might be interpreted to mean that some of them were able to make significant donations in order to have their names inscribed or recorded along those of *hocas* and other prominent individuals. In other words, some of the *mahtesis* were not simply pious pilgrims but quite rich people who had reached a visible station in the social structure.

A review of what is known about the predecessors of the *amiras* suggests that interpretations of the record have been clouded by an uncalled-for attribution of importance to certain groups and struggles, accompanied by an underestimation of others. What is most significant and must never be lost sight of, is that the individuals under discussion, whatever their titles, are the Armenian upper bourgeoisie of the period. Of course, the term “bourgeoisie” can be and has been applied to a very wide group, but it is possible to restrict it here. The Armenian writers understood quite well what group or class they were writing about; it is no accident that members of this group are so often called *ishkhan*. The term means “prince” in modern Armenian, but in its meaning are entwined two different strands: one derives from *ishkhel*, “to rule,” and the other from the notion of aristocratic origin. Naturally, the two were linked in classical Armenian history. Whether *ishkhan* implied aristocratic descent from the feudal nobility need not concern us here; what is necessary to stress is that in talking about the “ruling class,” such as it was, of the Armenian *millet*, a “class” which “ruled” subject to the limitations imposed by the sovereignty of the sultan and the Ottoman state.

What can be safely said about this ruling class is that there was competition and rivalry between its members, who were divided into two groups with no exact demarcation. Geographically speaking, the *hocas* were originally largely provincial merchants, while the *çelebis* were more metropolitan and derived their wealth from manipulations of financial capital. However, this state of affairs clearly changed as *hocas* migrated to Istanbul from the provinces and continued to lead their followers.⁸⁵ This rivalry between two power elites, displaced in Istanbul, continued unabated and took on social overtones. The perennial competition described by Armenian chroniclers adds another polarity, that of “insiders” versus “outsiders.” The “insiders,” in Armenian *nersetsi*, were those who had settled in the capital

⁸⁵ Hovhannisian, Review of Anasian’s Book, *Patma-Banasirakan Hantes* (1963, no. 1): 241.