

amira was used between 1550 and 1870.²⁵ Armenian sources, at least those examined in the course of this study do not bear this out. The earliest report is based on flimsy evidence.

Arakel Ketchian, writing in the 1930s, refers to a lost memoir by a provincial priest who claimed to have seen in his village of Abutchekh, near Akn, church records attesting that “*mahdesi* Pilibos the great benefactor *amira* of [the family of] Varents initiated and built from its foundation the church of St. Minas... in the Armenian calendar year R Kh T (which corresponds to 1600),”²⁶ In addition the same source reports that the existence of Pilibos *Amira* is attested by another, equally unverifiable item from Akn region, which is said to have testified that the “wealthy Pilibos *Amira* of Varents was elected [as supervisor for the construction of a public fountain] in the Armenian calendar year R H (which corresponds to 1621).”²⁷ There remains no way for checking the accuracy of these two reports, since Ketchian could not recall where the priest’s memoir was published.

One of the earliest fully confirmed uses of the word *amira* is found on an epitaph dating from 1758,²⁸ a colophon written between 1745 and 1770 mentions the names of five *amiras*.²⁹ After 1760 the use of the title in colophons, epitaphs, inscriptions and official records becomes widespread.³⁰ The official document certifying the election of the Patriarch Krikor Basmadjian, dated 1772, bears the signature of *amiras* right after those of the clergy³¹. Around this date, it became customary in records of churches and minutes of meetings to mention the names of *amiras* first, followed by those of other participants.

could not have lived in 1559! Could the discrepancy be ascribed to a printing error! Is the correct date 1659? In the latter case the source remains unknown.

²⁵ *Endarsak Oratsoyts*, 1902, p. 196.

²⁶ **A. Ketchian**, *Akn*, p. 225.

²⁷ *Ibid.* The letters for the date according to the Armenian calendar are misprinted: in R Kh H the letter Kh should be omitted to obtain the correct date, corresponding to 1621.

²⁸ **Azadian**, *Akn II*, p. 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³⁰ **Asadur**, *Polsoy Hayere*, p. 63, n. 2: “the word *amira* is found in colophons dating after 1760.”

³¹ **Krikor Kalemkearian**, *Kensagrutium Ergu Hay Patriarkneru ev Tasn Episkooosneru* [Biography of Two Patriarchs and Ten Bishops] (Vienna, 1915), pp- 344-350.