

to provide a satisfactory answer to the following question: why did so many *amiras* come from Akn?<sup>94</sup> In a recent study, a Soviet Armenian scholar correctly observed that

in the beginning, more than twenty *amira* families worked in Akn and its surroundings, created [working] capital, and later moved to Constantinople, and [eventually] took control of the empire's economic superintendencies.<sup>95</sup>

But this observation, like all the others preceding it, does not provide the necessary response to the question posed.

For strategic reasons the town of Akn was built by its original settlers in a mountainous region; therefore, it had limited economic possibilities. The townspeople grew fruits and vegetables in their skillfully created gardens and groves, and exchanged these fruits of their labor for cereals and other agricultural products with the villagers living in the surrounding plains. In addition to these garden products, the Akn-ers had developed thriving cottage industries and especially a vigorous trade. Akn *bazirgans*, *i.e.*, merchants, would organize large caravans to travel long distances and bring erchandise from such commercial emporiums as Istanbul and Aleppo. They would sell their imported goods to the population of the whole region. "The store of the Armenian merchant was sometimes like a 'grand magasin' ('general store') where all kinds of merchandise could be found."<sup>96</sup> The owner of this relatively large store would not only sell but also exchange his goods for the products of the peasants. He would also loan money to his customers. Then, in the winter, this merchant or store-owner would tour the surrounding towns and villages to collect his debts or loans.<sup>97</sup> Apparently, this is how Akn merchants entered the money-lending trade and turned into *sarrafs*, on a small scale. With time they would accumulate enough capital to enable them to move to Istanbul.

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<sup>94</sup> Three Armenian authors have written exclusively on Akn: **Toros Azadian**, **Arakel Ketchian** and **Mgrditch Barsamian**; see cited works in the Bibliography.

<sup>95</sup> **Ghazarian**, *Arevmtahayeri*, p. 397.

<sup>96</sup> **Ketchian** and **Barsamian**, *Akntsik*, p. 380. Thanks to its commerce and cottage industries Akn was so rich that it was called "Küçük Misir," *i.e.* "Little Egypt," in **A. Ketchian**, *Akn*, p. 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 381.