

ries;<sup>129</sup> such preference for a fixed burial ground and for family mausoleums tends to indicate dynastic pretensions.

Very little is reported about the educational level of *amiras*. Harutiun *Amira* Bezdjian barely had an elementary education; perhaps that accounts for the number of schools he founded and endowed. As a rule, *amiras* had some schooling which, more often than not, amounted to an ability to read and write. They kept scribes as much out of necessity as for prestige. However, there were a few who were highly educated. Seghpos Erevanents was the interpreter of the British Ambassador.<sup>130</sup> The correspondence of Arakel *Amira* Dadian with the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice and Istanbul is very significant: in his letters to Mekhitarist *vartabeds* he asked for an 11-volume encyclopedia, “preferably in Italian,” but if not available in that language, then in French.<sup>131</sup> During the second half of the eighteenth century, certainly the best educated person among his peers must have been Mgrditch *Amira* Miridjanian, who had received his higher education in Italy.<sup>132</sup> Hovhannes *Amira* Dadian, on the contrary, was given only a basic education by his private tutors, but later became well-versed in mathematics and French. What he lacked in formal higher education he made up for by reading widely in Western writings and by making long trips to Europe. He was a self-made man intellectually, who obtained several diplomas in technical fields from European institutions.<sup>133</sup>

As a group, *amiras* were better educated than the rest of Armenian society. Contact with the learned men of the time as well as with Westerners living in Istanbul had helped raise their level of general knowledge and widen their mental horizon.

---

<sup>129</sup> **Torkomian**, *Eremia Tchelepii*, 2:657.

<sup>130</sup> **Asadur**, *Polsoy Hayere*, p. 71

<sup>131</sup> Letter from Mahdesi Arakel, Chief of Canon Works, to Father Kevork Abdullahian, 14 April 1804, and letter from Fr. Mgrditch Avkerian, in Istanbul, to Fr. Gabriel Avedikian, in Venice, 11 May 1804, in Archival Collections, Correspondence, vol. 35. For these and other letters I thank Fr. Sahag Djemdjemian of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice who located the letters and made available to me.

<sup>132</sup> **Azadian**, *Akn II*, p. 74; *Idem*, *Akn I*, p. 55.

<sup>133</sup> **A. Ketchian**, *Akn*, p. 137; **Boghosian**, *Dadian Gerdastane*, pp. 43, 52, 106 passim.