

palace were named *amira*. These great *amira*-merchants, whom the Ottomans called *bazirgân*, a term best translated as “officially-appointed purveyor,”¹⁰⁴ provided the palace with such necessities as *çuha*, *bez* (cotton material), *tülbent* (muslin), etc. In addition to their primary function as purveyors of the palace, many *bazirgâns* served the army, assuming responsibility for its provisions. Others were involved in general trade.

As early as the 1640s, Armenian merchants occupied the position of *bazirgânbaşı*, i.e. “chief purveyor,” of Sultan Murad IV’s (1623-1640) army during its march on Baghdad in 1638.¹⁰⁵ Many of these merchants controlled a single trade route or specialized in a particular commodity. Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, for example, Garabed Manugian’s fleet dominated shipping between Istanbul and Russia, enabling him to accumulate a great fortune.¹⁰⁶ In the 1750s, Hovsep *Çelebi*, as *bazirgân*, monopolized the importation of watches from England, controlling their sale throughout the empire, and enriching himself in the process.¹⁰⁷

In the 1760s, three *amiras* are reported as *bazirgânbaşı* of the grand vezir: Boghos *Amira* (Aleksanian), Ghazar *Amira* (Movsesian) and Aslan *Amira* (family name not known).¹⁰⁸ After the grand vezir’s death, they all fell; Mardiros *Amira* Sakaian along with his associates succeeded them. A renowned *amira*, Mikayel Pishmishian, was also a *bazirgân*, specifically *ekmekçi*, “chief bread purveyor,” for the government, and most probably for the army as well.¹⁰⁹ During the eighteenth century a considerable number of *amiras* were *bazirgâns* but after the turn of the century the sources are silent about their activities. In general, the *bazirgân-amiras* are a much more limited phenomenon than the *amiras* engaged in finance and industry.

¹⁰⁴ According to Pakalin, the *bazirgâns* were Christian merchants, who were called also *çorbacı* and *çelebi*. The term was used synonymously for big merchant, *ehl-i ticaret*, i.e., people of commerce, and merchant whose occupation was commerce or money lending, *sarraflık*. See Pakalin, *Deyimleri*, 1:183, s.v. “bazirgân” and “bazirgânbaşı.”

¹⁰⁵ A. Ketchian, *Akn*, p. 272.

¹⁰⁶ Mrmerian, *Masnakan*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁷ Der Bedrosian, *Hayeru Sadare*, 6 November 1976, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Mrmerian, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ A. Ketchian, *Akn*, p. 178.