

they were both hanged in 1752.¹¹⁴ There is, however, no way of separating the share of the Armenian *bazirgân* from that of his collaborator. In 1828, Harutiun *Amira* Bezdjian, one of the wealthiest men of his time, is reported to have bought the pleasure boat of a European traveler for 350,000 *kuruş* with “one or two other leading [Armenian] characters,” and presented it to Mahmud II as a gift.¹¹⁵ In the same year, Harutiun *Amira* paid for half of the expenditure for the reconstruction of the burnt-out Patriarchal building and its adjacent three churches, at an estimated cost of as much as three million *kuruş*.¹¹⁶

These wealthy individuals could not feel secure without additional guarantees. The government granted them a legal framework which assured, to some extent, that they would not be considered simply *zimmi*, non-Muslim, subjects. Because of the nature of the profession of banking, disputes would inevitably arise between a *sarraḥ* and his debtor, usually a *mültezim* pasha. The *sarraḥ* as a member of a *zimmi millet* had a major legal handicap: his testimony was not admissible in an Islamic court, and he could, therefore, not obtain equitable redress in an ordinary tribunal. Furthermore, the *sharia*, Islamic canon law, considered interest on money loaned as illegal and usurious. To remedy this situation, the government created a special court where the *sarraḥs*' lawsuits could be tried equitably. It is not clear whether this special court, called by a western source the “council of the mint,”¹¹⁷ was connected with the Ministry of Finance, *hazine-i maliye*, or the Sultan's Privy Purse, *hazine-i hassa*.¹¹⁸ Whatever the jurisdictional connections of this tribunal, the fact remains that the *sarraḥs* were granted legal rights not available to the rest of the non-Muslim society, and were “considered privileged”¹¹⁹ subjects of the Sultan.

Even so this extraordinary and favorable legal measure guaranteed the security of neither their wealth nor their person. The fact remained that

¹¹⁴ J. M. Jouannin and Jules Van-Gauer, *Turquie* (Paris, 1850), p. 343, reported in Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, p. 2979.

¹¹⁵ MacFarlane, *Constantinople*, 1:491.

¹¹⁶ *Endarsak Oratsoyts*, 1901, p. 191.

¹¹⁷ Ubcini, *Lettres*, 2:314.

¹¹⁸ Pakalin, *Deyimleri*, 1:793.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*