

“eminent posts [were] eminent dangers in Turkey,” as a contemporary western observer noted succinctly.<sup>120</sup> Corruption and bribery were widespread in the administration; nothing could be accomplished without bribery.<sup>121</sup> This practice was not limited to poorly-paid, low echelon government employees, but reached the highest levels of the ruling class, and the sultan himself, who would not hesitate to confiscate the fortunes of his wealthy subjects when he felt need for money.<sup>122</sup>

In this atmosphere many a *sarraḡ* lost both his wealth and life. To some extent it was true that when “a *sarraḡ* has become so rich as to make him worth the sacrifice... [he] is hanged and decapitated, his property seized, and his family reduced to utter destitution.”<sup>123</sup> Hagop Hovhannesian’s case has already been mentioned. He was both the *bazirgân* and the *sarraḡ* of the grand vezir.<sup>124</sup> In 1763, Ghazaros *Amira* Movsesian, *bazirgân* of the Grand Vezir Ragib Mehmet Pasha, was imprisoned, along with two colleagues, after the latter’s death, and consequently hanged.<sup>125</sup> In 1821, Krikor *Amira* Tcharazian, a prominent *sarraḡ* in Istanbul, was hanged from the door of the Valide Han, a center for the *sarraḡ*s.<sup>126</sup> In general, a *sarraḡ* was imprisoned or killed as a consequence of the downfall or death of the pasha whose political patronage he enjoyed, although unlike the pasha, the Armenian *sarraḡ* might occasionally save his life and salvage part of his fortune through bribery and the intervention of friends.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> MacFarlane, *Constantinople*, 1:113

<sup>121</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole, Preface to *The People of Turkey*, by John Elijah Blunt, 2 vols. (London, 1878), p. xvi. A contemporary Turkish humorist put it very aptly: “ıceri girdim, selam verdim, rüsvet degil dir degi almadilar.” Trans. “I entered in [the office], and gave them my greetings, but as it was not a bribery they did not take it.”

<sup>122</sup> Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 1:265.

<sup>123</sup> Walsh, *Residence*, 2:431. To cite the case of a non-Armenian, Shapdji, a wealthy Jew who was so charitable that he was called “father of the poor,” was killed on a minor pretext and his fortune confiscated. MacFarlane, *Constantinople*, 2:147-150

<sup>124</sup> Torkomian, *Eremia Tchelepüi*, 2:612, 3:279.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:612; A. Ketchian, *Akn*, p. 285. These sources mention the names of three different individuals. The confusion is due to the fact that *amiras* are mentioned in their first names, as was the custom in the nineteenth century.

<sup>126</sup> A. Berberian, *Patmutiun*, pp. 175 and 465.

<sup>127</sup> Mrmerian, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, p. 65.