

boat, according to the wishes of the sultan, and passed by the palace, so Mahmud could bid farewell to his friend.¹³⁴

Two incidents are sufficiently indicative of Bezdjian's role to be worth presenting here. During 1829 there was a shortage of food in the capital because of the Russo-Turkish war. As a remedy the government issued a decree ordering Armenians, Greeks, Jews and others who had come to Constantinople in recent years, as well as bachelors, to return to their birthplaces. This decree created unrest in the population. Bezdjian proposed, instead, the removal of internal customs duties, the reduction of fees on travel and the freeing of the trade of wheat and other staples from any restrictions. As a result, the capital was soon flooded with wheat and other foods.¹³⁵ At the end of the war a new difficulty was faced: one of the stipulations of the treaty, was the payment of heavy war indemnity. As the Ottoman state treasury was empty, Bezdjian was granted permission to secure the amount demanded by the Russians by whatever means he could. In a matter of a few days he obtained the necessary loans from the European and local merchants in Istanbul and presented the voucher to the sultan.¹³⁶

Such easy access to and close contact with the sultan, at a time when he was still "the shadow of God on earth," was doubly significant: the sultan, by communicating with these *zimmi* subjects, was giving proof of his open-mindedness; the Armenian *amiras*, having such closeness with the ultimate authority in the Muslim empire, were indicating that they were as much an integral part of the Ottoman ruling class as any other elements. The Christian Armenian was closer to the sultan and his entourage than most Muslim *rayas* (subjects).

What made this possible was the role reserved to the Armenian notables, especially the *sarrafs*. These *amira-sarrafs* were capitalists *par excellence*: as capitalists their capital was essential for the functioning of Ottoman financial structure. In the *iltizam* tax-farming system their dual role of *sarrafs*, as banker providing capital and merchant selling commodities

¹³⁴ **Toros Azadian**, *Hariurameay Hobelean Bezdjian Mayr Varjarani, Kum Kapu, 1830-1930* [Centenary of the Bezdjian School, Kum Kapu, 1830-1930] (Constantinople, 1930), pp. 22-23; **S. Papazian**, *Kensagrutiun*, p. 65; **Zartarian**, *Hishatakarani*, pp. 8-9.

¹³⁵ **Zartarian**, *Hishatakarani*, pp. 20-21.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23. **Alexander W. Hidden**, *The Ottoman Dynasty* (New York, 1912), pp. 304-305.