

intervention by the laity in patriarchal affairs occurred in 1649, when a group of Armenian notables, led by *Hoca* Ruhitjan of Van, took control of the Patriarchate and lay vicars managed the office for eleven months.⁴⁷ A short time later, the Patriarchate once again came under the control of lay vicars, for about two years, between 1655 and 1657. A committee comprised of twenty-four members, with *Hoca* Ruhitjan as its leader, transacted the affairs of the Patriarchate.⁴⁸ This experience was repeated about forty years later, when for four years, from 1689 to 1692, lay, or married priest vicars administered the Patriarchate.⁴⁹

The growth and consolidation of the power of the Patriarchate did not hamper the *hocas*, *çelebis* and especially the *amiras*, except in exceptional circumstances when a strong-willed Patriarch who had personal contacts with the Ottoman bureaucracy was elected. Normally, the *amiras* were in closer touch with the Porte than the Patriarch, by virtue of their business dealings and personal connections. They could pressure the Patriarch directly or through the Ottoman government. As a result, a strong patriarchate, especially when led by a weak-willed Patriarch, simply meant that the Armenian *millet* would be ruled *de facto* by the *amiras* then in favor at Court.

This pattern of intervention and control over the patriarchate continued until the adoption of a constitution in 1860. It was not sheer hyperbole, then, for the most influential among the *amiras* to be called *azgapet*, "leader of the nation." Under his leadership, a council of *amiras*, composed of the prominent members of the class, would elect and depose the Patriarch.⁵⁰ Through the Patriarch they would appoint prelates for the various dioceses of the empire. This council "decided every question of any importance pertaining to the civil or ecclesiastical affairs of the Armenian nation."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, 2:2472; Asadur, *Polsoy Hayere*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, 2:2513, 2518; Asadur, *Polsoy Hayere*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Ormanian, *Azgapatum*, 2:2641, 2654; Tchamtchian, *Patmutiun Hayots*, 3:721.

⁵⁰ P. Ketchian, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, p. 91.

⁵¹ Dwight, *Christianity*, p. 66.