

This Committee of Twenty-Four, as it came to be known, was composed of two technocrat-*amiras* and twenty-two representatives of the various *esnafs*. In addition to the administration of the patriarchal finances, it had to manage all the national institutions, including the schools. It was chaired by a guild representative, Hetum Meriemkulian.⁶³ For the first time in the history of the Armenian *millet*, the *esnafs*' representatives were members of an executive body with decision-making power; furthermore, they also formed the absolute majority of the committee.

Several factors had contributed to this radical development: the reforms announced in the *Hatt-i Şerif*, the rise in the economic power of the *esnafs* in the *millet*, the diminution of patriarchal privileges, and the temporary split in *amira* ranks caused by conflicts between the extremely conservative *sarrafs* and the relatively "liberal" technocrat *amiras*. This conflict focused above all on developments in Armenian education.

The immediate and apparent cause for the wedge driven between the *amiras* was the question of the Armenian College, founded in 1838 at Üsküdar. This institution of higher learning, called the *Djemaran* ("college," "lyceum" or "academy"), was the brainchild of two imperial architects, Garabed *Amira* Balian and Hovhannes *Amira* Serverian, the latter of whom was appointed *mütevelli* of the college. As the Greeks, Latins and Protestants already had their high schools, the need for a similar educational institution for the Armenian Apostolic *millet* had been voiced repeatedly in the decade preceding the foundation of the College. On 26 August 1836 Patriarch Stepannos Aghavni Zakarian (1831-1839) called a meeting which resolved to open the school with an initial contribution of 200,000 *kuruş* for its construction, and an annual subsidy of 120,000 *kuruş* from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Twenty *amiras*, mostly *sarrafs*, made a pledge that each of them would pay the tuition of a needy student. Students from well-to-do families were to be charged 3,000 *kuruş*.⁶⁴ The project was supported by the clerics, including the Patriarch, the *amiras* and the *esnafs*, and the college was officially inaugurated on 9 December 1838.

⁶³ Alboyadjian, "Sahmanadrutiune," pp. 188-189.

⁶⁴ P. Ketchian, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, pp. 73-74; Asadur, *Polsoy Hayere*, p. 137.