

General Assembly convened on 19 March 1834 and in which representatives of the *esnafs* participated, was composed solely of *amiras*.

It was the combination of internal dissension and external pressure that brought changes in the political structure of the *millet* administration. The *Hatt-i Serif* of Gülhane of 1839 provided great impetus for change by its advocacy of reforms within Ottoman society, in general, and non-Muslim *millets*, in particular. As an application of the judicial equality of Muslims and non-Muslims in the courts, enunciated in the imperial edict, Sultan Abdülmecid established the *Meclis-i Ahkam-i Adliye*, “the Supreme Council of Judicial Ordinances,” which formulated a new penal code for all Ottoman subjects.<sup>60</sup> The introduction of such reforms as guarantees for security of life, honor and property, and equality before the law, did not affect *amiras*’ status directly. In the first Judicial Council, set up by the patriarch in 1840 following the Ottoman example, there were four *amiras* along with four married priests, with no *esnaf* representation.<sup>61</sup>

The abolition of *iltizam* tax-farming, one of the reform measures contained in the *Hatt-i Serif*, did however, undermine the *amiras*’ dominance over the *millet*. Not because it allegedly ruined the *amiras* economically, as one modern student has claimed;<sup>62</sup> no instances of financial loss of great magnitude have been recorded in contemporary sources; furthermore, the *iltizam* was reinstituted two years later (11 March 1842); but because of its economic consequences on the Patriarchate and the *millet*. As a result of this abolition, the Sultan directed the Patriarch, through the imperial *irade*, “rescript,” of 1 March 1840, to collect state taxes from all the Armenians under his jurisdiction and remit them to the imperial treasury. At the same time, religious institutions and properties which had been hitherto tax exempt were now taxed. The Patriarch, Hagopos Seropian (1839-1840), whose traditional prerogatives and privileges were greatly diminished by the reforms, faced with the refusal of *sarra-i-amiras* to cooperate with the Patriarchate in the collection of taxes and to extend to it financial help, on 7 March 1840, appointed a special committee to administer the complicated finances of the Patriarchate.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd ed. (London, 1969), p. 108.

<sup>61</sup> Alboyadjian, “Sahmanadrutiune,” p. 146.

<sup>62</sup> Artinian, “Historical Development,” p. 51.