

More importantly, the *amiras*' posture towards the Patriarchate was in accord with Ottoman policy, as was pointed out earlier. Any understanding and assessment of their political ideas, concepts and policies should be based upon their actions and utterances outside the realm of the church.

What were the *amiras*' political perceptions and orientation? Contemporary sources have transmitted very little about this. Most writings on this particular subject come from later periods and writers. *Amiras*' political creed was best formulated by a writer in a speech made in 1879, on the anniversary of the National Hospital: "... Bezdjian *Amira* taught us, not by words but by deed, how to worship our religion, respect the authorities and love our nation."¹²⁷ In Ottoman society, where religion was the single most important mark of identification, *amiras* strove for the strengthening of religious consciousness among Armenians. "Respect [for] the authorities" was not mere rhetoric; a whole mentality and a clear pattern of conduct were condensed in them. In remaining faithful to their creed, *amiras* earned for the Armenians the attribute *millet-i sadika*, the loyal *millet*, by the Turkish government and people.¹²⁸ Later critics chided the *amiras* for their loyalty to the Ottoman state and conservatism. As one scholar put it, "when the Turk said 'faithful people,' all knew that it was a name proper to the Armenian nation. The *amiras* kept that name attached to the Armenian people until they disappeared as a class."¹²⁹ Many later writers were critical of *amiras*, as well as of the upper bourgeoisie in general, for the "indifference towards the most essential and pressing concerns of the nation, which are weighing heavily on our mournful history, as an indelible and unpardonable stain."¹³⁰ These criticisms are misplaced, for they reflect the attitude of later periods, when social and political norms and criteria were different.

Among later writers Soviet Armenian historians have been especially vehement in condemning the pro-Ottoman political orientation of the *amiras*, and have juxtaposed it to the more fruitful pro-Russian political stand of the well-known Lazarian dynasty of St. Petersburg. This family, ennobled by the Russian tsar for its economic contribution to Russia,

¹²⁷ P. Ketchian, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, p. 9.

¹²⁸ Lewis, *Emergence*, p. 356.

¹²⁹ Leo, *Khotjayakan Kapitale*, p. 255.

¹³⁰ Varantian, *Haykakan*, 2:85.