

resembled the *amira* families in contributing financially and otherwise to the cultural revival of Eastern Armenians. The Lazarians built churches and schools, and were involved in the overthrow of Persian rule over Eastern Armenia, and in the establishment of Russian sovereignty over the country. Members of the family are invariably presented as “liberators” of Eastern Armenia, and their Russian orientation is hailed. It is in this context that Soviet Armenian scholars deplore the *amiras*’ less productive Ottoman orientation. Zurabian points out that “the Armenian people living in Western Armenia and Turkey and Russian orientation at a time when the most important segment of the *amira* bourgeoisie had a Turkish orientation.”¹³¹ This is essentially an accurate presentation so far as the *amira* political stand is concerned. (It is true that the Armenians living near the Russian border had pro-Russian sentiment, but such tendencies were very weak if not totally absent in cities in Western Anatolia, especially in Istanbul and Izmir, which both had large Armenian populations.)

The issue here is not the political orientation *per se*, but its implied comparison with the Lazarians’ “liberational” stand. Were the two groups pursuing different policies? One need only remember that the Lazarians were proponents of Russian state policy, which at the time pursued expansionist goals. Russian policy was to expand as far south as possible, and since the Armenians were eager to get rid of the oppressive and archaic Persian rule over Eastern Armenia, this fit well into Russian political plans and imperialist ambitions. In other words, the Lazarians were at the same time helping the Russian state realize its expansion in the south of the Caucasus, on the Armenian plateau, and assisting to “liberate” part of the Armenian homeland from the Persian yoke. The political orientation of the Lazarians was as conservative as that of the *amiras*, in that both groups supported state policy. Ottomans were already ruling over Western Armenia, and had no expansionist plans further east; consequently, the *amiras* had only to support the *status quo*. In this context, the Lazarians’ and the *amiras*’ orientations were essentially the same: to lend support to official state policy.

¹³¹ S. Sh. Zurabian, *Hay Tntesagitakan Mtki Zargatsman Urvagdzer* [Sketches of the Development of the Armenian Economic Mind] (Erevan, 1959), p. 69.