

The Armenians, in Istanbul as well as throughout the empire, were members of the “Ermeni,” *i.e.* Armenian, *millet*. The word *millet*, derived from the Arabic *milla*, originally meaning “religion,” was used to describe certain religious communities. In the Ottoman Empire, the three officially recognized *millets* were the *Rum milleti*, *Yahudi milleti* and *Ermeni milleti*, respectively the Greek Orthodox, the Jewish and Armenian religious communities. Each *millet* had its own administrative system, which enjoyed a quasi-autonomous status so far as its internal matters were concerned.

Along with members of the other two *millets*, Armenians were considered *zimmi* or non-Muslim subjects of the sultan. As such, they were subjected to many restrictive measures and additional taxes. Legally, all *zimmis* were equal, regardless of their profession, trade or economic position. But in practice, they were not treated equally and evenhandedly by Ottoman authorities. The Armenian clergy, for example, formed a relatively privileged elite in certain parts of the empire at certain times, and enjoyed various rights recognized by the government.

In addition to clerics, there were a number of Armenians to whom the Ottoman government had accorded tax exemptions and other privileges. Armenians called these privileged individuals *Amira* and perceived them as members of a separate class. Although *Amira* was not an official Ottoman designation of rank or status, the examination of the history of the Armenian *millet* will demonstrate, as we shall see, that *Amiras* in fact functioned as a class with special privileges, rights and powers, and were conscious of their privileged status. This class, with its characteristics and roles, is the subject of this study.

Armenians, 17,000). **A. Ubicini** et **Pavet de Courteille**, *Etat Présent de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1876), p. 202, note 3, state: “la population arménienne de Constantinople ne s’élève pas à plus de 180,000 âmes.” No explanation is provided for this lower figure. **Eugène Boré**, *Almanach de l'Empire Ottoman* (Constantinople, 1849), and **Mgr. Mislin**, *Les Saints Lieux* (Paris, 1851) both give 222,000 as the number of the Armenian population of Istanbul, while **Lorenz Rigler**, *Die Turkey und ihre Behowner* (Vienna, 1852), p. 82, estimates it as 250,000. The number 222,000 seems a reasonable and acceptable compromise between the lower figures and the much higher estimates to be found in other sources, which give the Armenian population of European Turkey as 400,000. See **Joubert** et **R. Mornand**, *Tableau Historique; Politique et Pittoresque de la Turquie et de la Russie* (Paris, 1867), p. 63, and **Henri Mathieu**, *La Turquie et ses différents Peuples* (Paris, 1857), p. 45.

⁵ **Aghaian**, *Hayastane 1801-1870*, p. 375.