

To preserve the *millet* was to preserve the Ottoman Empire, and this in turn guaranteed their own position within the *status quo*. Paradoxically, what modern nationalist Armenian historians regard as a revolutionary step, namely the emphasis on the Armenians' separate identity, was perceived by the *amiras* as a reasonable conservative policy: to strengthen the identity of the *millet* as a separate entity, they felt, was to guarantee the continued existence of their fiefdom.

To many outside observers, this role of the *amiras* as leaders of a quest for communal identity seemed paramount, and at least one contemporary Greek historian chastised his own countrymen by citing *amiras* as example:

Les Fanariotes songent à eux, les arméniens [speaking of the *sarrafs* and other wealthy notables] songent à leur nation; ils ont établi entre eux une espèce de solidarité qui contribue au bonheur de la grande famille. Les Fanariotes ne regardent jamais la Grèce; l'armenien a toujours les yeux fixés sur sa patrie.¹

Modern Armenian historians, such as Leo, have asserted that “*amira* capital[ism] constituted a purely Turkish institution, whose *raison d'être* emanated from the essential nature of the Turkish Islamic state.”² Another historian, Ashot Hovhannisian, has written that “like the regime of the sultans and the pashas, so *amira* capital[ism], too, was born from the essence of Turkish feudalism and was nurtured at the expense of the peasantry of the country, which was [still] in the condition of serfdom.”³ These are fundamentally accurate evaluations of the *amirate* and its function as an ally and a servant of the Ottoman state. As soon as the state ceased to borrow from the *sarrafs*, and started to seek loans from European lending institutions, the *sarrafs* disappeared almost overnight not only from the Ottoman administrative scene, but also from the Armenian *millet*. Only the technocrat-*amiras* maintained their declining presence in the *millet* and the government.

¹ Marc-Philippe Zallony, *Essai sur les Fanariotes* (Marseille, 1824), p. 252.

² Leo, *Khotjayakan Kapitale*, p. 246.

³ Hovhannisian, *Nalbandiane*, 1:351.