

As individuals, the *amiras*, like their institution, were also Ottomans; they met all the requirements⁴ that were essential for being an Ottoman (not to be confused with Ottoman subject), except for religion: they held first-class status, served the state and as a consequence enjoyed privileged tax status and received income from state resources. They knew Ottoman ways and used the Turkish language. Even their Armenian was replete with Turkish words and ideas.⁵ Religion was the sole barrier which prevented their total absorption into Ottomanism.

It is regrettable that Turkish historiography has no knowledge of the *amira* class which is, after all, as much part of Turkish history as of Armenian history. The little that is known about the *sarrafs* is not satisfactory, but it can be used as a first step toward a more detailed study of the function and role of the *amiras* who served the Ottoman state so faithfully for almost a century. Indifference and omission⁶ serve neither Turkish nor Armenian historical scholarship; serious examination of the class will certainly help develop a better understanding of the history of both peoples at a time when there were no political conflicts.

The study of this class leads to a conclusion which has also been reached elsewhere: no matter how important, and at times how crucial, economic power is, ultimately it is politics, not economics, that has primacy in state affairs.⁷ The *amiras* did not fully grasp this fact. They did not

⁴ To be an Ottoman means to belong to the class of ruling elite. The term Ottoman signified “those who qualified for first-class status in that society by serving the religion (being Muslim), serving the state (holding a position that gave them a state income and a privileged tax status), and knowing the Ottoman way (using the Ottoman Turkish language and conforming to the manners and customs of the society that used Ottoman Turkish).” **Norman Itzkowitz** and **Max Mote**, *Mubadele: An Ottoman-Russian Exchange of Ambassadors* (Chicago, 1970), p. 11, n. 11.2.

⁵ **Hnaser**, “Niuter Ashkharhabari,” pp. 142-143.

⁶ **Besim Darkot** mentions that some of the inhabitants of Egin (Akn in Armenian) rose to high positions in the government in Istanbul, but does not give any indication that they were Armenian; see *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, s.v. “Egin,” by **Besim Darkot**.

⁷ **Stern**, *Gold and Iron*, p. xvii. Like the Jews whose “special services, usually as bankers and lenders to dynasts, earned [for] them the place of Hofjude (‘Court Jew’)” (p. 5), *amiras* were Palace or Court Armenians of the Ottoman state. And just as in the case of a few privileged Jews who “for particular usefulness to the state... were granted the status of protected Jews, exempted by the state from many, though not all, of the disabilities it had imposed on the rest, of