

*millet* itself to bring about the disappearance of the *amiras* as a distinct power elite.

The *amiras* have never before been studied with the scholarly apparatus of Western history, in large part because neither Western historians nor the rulers of the Ottoman Empire recognized the *amiras* as distinct group. I shall argue that the people whom Armenians invariably identified as members of the ruling elite they labeled *amira* were, indeed, a class within the context of the *millet*, one which formed a necessary appendage of the Ottoman ruling class in the period when the *iltizam* system of taxation achieved its zenith and began to go into decline, in order to be replaced by an imitation of Western bureaucracies. Furthermore, I shall claim that both the rise and fall of the *amiras* were responses to the needs of the several thousand men who ruled the Ottoman Empire for most of the period under question, although, as the last chapter will make clear, matters were more complicated in the twilight of *amira* history than they were at its inception. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when the *amiras* experienced a relative decline in their economic importance and an absolute decline in their power within the Armenian *millet*, the pressures which brought these changes about no longer emanated entirely from the Porte. In part, it was the increased wealth and socially complex organization of the Armenian *millet* which generated the pressures to which the rule of *amiras* succumbed.

This dissertation is in some ways an extension of prosopographic study, for the major *amira* families were few in number and of relatively well-defined geographical origin. Throughout, I shall underscore the contradictions of the history of the *amiras*. They were provincials who achieved power in the city, Armenians who achieved power as the servants of the Turkish aristocracy of the Ottoman Empire, economic power who could make the fortune of a pasha but could not break him, and indeed fell with him, because despite their enormous wealth they had no political power of their own. Curiously, they seem to have been reluctant and fearful of grasping such power in the rare instances when it was offered to them. Above all, the ironic contradiction which marks the history of the *amiras* most deeply is their role within the Armenian *millet* itself. Deeply conservative, they consolidated their control of the apparatus of religious, civic and cultural life in the Armenian *millet* in order to assure themselves of the continuation of