

Chapter II

THE ADVENT OF THE AMIRA CLASS

The word *amira* is derived from the Arabic *emir*, which means “chief,” “commander.”¹ In the classical period, the term was used by Armenian historians to designate a Muslim governor.² Not only the chronicler Krikor Daranaghtsi, in the 1630s, and the historian Arakel Davrijetsi, in the 1660s, but even Mikayel Tchamtchians, considered the first modern Armenian historian, used the term in its classical meaning referring to Muslim or Turkish governors as late as 1785.³

In modern times, Armenians used the term *amira* to honor a group of wealthy individuals who were considered leaders of the *millet* and who were favored by the Ottoman government in a variety of ways. The determining factors that enabled an individual to acquire that honorific appellation were wealth and concomitant influence, as well as connection with Ottoman officialdom. Though wealth was a necessary “condition,” by itself it was not sufficient. (This was not the case with *çelebis*, most, by no means all of whom, were well-connected with government circles, and it was certainly not the case with *hocas*).⁴

Piuzant Ketchian, the only nineteenth century writer to have attempted a definition of the term *amira*, states:

¹ **Adjarian**, *Armatakan*, 1:158; **Edvard B. Aghaian**, *Ardi Hayereni Batsatrakan Bararan* [Definitional Dictionary of Modern Armenian], 2 vols. (Erevan, 1976), 1:33; **Stepan Malkhasiants**, *Hayeren Batsatrakan Bararan* [Armenian Definitional Dictionary], 4 vols. (reprint ed., Beirut, 1955-1956), 1:67-68. In Armenian the word *amira* = ամիրա is used both with and without the j = y ending (not pronounced). For simplicity, the term is transliterated without Ū = y ending.

² The term *amira*, in its classical meaning, designated not only the governor of a province but also of a city. The governors of Ani, Dvin, Kars, were called “*amira of amiras*.” See **T. Kh. Hagopian**, *Hayastani Patmakan Ashkharhagrutyun* [Historical Geography of Armenia] (Erevan, 1968), p. 324.

³ **Daranaghtsi**, *Jamanakagrutiun*, p. 388 passim; **Davrijetsi**, *Patmutiun*, p. 635 passim; **Tchamtchian**, *Patmutiun Hayots*, 3: sec. II, 150 (a listing of *amira*-governors).

⁴ **P. Ketchian**, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, p. 49.