

the individuals who had the right to be called *amira* were: the *sarrafs* [bankers] of the vezirs and of the provincial governors of the state, the gunpowder mill superintendents, the chief architects and the directors of the mint... Although there were other well-known Armenians who were responsible for the provisions of necessities for [other] governmental offices, such as *kiliççibaşı*,\* *süngübaşı*,\* *kurkçubaşı*,\* *kuyumcubaşı*,\* these were called only *ağa*.\* Among them [however], Harutian Noradungian, the Armenian *ekmekçibaşı*\* for the commander-in-chief [of the army] and the [commander of] cannon-works, was exceptionally called *amira*.<sup>5</sup>

Ketchian's reference to "rights," followed by reference to exceptional treatment, unnecessarily confuses the matter. There could be no question of "rights" in the official, legal sense; however, communal customs were strongly established, and the honorific *amira* was bestowed by the community on virtually all holders of the government offices enumerated by Ketchian in the first part of his statement, and on many but by no means all *sarrafs*.<sup>6</sup>

It should be emphasized at the outset that *amira* was an honorific title bestowed upon Armenian individuals by their fellow Armenians, to describe certain other Armenians. Neither the Ottoman government nor Turkish society ever took note of its existence; the figures to whom the Armenians attached the honorific are not cited in available official documents as *amiras*, whereas the same individuals are always singled out among Armenian notables, in Armenian documents, by the use of the honorific.<sup>7</sup> In short, use of the title is one way in which Armenians denoted their important leaders, indeed their "aristocracy" (the latter will be elaborated later).

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

*Kiliççibaşı* = chief swordman

*süngübaşı* = servant in charge of the sultan's bayonets

*kurkçubaşı* = servant in charge of the sultan's fur coats

*kuyumcubaşı* = chief jeweler in the palace

*ağa* = lord, master; title formerly given to certain officers

*ekmekçibaşı* = head of sultan's court bakers

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> **Alboyadjian**, *Les Dadian*, p. 39.