

the *amiras*; these show personalities and events in a different, helpful perspective. Fourth, it synthesizes materials from political, economic, religious and communal histories to offer an unmatched panorama of the Istanbul Armenian world in which the *amiras* played a pivotal role in various spheres of life. Fifth, Barsoumian lays the groundwork for a comparative future history of Armenian elites in the Ottoman, Russian Romanov and Safavid Persian Empires. Such a comparative study of Armenian “stateless power”² in the various diasporas is long overdue, though several scholars have begun to create the foundations for it. Reading Barsoumian, one is immediately struck by the many similarities, but also the differences, between the Dadians and Bezdjians of Istanbul, the Lazarians of St. Petersburg, and the great merchant families, the *hocas* of New Julfa, such as the Uskan (Voskanian) and Minasian clans.³ Finally, Barsoumian ends with a brief but resonant meditation on the relative importance of wealth and political power. He points out that great wealth in the hands of the leaders of the Armenian minority could not purchase real power outside the Armenian community; indeed, such wealth was trumped by the political power of the Turkish elite of the Ottoman Empire. His brief analysis implies the question: when and under what conditions has the economic wealth of an ethnic or diasporic minority been “convertible,” able to purchase or control political power, and when has it failed to do so, in Armenian and other histories? Barsoumian’s work is important because it begins with small historical details and incrementally, cumulatively, arrives at a point where it can begin to pose such major questions about Armenian and world history.

Barsoumian begins by exploring the state of Armenian wealth and status before the appearance of the *amiras*. His study of who was called a *hoca*, who a *chelebi*, and why, and where these people lived, is scrupulously documented and fascinating; in fact, it amounts to a brief history of the Armenian upper classes in the Ottoman Empire from the 1400s to around 1720. Barsoumian outlines the complex and nuanced tensions between outsiders and

² **Khachig Tololyan**, “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment.” *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, 5:1, 1996, 3-37.

³ For a recent account of the remarkable accomplishments of the New Julfa merchant elites, see the essay by **Sebouh Aslanian**, “Armenian merchants in the Indian Ocean,” *Diaspora: a journal of transnational studies*, 12:3, 2003.