

while still others worked as industrialist-technocrats and architects. These professions, along with their economic, financial and industrial backgrounds and effects, will be studied in the next chapter. For the moment, suffice it to mention that the *amiras*' economic power formed the very foundation upon which they built their social status and prestige, and their political power in the Armenian *millet*. Their wealth and professions separated them from the rest of Armenian society, for such factors as income, property, capital and occupation, together with status, are the ones which divide societies into social strata or classes.⁸² Since "classes are aggregates of individuals and families in similar economic positions,"⁸³ *amiras* obviously met this criterion of societal organization.

The *amira* social stratum or class was neither a totally "closed" nor wholly "open" one. It is true that there were no such restrictions as nobility of blood, but entry into this group was not easy. Even the practice of the profession of *sarrafa* did not necessarily lead to *amira*-hood, as was pointed out earlier. Only appointment to such positions as Director of the State Mint, Chief Imperial Architect and Superintendent of Gunpowder Mills, seem to have resulted automatically in "obtaining" the title of *amira* from the Armenian community.

Marriage practices are one of the factors that can serve as an index of the self-awareness of a class, especially of one that aspires to "aristocratic" status. The kinship relations of *amiras* are not clear enough to permit a totally confident generalization, but the available evidence strongly suggests that *amira* families were related to each other through marriage, baptism and other social functions (bestmen, godfathers' roles, etc.). In the early period of the *amiras*' rise to prominence, these relations were either so infrequent that they were not noticeable, or historical sources have failed to record them. In 1797 one of Kasbar *Amira* Aznavourian's sons is reported to serve as the godfather for the baptism of Garabed *Amira* Pishmishian's son.⁸⁴ The same person, Madteos Aznavourian, was godfather of another son of Garabed *Amira* Pishmishian in 1799.⁸⁵ Karakehia Apraham *Amira* Terzian's

⁸² Kurt B. Mayer, *Class and Society* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955), p. 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Azadian, *Akn II*, p. 99.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*