

After the waning of the power of the *amiras*, the most pious of later writers were willing to appear scandalized in print about the nature of the lavish festivities that the *amiras* organized in their houses, some of which apparently had an oriental character and were marked by self-indulgence, with professional entertainers to amuse them. In addition to a large number of domestic helpers, which included not only cooks, servants and chambermaids, but wine-keepers too, some *amiras* kept a retinue of notables and their own clowns and musicians for their amusement. *Amiras* had their scribes, priests and *vartabeds* (celibate priest), and managers to supervise their domestic affairs as well as their properties and employees to run their businesses.¹²³

They also held group outings, pilgrimages and festivities. They had established set rules and codes for marital ceremonies and receptions, as well as for funeral processions.¹²⁴ Their customs and mores have been criticized as being lax, permissive and even reprehensible.¹²⁵ They were said to be jealous, callous and arrogant. Some *amiras* are perceived to hide behind a glittering façade of extreme selfishness and greed.¹²⁶ However, there were also those who conducted exemplary lives marked by pious religiosity and generous charity.¹²⁷

They lived in certain quarters of Istanbul, especially Ortaköy and Has- köy.¹²⁸ Apparently some families even had a preference for certain cemete-

¹²³ **Mrmerian**, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, pp. 112. A poem written by a contemporary Mekhitarist *vartabed*, reproduced in Mrmerian's *Patmutiun* on page 113, depicts in great detail and quite vividly *amiras*' way of life.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* The account of the funeral procession of Boghos *Amira* Dadian (d. 24 December 1863) is reproduced here, giving every minute detail as to who, how and when each part of the procession will proceed. An indication of the duration, as well as the pomp, of the funeral ceremonies is provided by the fact that it had started at 7:30 A.M. It is significant that official security troops ("zabtiye," i.e. gendarme) took part in the solemn non-Muslim ceremonies.

¹²⁵ **Giuleserian**, *Hishatakarar Basmadjian Krikor Patriarki* [Memoir of Patriarch Krikor Basmadjian] (Paris, 1908), pp. 5 and 70.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ **Varjabedian**, *Hariurameay Hobelean Verashinutean Patriarkaranist Mayr Egeghetsvoyn Kumkapui 1828-1928* [Centenary of the Reconstruction of the Patriarchal Cathedral at Kumkapu 1828-1928] (Constantinople, 1928), p. 37; **Mrmerian**, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, p. 111.

¹²⁸ **P. Ketchian**, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, p. 73; **Torkomian**, *Eremia Tchelepii*, 2:437, 458, 678; **Mrmerian**, *Masnakan Patmutiun*, p. 94.