

Living clustered in a few quarters of Istanbul, practicing half a dozen professions, serving the state in high offices, controlling the affairs of the Armenian *millet*, limited in number, wealth and influential, *amiras* were very conscious of their position in society and of their membership in a compact social stratum, albeit an internally divided one. The limited number of their membership, on the one hand, and the concentration of economic and political power (the latter limited only to Armenian *millet*), on the other, gave them the necessary characteristic features of a social elite.

As members of this elite, *amiras* enjoyed a special status at whose foundation lay wealth and honor. This status was as much real as apparent: real, in the privileges accorded to them by the government, such as tax exemption, and hereditary high offices; apparent, in such rights as clothing and the right to ride horses. It was the government that gave them this special status. Without it, *amiras* would simply be rich individuals, not fundamentally different from many of their Armenian contemporaries.

By definition, “a status group is characterized by specific behavior patterns, [and] a definite ‘style of life,’ which must be adhered to by those who wish to belong to it.”¹³⁴ But status implies more than behavioral pattern and life style; it means “prestige and deference among individuals and groups in a society.”¹³⁵ We have seen earlier the *amiras*’ characteristic life style and social pattern. We have also noted that prestige was a *sine qua non* in the rise to *amira* status. Wealthy by itself was not sufficient, nor was the practice of the profession of *sarraḡ* and the nomination to a high governmental office, except in some specific cases. In this context, where status is considered one of the “dimensions of stratification in modern societies,”¹³⁶ it was also the cutting edge which at once separated *amiras* from the other wealthy individuals and the rest of society and turned them into a distinct social class.

¹³⁴ Mayer, *Class and Society*, p. 26.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*