

“industrialists” who spearheaded what we might call the Ottoman drive for modernization in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, helping design and build the factories that manufactured gunpowder and rifles, made steel and wove silk. Important as these technocrats were, Barsoumian argues, after giving them their due, financial capital was key. The *amiras* faded into history soon after the Crimean War (1853-6), because that is when the Ottomans had to change their system for raising taxes and covering deficits – fatally, not just for the *amiras* but also for the Empire, they started borrowing from the great capitalists and bankers of the West. This suggests that despite the role played by the great industrialist-technocrats and architects like the several Balian *amiras*, in the end the financial capital of the *sarrafs* was key to their dominance.

But the wealth was not, by itself, enough. It was the tight mutual, reciprocal relationship between the *amiras* and the Ottoman elite that was key, Barsoumian shows. At any one time for several centuries, a few thousand men ruled the Ottoman Empire – *vezirs*, *pashas*, eunuchs and the Sultan himself. These men interacted frequently with the *sarrafs* (especially) and the industrialists. They created a system from which both elites profited, albeit unequally. The Ottomans found it convenient to rule the Armenian *millet* through the *amiras* and the Patriarch who was their close ally and sometimes subject to their authority. The Armenian *amira* elite became the intermediaries between the Empire and the *millet*. They did not always use their power wisely – they argued with each other far too much, they were authoritarian towards other Armenians, were frequently arrogant and vain; they were also deeply, carefully conservative, and they practiced censorship, which the emerging Armenian intelligentsia of the second quarter of the nineteenth century never forgave them. But they were also the guardians of the Armenian Church, stewards of the community, its principal philanthropists, and the leaders of the drive for modernization through education that placed the Armenian community of Istanbul, Izmir and some provincial cities ahead of others. Though their political authoritarianism was never palatable and, by the time the Armenian National Constitution was debated (1857-1863), it could be called “reactionary,” their conservatism was only partly driven by a desire to retain power. It was also driven by a fearful understanding of Ottoman power: they knew how ruthlessly it was exercised. Some of them were hanged, along with the *pashas* they had backed; some