

had their wealth expropriated, and went from the status of millionaires to destitution overnight.

Thus, the *amiras*' conservatism was the result of mixed motives, and subsequent history shows they should not simply be simply dismissed as "reactionaries" opposed to the forces of Armenian liberation, as some historians have done. Barsoumian points out, for example, that Soviet Armenian historians compared the *amiras* to the Lazarian dynasty of the Tsars' empire, presenting the latter as inclined towards the "liberation" of the Armenians. Carefully, Barsoumian shows that the Lazarians served the Tsars just as the *amiras* served the Sultans: neither could have existed and accumulated power without doing so. The Lazarian role in "liberation," he shows, was made possible by the fact that Russia was an expansionist Christian empire in the Caucasus, not by a different or superior national orientation and *azgayin* virtue to be found only among the Lazarians. In fact, Barsoumian shows, foreign observers were impressed by the *amiras*' stewardship of their community, while a Greek historian chastised the "Phanariotes," the wealthy Greeks of Istanbul, for not acting as the *amiras* did.

He saw them as "always thinking of their nation, creating solidarity and spreading good fortune throughout the Great Family of their nation." Some of this is no doubt Greek exaggeration – diasporic minorities often chastise themselves by pointing to the real and alleged virtues of others, as Armenian writers do when citing Jewish achievements. Nevertheless, Barsoumian shows, the *amiras* were patriarchs – dominant, strict "fathers" of the national family who ruled through their control of the other "father," the Patriarch of Istanbul, whom they could install and depose at certain points.

Wealth, connections with the Ottoman elite, power exercised in the Armenian community through control of the Patriarchate and through patronage, combined with generous philanthropy – this constellation of features together determined who became an *amira* to his fellow Armenians, Barsoumian conclusively demonstrates with scrupulous scholarship. The details are fascinating, intriguing, even amusing. The brief but detail-rich account of the struggle for leadership positions between the *amiras*, the Patriarchs, the *esnafs* (guilds of Armenian craftsmen, artisans, merchants, 65 of them!) and intellectuals is fascinating – one wishes it were longer. One cannot help but be impressed by the foresight of some *amiras*, building Soorp Prgich as a