

hospital for not just the sick and the elderly but also for the insane, at a time when Europe, too, was just learning to care for the mentally ill. One cannot but admire the guilds of tradesmen who each undertook to finance an elementary school – the *tuccars* or merchants, but even the guild of *meyhanacis* or Armenian tavern-keepers funded a school. At a time when Armenians were stateless and when the existing Ottoman State could barely finance its military activities, the stateless power of the Armenian community carried out the functions of a state – addressing the needs of health, education and even welfare – Barsoumian discusses the fund called *Tnangats Matakararutiun*, “Assistance to the Homeless,” run by a council of 36 members “comprised of six ‘classes’ or categories, each of which was headed by one or two prominent *amiras* and included well-known artisans. Each guild contributed a determined amount to this body through its representatives. The committee dispensed money to the poor, the orphans, helpless old people, the mentally retarded, and even contributed to the dowry of poor brides. In addition, it allocated financial aid to schools in need, and helped alleviate the financial burden of the Patriarchate.” Governments then and now have not done better. Admittedly, Barsoumian points out, the *amiras* favored Istanbul, Izmir and Izmit, neglecting the provinces in all but a few instances. But such failures, real as they are, cannot obscure the image of an elite that regarded Istanbul as its core constituency and ruled it with benevolent authoritarianism from the 1750s to 1863.

In offering us this panoramic story of the rise and fall of the *amira* elite and of the Armenian nation they guided, Barsoumian takes an important step towards a history that is still needed, as Hagop Anasian and others had also intuited: a history of the Armenians as a people without a state but with leadership elites, with all their skills and shortcomings.

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That leadership elite has consisted, for several centuries, of Armenian clergy, wealthy philanthropists, and intellectuals. Hagop Barsoumian had the western training of a scholar and the temperament and commitments of an Armenian intellectual whose life was cut short by Armenian terrorism in its