

would remove him from office with the concurrence of the *amira* council. Many an *amira-mütevelli* abused his authority and misused the office entrusted to him to benefit financially. Popular discontent and protest, however, could not force his removal.

Armenian writers have frequently mentioned the office of *mütevelli*, but none has focused any attention on it, except for one student of the topic who has pointed out the arbitrary and capricious nature of the authority vested in the office holder:

whenever the *mütevelli* was a man of great influence, which happened quite frequently, there was no limit to his rule or caprice. He would run the church and the institutions connected with it with his own men; nobody dared ask an accounting from him. As the properties of the church were [recorded] in the name of the *mütevelli*, he was practically free from any responsibility; it is easy to see how, under the *mütevelli* system, abuses were committed and covered up.⁴¹

In addition to possible financial “rewards,” the office of *mütevelli* served as a power base for many *amiras*. Control over a church was translated, in practical terms, into great influence, if not rule, over a segment of the community. The combination of economic power and connections within the government turned the *mütevelli-amira* into an unchallengeable leader. The church, if one is allowed to use a medieval term, was the fief of the *mütevelli-amira*. Only in 1847 was a first attempt made to reform the system, and the Armenian constitution of 1860 eventually abrogated the system in a special article relating to the Economic Council.⁴²

As was stated earlier in this chapter, Armenian national life evolved around the Patriarchate. The institution was a creation of the Ottoman state. The Patriarch was both the spiritual and civic leader of the entire Armenian population of the empire. As *milletbaşı*, head of the *millet*, the Patriarch ranked equal to a pasha. His investiture came directly from the sultan through the issuance of an imperial *ferman*. The Patriarch was personally responsible for the administration of his *millet*. As a corollary to this

⁴¹ P. Ketchian, *Patmutiun Hivandanotsin*, p. 46.

⁴² *Ibid.* Modern historians have also failed to focus on the office of *mütevelli*.