

As the events following these elections showed, the *amiras'* control over the Patriarchate and the *millet* was not absolute. Due to the presence of strong contenders for the two positions and to the meddling of the Russian ambassador at Istanbul, new elections were held and different candidates were elected *katholikos* and Patriarch, respectively. *Amira* leadership was to be tested time and again, several factors combining to undermine it. First, the perennial rivalries among clerical figures who aspired to the patriarchal chair offered the *amiras* an opportunity to gain firm control but fragmented the group: the more clerical candidates needed the help of *amiras*, the more indebted they were to their backers, who had demonstrated their power by helping to install them and could threaten to do the reverse.

Secondly, *amiras* did not form a united front and a cohesive unit, unless faced with outside challengers. They were divided, as we shall see, by personal, dynastic and group rivalries. It must be said in the *amiras'* favor that when faced with such a challenge, they worked together far more effectively than Armenian clerics, who might be thought to represent a coherent interest group. Ironically, the spirit of anarchic free-enterprise was stronger among clerics than the Armenian banker princes. Naked ambition blinded the former to their institutional interests more often than the latter.

Thirdly, new movements and forces, which the *amiras* attempted to stifle and contain, were developing and gaining strength within the *millet*. One of these developments was the centuries-old Catholic propaganda, which resumed its campaign around the turn of the eighteenth century with new vigor and militancy, thanks to the diplomatic and financial support of such Catholic Western powers as France and Austria. At first, the Armenian Apostolic church fought the Catholic missionaries with some success, the Ottoman government lending its own support to the Armenian church which it considered native. When these efforts failed to eradicate Catholic influence among Armenians, the church turned to an attempt to win over its "schismatic" members.

At this time the Catholics were divided into two major camps: the Collegians, named after the College for the Propaganda of the Faith, insisted on the supremacy of the Pope and denied validity to the sacraments of the Armenian church, and the other Catholics and the Mekhitarists, named after their first Abbot, Mekhitar, founder of the Uniate Benedictine congregation,