

their authority unchallenged. Unwittingly, they were curbing their own power,¹⁰⁵ for they were institutionalizing secular authority and regulating the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate. This act in itself was not only a mark but also an admission of the weakening of their influence within the power structure of the *millet*.

In the *amiras*' perception, the Civil Council had a wider jurisdiction than its religious counterpart. In 1847, their sole purpose in setting up the two councils was to diminish the authority and control of the Patriarch. They hardly realized that they had led the *millet* not because of any authority legally vested in them but because of the Patriarch's unlimited power and their control of him. In other words, so long as they could exercise their strong influence over the occupant of the patriarchal office and retained their position in the Ottoman ruling elite, they were masters of the *millet*.

The *amiras* had not allowed any role to the *esnafs* other than that of a silent and servile minor partner. Conditions changed, and the new situation warranted a modification in their attitude, but they continued to demonstrate a haughty inflexibility and misplaced authoritarianism. Thus, they antagonized the *esnafs* by refusing them even the appearance of shared power. More potent than the *esnafs* were the young intellectuals who became the spokesmen of the *esnafs* and articulated their desires. They challenged the *amiras*' capricious and dictatorial way of governing *millet* affairs, at first discretely but later openly.

Some historians find a clear division among the *amiras*; the *sarrafs* and their supporters in one camp, the professionals and their partisans in another. Such a division was, first of all, only temporary, and secondly, more apparent than real. As stated earlier, Balian, Dadian and Serverian supported the College more out of antagonism to the *sarrafs-amiras* than as a demonstration of deeply ingrained conviction in the benefit of the institution to the *millet*. As a matter of fact, while "most of the *amiras* [were] adherents of old principles, the Dadians, the Balian and the Serverians, antagonistic to the new policy, were trying to destroy an institution which [people] thought

¹⁰⁵ The councils "put an end to the *amira*-class administration of the national-religious affairs [of the millet]." **Hovhannisian**, *Nalpandiane*, 1:345.