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## Commercial Network of Armenian Merchants in the 19th Century Ottoman State

*19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Tüccarların Ticaret Ağı*

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**Abstract**

The 19th century marked a period of significant alteration for Armenians in the Ottoman State, during which political reforms and social transformations had a profound impact on their economic and cultural lives. This article examines the multifaceted role of Armenians within the state, focusing on how the Reorganization Period (1839-1876), marked by the *Tanzimat* and other decrees, created both opportunities and challenges for Armenians. Specifically, the article explores the influence of Armenian merchants and the *amira* class, highlighting their economic ventures, involvement in government, and the socio-cultural dynamics within Ottoman society. The Armenian National Constitution of 1863 and evolving global trade networks are analyzed as pivotal developments that shaped Armenians' roles within the state, facilitating urbanization, trade expansion, and cross-cultural exchange. The article also analyzes the daily life experiences of Armenians in a multi-layered manner through elements such as tradesmen organizations, family-based commercial networks, and rural production practices. Through detailed examination, this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of how Armenians navigated modernization, contributed to the Ottoman economy, and maintained cultural distinctiveness amid broader imperial shifts.

**Keywords:** 19th century, *amiras*, Armenian merchants, commerce, the Age of Reform, the Ottoman State

**Öz**

19. yüzyıl, Osmanlı Devleti'ndeki Ermeniler için önemli bir değişim dönemini işaret etti; bu dönemde siyasi reformlar ve toplumsal dönüşümler, ekonomik ve kültürel yaşamları üzerinde derin bir etki yarattı. Bu makale, Tanzimat ve diğer kararnamelerle öne çıkan Tanzimat Çağı'nın (1839-1876) Ermeniler için hem fırsatlar hem de zorluklar yarattığına odaklanarak Ermenilerin devlet içindeki çok yönlü rolünü inceliyor. Makale özellikle Ermeni tüccarların ve amira sınıfının etkisini araştırıyor, ekonomik girişimlerini, hükümete katılımlarını ve Osmanlı toplumundaki sosyo-kültürel dinamikleri vurguluyor. Ermeni Milleti Nizamnamesi ve gelişen küresel ticaret ağları, Ermenilerin devlet içindeki rollerini şekillendiren, kentleşmeyi, ticaret genişlemesini ve kültürler arası değişimi kolaylaştıran temel gelişmeler olarak analiz ediliyor. Makale ayrıca esnaf teşkilatları, aile temelli ticarî ağlar ve kırsal üretim pratikleri gibi unsurlar üzerinden Ermenilerin gündelik yaşam deneyimlerini çok katmanlı bir biçimde analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Ermenilerin modernleşmeyi nasıl yönettiğine, Osmanlı ekonomisine nasıl katkıda bulunduğuna ve daha geniş değişimler arasında kültürel farklılıklarını nasıl koruduğuna dair kapsamlı bir görüş sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** 19. yüzyıl, amiralar, Ermeni tüccarlar, ticaret, Tanzimat Çağı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu

### Armenians' Everyday Lives in the 19th Century Ottoman State

The 19th century was highly complex for the Ottoman State. The loss in the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–29 and the threat posed by Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt in the 1830s were serious problems that the Ottoman State dealt with at the beginning of the 19th century. Despite these challenges, the period between 1839 and 1876 is called the Age of Ottoman Reform. The period involves the *Gülhane* Edict of 1839 (*Tanzimat Fermanı*), the Reform Edict of 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*), the Land Code of 1858 (*Arazi Kanunnamesi*), and the Armenian National Constitution of 1863 (*Ermeni Milleti Nizamnamesi*). The last quarter of the 19th century included a significant economic problem in the Ottoman State. The Ottoman government became significantly indebted to foreign creditors in the capital market starting with the Crimean War, leading to a financial crisis and bankruptcy in 1875. This situation resulted in the creation of the Ottoman Public Debt administration in 1882, managed by a consortium of Great Powers. This administration oversaw the tax revenues from key revenue sources and restructured the payment of Ottoman debts (Cora, 2016, p. 15).

By the early 1800s, Armenians were present in nearly every region of the Ottoman State. Most of them resided in the *eyalets* (a former administrative division or province of the Ottoman State) of Erzurum, Bayezid, Kars, Çıldır, Van, Diyarbakir, Adana, and Maraş. While significant Armenians were found in many major Ottoman cities, the majority of the Armenian urban population was concentrated in Bitlis, Sivas, Harput, Tokat, Amasya, Malatya, Kayseri, Bursa, Smyrna, and Istanbul (Artinian, 1970, p. 5). By the end of the early 1800s, the Armenian urban population in the state was estimated to be around 612,212 (Artinian, 1970, pp. 6-7).

Armenians lived in villages, towns and cities. Those living in villages were involved in farming and animal husbandry. Those living in towns and cities were engaged in trade and commerce (Mert, 2003, p. 146-47). In the early 1800s, there were more than 5,000 small shops in the capital and surrounding areas, nearly all owned by Armenian, Greek, and Jewish artisans and merchants (Artinian, 1970, p. 9). Armenians, who were active in various professions in the field of commerce, were particularly advanced in jewelry. They were very active in the fields of money changers, bankers, construction and trade (Mert, 2003, p. 146-47). With the Reform Edict of 1856, the tradition of non-Muslims entering state affairs was made law. Ottoman Christians were permitted to operate. The influence of Armenians in economic life and high state positions increased. They were appointed to governorships, ambassadorships and even ministerial positions (Akın, 2008).

Under Ottoman rule, Armenians continued to speak their language and continued their cultural activities freely. The Ottoman administration granted Armenians the right to open printing houses 160 years before the Turks, who were the primary and dominant element of the state, were given permission to do so. The number of printing houses even reached 38 in the state in 1908. Likewise, Armenians published a private newspaper in their language before the Turks in 1859. Another cultural activity of Armenians in their language was to stage theater plays (Mert, 2003, pp. 145-46).

Armenians were actually affiliated with a church independent of Orthodox and Catholic sects. However, due to the influence of the policies of the Papacy, France and Russia on Armenians and Catholic missionaries, the number of Armenians who converted to Catholicism increased. Under the influence of France, Catholic Armenians were recognized as a “*millet*” in 1831 (Yılmaz and Erdem, 2020). The *millet* system implemented in the Ottoman State was a policy of tolerance. This system provided a living space for each nation. Nations lived their own language, religion, traditions and values freely within this space (Yılmaz and Erdem, 2020). When the state is strong, *millet* system is also strong, but when the state begins to weaken, *millet* system also begins to weaken and nationalist movements begin to emerge (Yılmaz and Erdem, 2020). Under the influence of Protestant missionaries operating in line with the political interests of England, a Protestant Church was opened in Jerusalem in 1842. In 1850, following the initiatives and pressures of the English and Prussian ambassadors, Protestants were officially recognized as a “*millet*”. The statute of this *millet* was published on March 12, 1878 (Yılmaz and Erdem, 2020).

The Armenian subject (*tebaa*) of the Ottoman State centered itself fiscally, politically, and culturally in 19th-century Istanbul. At the beginning of the century, about 150,000 Armenians made up the city's population. By the mid-century, the number increased to 250,000 and 300,000 (Matossian, 2007). Growing numbers of Armenians moved to Istanbul, indicating the city's emergence as a central business hub and the phenomenon of urbanization. Many Armenians from the periphery came to Istanbul in search of better opportunities and employment, as it served as a channel for the distribution of goods to other regions of the state, facilitated by a large number of Armenian merchants living in Manchester, Paris, Marseille, Trieste, and other cities (Matossian, 2007).

### Political Developments in the 19th Century and Their Effects on Armenian Merchants

The Age of Reform is generally regarded as lasting until 1876, when the Ottoman Constitution (*Kanun-i Esasi*) was proclaimed and the First Ottoman Parliament convened, shortly before the disastrous Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878. With the Age of Reform, the Ottoman State underwent modernization, seeking to engage its subjects in new ways, including individual taxation and compulsory conscription, thereby transforming them into citizens (Cora, 2016, p. 14). Armenians were the ones who benefited the most from the innovations of the Reorganization (*Tanzimat*) period (1839-1876) (Mert, 2003, p. 148). They gained rights equal to or even more than the Turks (Akin, 2008). Armenian local notables played a key role in shaping the *Tanzimat* order, leveraging their economic foundations in tax farming, military provisioning, trade, manufacturing, and political influence as members of the administrative councils (Cora, 2016, p. 41).

The Ottoman-British Trade Agreement of 1838 (The Treaty of *Baltalimanı*) facilitated the possibility of domestic trade and acquiring local partners for foreign merchants. Similar agreements were signed with other European countries until 1846. Foreign merchants often cooperated with non-Muslims. In response to this situation, Armenian merchants became brokers of European industry. Thus, a comprador class (a class that protects and advances its local interests by cooperating with foreign powers) was formed from Armenians who served European imperialism in the exploitation of the state and saw benefits in integrating with it (Mert, 2003, pp. 147-48). Almost all of this class consisted of non-Muslims (Mert, 2003, p. 156).

The *Gülhane* Edict of 1839 was the initial reform decree in the Ottoman history's Reorganization (*Tanzimat*) period. The decree included three key reform initiatives. First, it guaranteed the protection of life, honor, and property for all subjects of the Ottoman State. Second, it committed to abolishing tax farming and implementing fixed tax collection by government officials. Lastly, it vowed to create a regular system for military conscription. The most notable promise of the edict was the declaration that “these imperial concessions extend to all our subjects, of whatever religion or sect they may be.” Therefore, for the first time, equality before the law for all Ottoman citizens was officially declared as a solemn policy. For instance, previously, Armenians were typically prohibited from providing testimony in Ottoman courts (Artinian, 1970, pp. 49-50).

After the Reform Edict of 1856, *millets* of Orthodox Greeks, Apostolic Armenians, and Jews were reorganized and democratized through institutionalized lay participation, as ensured by their communal “constitutions.” These constitutions also highlighted the ongoing conflicts within these communities, especially the Apostolic community. Initially, tensions arose between the influential Armenian elite of Istanbul (*amiras*) and the chief artisans in the 1840s, followed by conflicts between the *amiras* and the liberal educated classes in the 1850s and beyond (Cora, 2016, p. 18). The edict encouraged the Armenian constitutionalists in their efforts to present the initial draft of the constitution to the National Assembly (Artinian, 1970, p. 80).

Armenian traders in Istanbul depended on the French and Italian markets until the 19th century. However, both British financial penetration into the Ottoman market and the Crimean War altered the situation (Matossian, 2007). Ottoman society experienced significant transformations in the aftermath of the Crimean War. The rise of Armenian lesser notables as key players in the new order in Erzurum was a considerable development. During the 1860s, their new societal role became institutionalized (Cora, 2016, p. 283). Non-Muslim merchants gained economic, social, and most importantly, political power due to their collaboration with the modernizing state and its bureaucrats. They were some of the most prominent representatives of the new order (Cora, 2016, p. 271). Greek and Armenian traders eventually became middlemen for British business ventures in the Ottoman State, resulting in the expansion of their businesses. Armenian merchants from Istanbul began opening branches in European cities and started importing glass lamps, German amber, fabric, and Venetian mirrors from France and Italy. These imports were sold in Turkey to some extent, while the rest were re-exported to Russia, Iran, and Arabia (Matossian, 2007).

The social and economic transformation of Ottoman (Armenian) provincial society occurred amid various interrelated developments driven by Ottoman reforms across various fields, including administration and the military. This transformation was particularly influenced by changes in communal structures following the Armenian National Constitution and shifts in regional and global economies (Cora, 2016, p. 279). With the Armenian National Constitution, the Armenians became a pressure group within the state, beyond being a community. This regulation, which predates the Ottoman State’s first constitution, the Ottoman Constitution, by 13 years and the Armenians call the Armenian Constitution, gave essential privileges to the Armenians (Akin, 2008). The Armenian National Constitution granted the upper classes a role in managing communal affairs (Cora, 2016, p. 19). Although the Sultan's approval was required

for some matters, such as the appointment of the Patriarch and the approval of the statute, the Armenians carried out their affairs in education, health, foundations, taxes and, to some extent, the judiciary, in addition to religious matters, through commissions to be elected by this statute. Therefore, the Armenians have reached a position where they can make their own decisions (Akın, 2008).

The key reforms that impacted the Armenian patriarchate's administrative structure involved reducing the banker amiras' economic power. The end of tax farming resulted in Armenian bankers and moneylenders losing their contracts, which caused financial ruin for some wealthy amiras and diminished their influence with Ottoman authorities (Artinian, 1970, p. 53).

Having provided this overview, we now turn to the emergence, rise, and eventual decline of the amira class within the Armenian community and its relationship with the Ottoman state.

### **The *Amira* Class**

Piuzant Ketchian, the sole 19th century author to have sought a definition of the term "*amira*," states: "the individuals who had the right to be called *amira* were: the *sarrafs* [bankers] of the *vezirs* and the provincial governors of the state, the gunpowder mill superintendents, the chief architects and the directors of the mint..." (Barsoumian, 1980, p. 50). *Sarrafs* and *Amira* were almost interchangeable for many Armenians as well. Using the title was one way for Armenians to identify their key leaders, essentially representing their "aristocracy" (Barsoumian, 1980, p. 51).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, these affluent Armenians were called *hocas* or *çelebis* (Artinian, 1970, p. 20). In the 18th century, the *amiras* strengthened their position in Istanbul by engaging in various business ventures and serving as benefactors for the welfare of the Armenians (Karaca, 2022, pp. 19-20). Starting in the latter half of the 18th century, they began to be known as *amiras*, a title granted by the sultan solely to Armenians who had financial ties to or were directly employed by the Ottoman government (Artinian, 1970, p. 20). The prestige of the title "*amira*" grew so quickly after the turn of the 19th century that it transformed from being one of many symbols of distinction into the primary title retrospectively granted to notables who had held other titles during their lives (Barsoumian, 1980, pp. 57-58).

Comprising around 186 members, the majority of the *amiras* came from Eğin. Other places of origin include Sivas, Divriği, Tokat, Van, Erzurum, and nearby areas (Karaca, 2022, p. 20). The *amiras*' amassed wealth in the Eğin region, and their professional progress, enabled them to

establish themselves and thrive in the Ottoman capital (Karaca, 2022, p. 19). On the one hand, the *Amiras* had a significant role in the Ottoman State. The *amiras* contributed to the Ottoman state through various roles, including serving as moneylenders, manufacturers, and architects, while managing and working within different state institutions. In addition to their institutional duties, they oversaw the personal savings of the state elite (*padişah sarrafı*). Due to their professions, they fostered strong connections with the Ottoman elite, and on rare occasions, even with the Sultans themselves (Karaca, 2022, p. 22). Their favored status with the state enabled them to act as intermediaries between the Sublime Porte and the Armenians (Karaca, 2022, p. 28). On the other hand, the *amiras* had an important role among the Armenians. Until the latter half of the 19th century, the *amiras* wielded considerable influence over the election and removal of Patriarchs within the community (Karaca, 2022, p. 27).

The first key feature of the *amiras* is that they were not an institutionalized group. For instance, *amiralık* represented a status for Armenians who had established themselves as successful moneylenders, state officials, and merchants. Their privileged status is evident in their exemptions from tax obligations, dress codes, and restrictions on carrying weapons. Secondly, *amiralık* was not a hereditary title passed down from fathers to sons (Karaca, 2022, p. 22).

In Istanbul, the *amiras* played a decisive role establishing state-sponsored industrial projects that were first consumed by the military in the first half of the 1800s (Matossian, 2007). However, during the second quarter of the 19th century, when the *amiras* saw an absolute loss in their dominance within the Armenians and a relative decline in their economic significance, the forces that brought about these changes no longer came solely from the Porte. The growing wealth and social complexity of the Armenians contributed to the pressures that ultimately caused the decline of the *amira* class (Barsoumian, 1980, pp. 17-18). The middle class, Armenian *esnafs* (guilds) and Armenian merchants, who represented the growing Armenian bourgeoisie, replaced them (Matossian, 2007).

One of the key factors contributing to the weakening of the *amiras* was the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the issuance of the Reform Edict in 1856 (Karaca, 2022, p. 30). The onset of the Crimean War and its aftermath led to a shift in the power dynamics within the Ottoman State (Karaca, 2022, p. 31).

Armenians played a crucial role in Istanbul's commercial life, engaging in money changing, artisanal crafts, and international trade.



## Armenians' Commercial Activities in Istanbul

In Istanbul, money changers played a crucial role in meeting the credit needs of trade and guilds, particularly from the late 17th century onwards when they organized into a guild and relocated to Galata. While Jewish influence in finance waned after the 16th century, Greeks and Armenians gained prominence, especially in international trade financing. Greek money changers capitalized on maritime trade networks, while Armenians benefited from strong ties with the Ottoman bureaucracy and European finance (Pamuk, 2007, pp. 142-43).

As the Ottoman State's financial situation deteriorated in the 1760s, money changers became vital for securing loans and managing the sultan's and top officials' financial affairs. After the French Revolution, they replaced French merchants in Istanbul and expanded their influence, evolving from traditional money changers to large-scale financial capitalists. By the 1840s, they formed a financial bourgeoisie, establishing banks and including Jews and Levantines. Prominent Armenians held significant positions, such as the directorship of the Imperial Mint (Darphane-i Amire), which was both powerful and perilous, often leading to their downfall during financial crises (Pamuk, 2007, p. 143). For instance, Artin Kazaz, an Armenian money changer, was appointed the head of the Imperial Mint by Sultan Mahmud II. Kazaz was, in fact, just one of a series of Armenian money changers who managed the Imperial Mint from the second half of the 18th century until the 1840s (Pamuk, 2007, p. 128). Additionally, from 1860, there were a dozen Armenian manufacturing houses in Istanbul, Bursa, Edirne, Izmit, Kayseri, and Izmir, while the Greeks abandoned the manufacturing and *basma* business to focus on currency exchange (Matossian, 2007).

Determining the precise number of Armenian *esnafs* in the Ottoman State at any given time is challenging. By the late 18th century, 65 *esnafs* were comprised of Armenian artisans and merchants in Istanbul. By the mid-19th century, this figure had nearly doubled, encompassing most trades in the capital. The structure of the Armenian *esnafs* was largely consistent across the state. Each guild comprised *ustas* (masters), *kalfas* (master-apprentices), and *çıraks* (apprentices). The leader of each *esnaf* typically held the title of *ağa* (general officer) as designated by the Ottoman government. The local government determined the privileges for each *esnaf* to open shops, and the quality and pricing of their products (Artinian, 1970, p. 25).

Bonds of kinship were a contributing factor in Armenian merchant networks' growth. From their bases in peripheral cities like Kayseri or Harput, Armenian merchant networks expanded throughout the state and extended their operations to Manchester and London. Family members

often traveled abroad to enhance their knowledge of manufacturing processes. They also participated in international fairs and trade shows (Matossian, 2007). By the mid-1800s, more than thirty Armenian businesses were operating in London and Manchester, have its main offices based in Smyrna or Istanbul (Artinian, 1970, p. 9). Thus, Armenian merchants' networks linked the periphery, center, and the international economy (Matossian, 2007). After spending a few years in these locations, they sometimes returned to their hometowns with cutting-edge machinery to accelerate factory production, such as steam-powered silk reeling machines and spinning machines (Matossian, 2007). The government also drafted a law exempting specific machinery from tax, which encouraged the import of machines from overseas. Despite this, most Ottoman textile production was still handmade (Matossian, 2007).

Two documents in the Ottoman Archives from October 1899 tell us about an Armenian merchant named Aram Fındıklıyan. These documents mention that merchant Aram Fındıklıyan, who went to Manchester with a passport for trade purposes, was not allowed to pass through Cısr-i Mustafapaşa on his return. Aram Fındıklıyan went to a business trip in Manchester approximately six months ago to do business. He obtained the necessary passport and police permits for this. However, on his return, he was not allowed to cross the border and was detained under police surveillance for approximately three days. The document states that Fındıklıyan applied to the relevant authorities for permission to visit Istanbul. After Aram Fındıklıyan's application, an investigation process was initiated by a commission. The investigation determined that Fındıklıyan's reason for going to Manchester was business and it was concluded that there was no obstacle to his travel for this purpose. These documents provide information about trade, travel and police practices during the Ottoman period. It is understood that merchants had to obtain permission for their travels abroad and that there were practices such as being kept under police surveillance at the border upon their return.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Livestock Trade and the Production of *Pastırma* in the 19th Century Erzurum**

The trace of commodities revealed local and regional trade patterns in the inland city's economy during an era when the Ottoman economy was becoming more integrated with global markets. Local social structures in the communities where these commodities were produced were impacted by their production, and local and regional networks were formed by domestic and regional trade. For instance, by the end of the century, the livestock trade between Erzurum and the southern provinces of Aleppo and Damascus had peaked, having intensified around the

<sup>1</sup> Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Dahiliye Nezareti Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu [DH.TMİK.M] 76–69.

middle of the 19th century. Erzurum also saw a concurrent development: the rise in *pastırma* (the salt cured, air dried beef) production (Cora, 2016, p. 280).

There is a document in the Ottoman Archives from March 6, 1824 which is regarding the privileges of Armenian, Jewish and Frankish merchants in Aleppo regarding customs etc.<sup>2</sup> The document expresses Baghdad merchants' problems and complaints while trading in Aleppo and other Ottoman lands. Baghdad merchants stated that trade in Ottoman lands should be facilitated thanks to their governors' strong influence and reputation. However, it was stated that these merchants engaged in trade, especially in Aleppo and its surroundings, were subject to the interventions of ill-intentioned people, heavy liabilities and unfair taxes.

Moreover, it was emphasized that this situation negatively affected their trade activities and that the merchants experienced significant difficulties. In addition, another complaint was that the customs privileges enjoyed by Armenian, Frankish and Jewish merchants were not granted to Baghdad merchants. The merchants demanded that justice be provided that these unfair practices be abolished and that they be protected by gaining a privileged status. In this context, decrees containing definite provisions were requested to be issued and sent to regulate the practices in regions such as Aleppo and Hatay. Therefore, the document reflects the demands of Baghdad merchants for equality in the Ottoman trade system and their efforts to regulate trade. From my point of view, this document could be effective in intensifying the livestock trade between Erzurum and Aleppo in the mid-19th century.

The changes in the livestock trade and the production of *pastırma* in the 19th century were driven by evolving interactions between the Ottoman and European economies. These developments occurred within an imperial context and were influenced by interconnected regional and imperial factors, and economic and social dynamics (Cora, 2016, p. 235). The livestock trade between Erzurum and the provinces of Aleppo and Damascus in the south intensified from the mid-19th century, reaching its peak in the state's final years (Cora, 2016, p. 280). The trade connecting Erzurum to other parts of the state included a variety of participants: nomads with sheep, peasants who raised them for personal use or local business owners, external merchants from places like Aleppo who came to buy sheep, local merchants who acted as intermediaries and provided financing, and local Muslim and Armenian elites who invested in tax farming related to sheep levies (Cora, 2016, p. 238).

<sup>2</sup>Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA). Hatt-ı Hümayun [HAT] 808-37196. I would like to thank Gökçe Arslan for her help to examine the document.

*Pastırma* is a traditional Anatolian delicacy with roots in Central Asia, consisting of thin slices of beef, ideally taken from premium cuts. The meat is seasoned with garlic and local herbs, then sun-dried. Traditionally prepared in the autumn, it was intended for consumption during the winter months. Before refrigeration, *pastırma* served as the primary alternative to mutton, making it the preferred way to enjoy beef. *Pastırma* was a food of the lower classes in rural areas who lacked access to fresh mutton before the mid-19th century (Cora, 2016, p. 245). After it became a staple food for the poor and middle classes of Istanbul, it provided enormous opportunities for its producers, such as Khachatur Pastırmacıyan (Cora, 2016, p. 247). No historical records pinpoint the exact time when *pastırma* began to be produced on a large scale in Erzurum. The earliest documentation, from the 1860s, suggests that its production was aimed primarily at the market in the imperial capital. Consul Taylor, who visited Erzurum in 1865, noted a universal demand for *pastırma* throughout the Ottoman State. While Diyarbekir and Kayseri were competitors, Erzurum held an advantage since cattle were exported from there to these regions. Records from 1867 indicate that 1,454 boxes of *pastırma* from Erzurum were shipped from the port of Trabzon to Istanbul on Austrian, Ottoman, and Italian vessels (Cora, 2016, p. 249).

Khachatur Efendi, a leading figure in the notable Pastırmacıyan family, was among the city's prominent personalities during the 1860s and 1870s. He had a brief but highly successful career in the flourishing livestock trade and *pastırma* production, which he supplemented with various other trades and personal relationships (Cora, 2016, p. 254). During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1878-79, as a prominent livestock merchant and *pastırma* producer in the region, Khachatur Efendi was able to provide food for the army due to Erzurum's geographical location on the border. Khachatur Efendi was not the only Armenian notable in Erzurum engaged in military efforts. Still, the long-term nature of his contracts established him as one of the most successful merchants in the region (Cora, 2016, pp. 259-60). Also, he was involved in numerous significant charitable endeavors in Erzurum and did not distinguish between Armenians and Muslims in these efforts (Cora, 2016, p. 266). His philanthropic efforts brought him into daily contact with the lower classes.

Khachatur Efendi was the first notable to cross these communal and class boundaries in *Tanzimat*-era Erzurum (Cora, 2016, pp. 268-69). However, he was assassinated. The assassination of Khachatur Efendi was a meticulously planned political act, reflecting the response of a group that had been steadily losing its symbolic and economic influence. It marked the destruction of one of the key pillars of the new Ottoman order (Cora, 2016, p. 277).

He was murdered not out of envy for his wealth, but because of the social and symbolic capital that came with it (Cora, 2016, p. 281). There were Armenians and individuals from other non-Muslims who, while not directly involved in the murder, were nonetheless pleased with the notable's death (Cora, 2016, p. 278).

Despite its failure, Khachatur Efendi's biography illustrates how the Ottoman Armenian elite transcended boundaries during the peak of the Ottomanist ideology in the 1860s. The life of Khachatur Efendi, the *pastırma* producer from Erzurum, reflects the city's broader economic and social developments during this period. He engaged in various economic and social activities: livestock trade, *pastırma* production, army contracts, and land ownership (Cora, 2016, pp. 280-81).

### Conclusion

The Age of Reform in the Ottoman State, lasting until the 1876 Constitution, saw significant modernization efforts, including new forms of taxation, conscription, and citizen rights. Armenians benefited greatly from this period, gaining legal equality and engaging in administrative and economic roles, primarily through the *Tanzimat* reforms (1839-1876). The Gülhane Edict of 1839 provided legal protections for all subjects, while the Reform Edict of 1856 allowed for greater communal participation and equality. These changes enabled Armenians to become prominent in trade, finance, and politics, forming a comprador class that collaborated with European merchants.

Armenian merchants, particularly in Istanbul, expanded their businesses through connections with European and British markets. The Armenian National Constitution further empowered the community, to self-manage areas like education and health. This autonomy fostered an influential Armenian presence within the Ottoman administration. The abolition of tax farming reduced the economic dominance of wealthy Armenian bankers, shifting the community's structure and influence. Together, these reforms and shifts positioned Armenians as significant contributors to the Ottoman State's modernization efforts.

The *amiras* were influential Armenian elites in the Ottoman State, holding roles such as bankers, architects, and mint directors. Recognized for their wealth and close connections with Ottoman elites, including occasionally the Sultan, they acted as intermediaries between the Ottoman government and the Armenians. Though they were not an institutionalized or hereditary group, the title "*amira*" symbolized Armenian "aristocracy", given only to Armenians with official roles or financial ties to the state.

Most *amiras* originated from Eğin, using their wealth to establish themselves in Istanbul, where they supported Ottoman state projects, particularly military-related industries. However, their influence declined in the mid-19th century as economic and social changes, including the Crimean War and the Reform Edict of 1856, empowered a new Armenian middle class and merchant “bourgeoisie”. By the late 19th century, the *amiras* lost their economic dominance and political influence, replaced by Armenian *esnafs* and merchants who represented a growing “bourgeoisie”.

From the late 17th century, money changers in Istanbul, particularly Armenians and Greeks, were crucial in financing trade and guilds. While Greeks leveraged maritime trade, Armenians benefited from connections with the Ottoman bureaucracy and European finance. As the Ottoman state’s financial struggles grew in the 1760s, these money changers became essential in managing the sultan’s finances. By the 1840s, they formed a financial bourgeoisie, establishing banks and gaining influence, with Armenians like Artin Kazaz heading the powerful but risky Imperial Mint.

Armenian *esnafs* nearly doubled by the mid-19th century, comprising artisans and merchants organized by rank. Strong kinship bonds helped Armenian merchants expand networks within and beyond the state, reaching London and Manchester. These merchants contributed to Ottoman modernization by importing machinery, especially as mechanization accelerated production in Armenian-owned factories. Ottoman infrastructure developments, such as port expansions and railroads, further supported Armenian businesses, enhancing their role in domestic and international trade.

In the 19th century, the Ottoman economy, increasingly integrated with global markets, saw significant local and regional trade shifts. Erzurum became a key player, with its livestock trade peaking in the state’s final years, driven by demand from Aleppo and Damascus. At the same time, *pastırma* production also grew. This economic activity involved various participants, including nomads, peasants, merchants from Aleppo, and local intermediaries. Muslim and Armenian elites further supported this trade through investments in tax farming, shaping social and economic structures in Erzurum’s community as it connected to broader regional networks.

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***Etik Kurul İzni***

*Bu çalışma için etik kurul izni gerekmemektedir. Yaşayan hiçbir canlı (insan ve hayvan) üzerinde araştırma yapılmamıştır. Makale Tarih alanına aittir.*

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*Makalenin yazarları, bu çalışma ile ilgili herhangi bir kurum, kuruluş, kişi ile mali çıkar çatışması olmadığını ve yazarlar arasında çıkar çatışması bulunmadığını beyan eder.*

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***Destek ve Teşekkür***

*Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum ya da kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.*

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