

## **Aldo Ferrari - Abstract**

### **Looking for a Kingdom. Prophecy and Politics in Eighteenth Century Armenia**

The persistence of an important part of the ancient social structure, dominated by the nobility (the so called *meliks*), gave the Armenians of Transcaucasia not only the chance of maintaining a self-government, though under Persian or Georgian sovereignty; it also made possible a kind of “foreign policy”.

Since Israyel Ori’s mission in the beginning of eighteenth century, the aim of the Armenian nobility of Transcaucasia was the rebirth of a national statehood under the protection of the Russian Empire. Unlike the republican project elaborated in the second half of the eighteenth century by Shahamir Shamirian’s group in Madras, Armenian nobility projected the building of a new kingdom. This circumstance must be considered with no ideological bias, but merely as a direct consequence of the survival among the Transcaucasian Armenians of strong remnants of the ancient social and political order.

It is interesting as well to consider the active role played in this political activities by the Archbishop of the Russian Armenians, Hovsep Arghutean, he himself a member of an armeno-georgian princely family.

Largely because of the weakening of the *meliks* during the eighteenth century, Karabakh failed to become the Piedmont or the Prussia of Armenia. The project of the rebirth of an independent kingdom, thanks not only to the Russian aid, but also to the forces of the last national noble houses, proved to be unattainable. It was a kind of swan-song of the political, social, and cultural structures of ancient Armenia, that survived in some Transcaucasian regions until the end of the eighteenth century.