

THE CODE OF HONOR OF THE ARMENIAN MILITARY (4-5th CENTURIES)¹

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Summary

Armenian historiography contains a considerable amount of information about ancient and medieval Armenian military ideology. In the works of the 5th century historians Pavstos Buzand and Movses Khorenatzi, the commands and legacy of the Armenian sparapets (commanders-in-chief) to their successors lay out in detail the obligations and responsibilities of Armenian warriors. This code of honor, in hierarchical order, requires selfless loyalty to: (1) their fatherland, the Armenian "world," country and independent kingdom; (2) chivalric honor; (3) the king as the most important state institution of Armenia; (4) the people of Armenia, all of its inhabitants, irrespective of their social status; (5) the Christian faith, church and clergymen; (6) family; (7) their kinsmen; (8) their comrades-in-arms.

These norms of conduct share similarities with later medieval West European chivalry of the 8th-14th centuries, as well as the system of values of the Japanese samurais codified during the 16-18th centuries. However, as this study shows, there are significant differences in the priority of obligations of the Armenian honor code, on the one hand, and the West European and Japanese codes on the other. The concept of fatherland developed in the Armenian people long before the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century and was expressed by various terms, such as "Hayotz ashkharh, Yerkir, Tagavorutiun" (the Armenian "world," country, kingdom). In addition to these terms, Movses Khorenatzi directly uses the terms "hayrenik" (fatherland) and "hayrenaser" (patriot); whereas, for example, a similar concept of fatherland as well as the term "fatherland" itself did not emerge in neighboring Byzantium until the 10th century.

The large number of Armenian troops (90-120 thousand men from at least the 4th c. BC to the 11th c. AD) and the dominant role of warriors in Armenian society of that period was conditioned by the pressing need for defense of the country from continual foreign invasions. The study demonstrates that in this historical context the Armenian military's honor code had a solid and lasting impact upon the national character and the worldview of the Armenian people.

¹ *The Code of Honor of the Armenian Military, 4-5th centuries* (Yerevan, Matenadaran: "Artagers," 2000), 48 pp. The full version of this study (minus footnotes) was republished in *Hayrenik yev Tsarayutiun* [The Fatherland and Service]. Textbook for officers and noncommissioned officers (Yerevan, Defense Ministry of Armenia: "Voskan Yerevantzi," 2001), pp. 548-562. The Russian version of this study appeared in *Golos Armenii* (Yerevan), February 1, 2001 and *Armyanskiy Vestnik* (Moscow), No. 1-2, 2002, pp. 101-106. A shorter version appeared with the same title in *Haykakan Banak* (Armenian Army, Military-Scientific Quarterly of the Defense Ministry of Armenia) No. 3 (25), 2000, pp. 52-61.