

ARMENIAN STATE GOVERNANCE IN THE EPOCHS OF THE KINGDOMS OF GREAT ARMENIA AND CILICIA

Suvaryan Y. M.

*Academician-Secretary of the Division of Armenology
and Social Sciences of NAS RA*

State governance was of a monarchical nature in ancient and medieval Armenia. The king was the head of the state apparatus and the royal power was hereditary, passing from father to son. This custom was already well developed in the 6th-1st centuries BC, during the reign of the Yervanduni and Artashesyan royal dynasties in the Kingdom of Great Armenia. Its roots go even further back to the Ararat (Urartu) Kingdom and deeper.

In domestic and foreign policy matters, the king had broad legislative and executive authority. He “was the source of law. He could act based on customary or state enacted laws and regulations, and was entitled to revise them and enact new laws”¹. According to Movses Khorenatsi, the Armenian king Vagharshak “...enacts laws in his royal court, defines times for visits [to the royal court], as well as for counseling, feasting, and taking walks, [the king] defines military hierarchy, first, second, third, and so on... appoints arbitrators in the royal court, in the cities, and in the townships”². According to the same source, the king “...appoints his armed guards from the family of Haykazn Khor, superb and brave lancers and sword carriers, and appoints a person named Malkhaz as the head of their ministry...”³.

It is noteworthy that in 488 AD, Vachagan, the Armenian king of Artsakh and Utik⁴, ratified the “*Kanonakan Sahmanadrutyun*” (“Canonical Constitution”)⁵, which consisted of a preamble, 21 sections, and a conclusion. The document regulated the rights and the responsibilities of the secular and spiritual layers of the Armenian society, as well as taxation and civil matters⁶.

¹ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 1, Երևան, 1971, էջ 672:

² Մովսէս Խորենացի, Պատմութիւն Հայոց, Երևան, 1991, էջ 117:

³ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴ Ուլուբաբյան Բ., Հայոց Արևելից կողմանց եկեղեցին և մշակույթը, Երևան, 1998, էջ 64-65: Ուլուբաբյան Բ., Դրվագներ Հայոց Արևելից կողմանց պատմության (V-VII դդ.), Երևան, 1987, էջ 31: Դանիելյան Է.Լ., Գանձասարի պատմություն, Երևան, 2005, էջ 43-46:

⁵ Մովսէս Կաղանկատուացի, Պատմութիւն Աղուանից աշխարհի: Քննական բնագիրը և ներածությունը Վ. Առաքելյանի, Երևան, 1983, էջ 89-94: Ղահրամանյան Կ., Հովհաննիսյան Վ., 1550-ամյա հայկական սահմանադրությունը, ընդունման հանգամանքները և նշանակությունը, Երևան, 1999, էջ 46-58:

⁶ Կանոնագիրը Հայոց, աշխատ. Վ. Հակոբյանի, Երևան, 1964, էջ 91-100:

According to historical sources, the king was responsible for foreign policy, particularly for decisions on waging wars, making peace, and signing treaties. He was entitled to found cities and give names to them. He was the supreme commander of the armed forces, while also managing all aspects of domestic policies⁷.

The court was the counseling body of state governance, which consisted of the members of the king's immediate circles, especially relatives and the elite of noblemen. *Ashkharhazhoghov* («the forum of delegates») was a unique counseling body, which was summoned by the king at a certain time of the year. Among landlords and noblemen the elite of the rural community was also participating in the assembly. As the supreme counseling body of Armenia, *Ashkharhazhoghov* was usually assembled in Tsaghkotn region, near the mountain Npat, and in Shahapivan⁸.

The functional government was realized through the ministries (or departments). Some of them were permanent, including Հազարապետություն (*Hazarapetutyun* - Ministry of Finance), Մաղխազություն (*Maghkhazutyun* - the Royal Guard), Մարդապետություն (*Mardpetutyun* - the Office of Royal Treasury), Մեծն Դատավարություն (*Metsn Datavarutyun* - the Great Lawsuit), Սպարապետություն (*Sparapetutyun*- the Ministry of Defense), etc.; there were also a number of secondary departments.

Hazarapetutyun was one of the main ministries of the state, which was controlling all the rural communities, financial matters, including taxation, and the military⁹.

Maghkhazutyun was the department of court guards.

Mardapetutyun was the ministry supervising the court, royal manor and the treasury.

In ancient times *Metsn Datavarutyun* was a privilege of the High priest and after the adoption of Christianity in Armenia as the state religion (301 AD) it became the ministry headed by the Armenian Catholicos.

Sparapet (minister of defense) was the supreme commander of the armed forces of the kingdom of Great Armenia¹⁰.

As a rule, the ministries (or departments) were headed by the most influential representatives of the Armenian nobility, while the positions were of an hereditary nature.

The territory of the kingdom of Great Armenia consisted of 124 regions ("gavars"), which were included in 22 "strategies" and the realm of the royal domain. Each "strategy" (or prefecture) had its governor, who in the beginning was appointed by the king, but later the position became the hereditary privilege of the dynasty. Movses

⁷ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 1, էջ 672-673:

⁸ Ibid., pp. 828-829.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 830-831.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 834.

Khorenatsi states that the king “appoints Sharashan, who was from Sarasar’s family, as «bdeashkh¹¹ mets» (մեծ բդեաշխ) in the south-west, close to the borders with Assyria, on the bank of the Tigris River...”¹². At first, the title “landlord” was given to the governors of the regions appointed by the king. Later, however, the title of the landlord became hereditary, while the region became the hereditary property of the princely family (nakharar)¹³.

The cities in Great Armenia were governed by city governors (վերապագու - *verakatsu*) appointed by the king. Besides the governors, however, there were also the city government councils¹⁴. For instance, according to Khorenatsi, the governor of the city of Tigranakert was King Arshak II’s father-in-law, Antioch¹⁵/Andovk Patriarch of Syunik¹⁶. Rural communities were governed by the appointed community governors, as the lower layers of the state administrative apparatus. Moreover, bigger cities were independent, while smaller ones together with some of the rural communities were part of the “strategies, while certain villages were in the territories of the cities¹⁷.

For centuries the landlords were among the most crucial links of state governance (Figure 1). Each landlord was not only a big landowner, but also a governor of a certain region (a body of territorial administration). At the same time, they were entitled to hold positions in state governance and run above mentioned ministries and departments. In their own domains, the nakharars were entitled to taxation, judicial, administrative and military power and fortresses.

¹¹ Cf. margravia *vitaxae*.

¹² Մովսէս Խորենացի, էջ 116:

¹³ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 1, էջ 842-843:

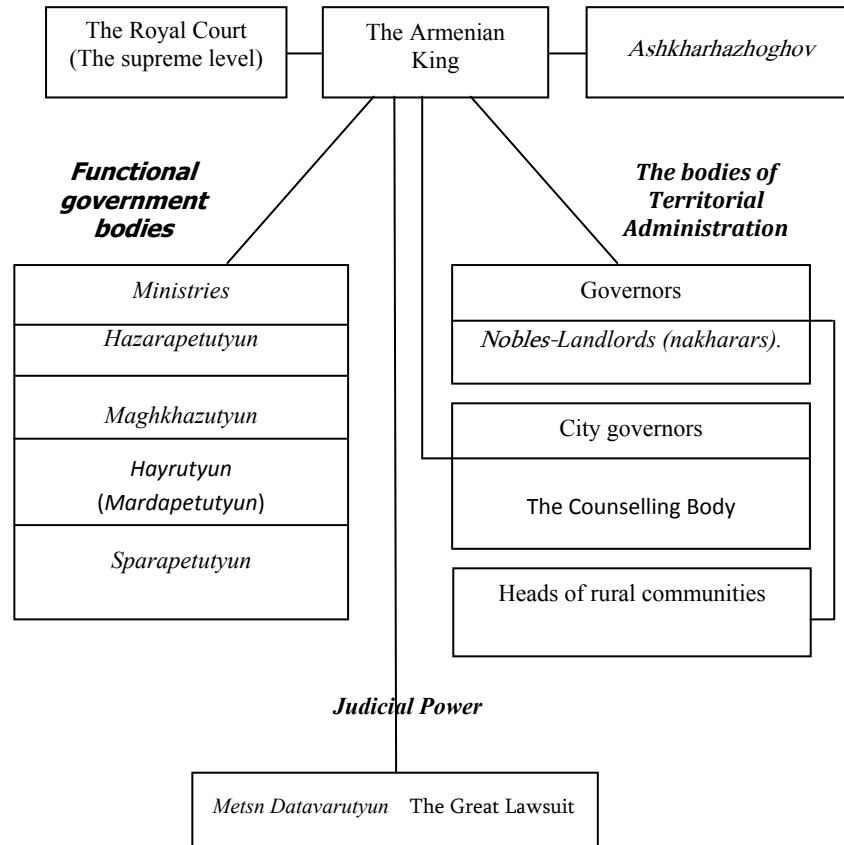
¹⁴ Ibid., p. 681.

¹⁵ Cf. Andovk Patriarch of Syunik, father of Queen Parandzem (see: Հ. Աճառյան, Հայոց անձնանունների բառարան, հ. Ա, Երևան, 1942, էջ 158):

¹⁶ Մովսէս Խորենացի, էջ 287:

¹⁷ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 1, էջ 682:

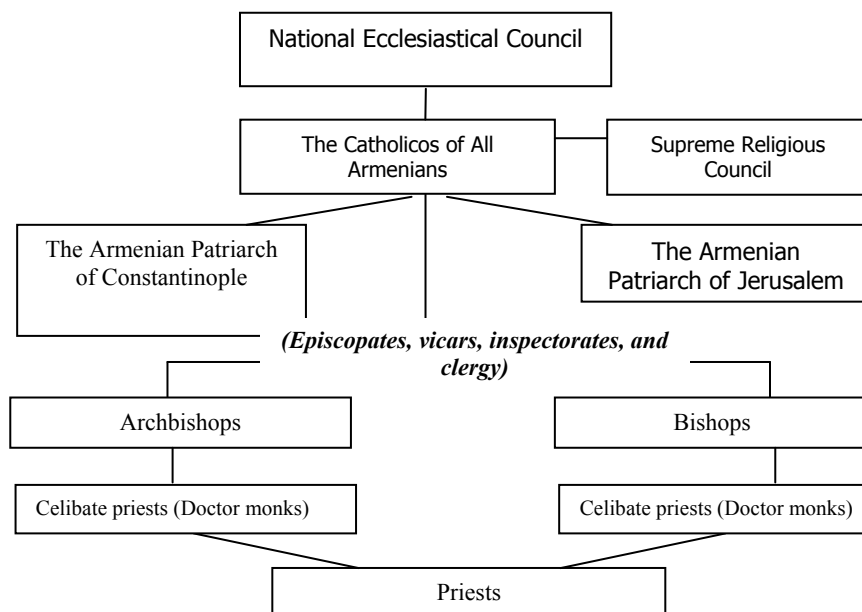
Figure 1. The System of State Governance in Great Armenia



By their nature, the ministries were functional government bodies, authorized to govern the sphere assigned to them (e.g., national defense, economy). Thus, the system of state governance consisted of the monarch, court, «the forum of delegates» (*Ashkharhazhoghov*), the bodies of functional and territorial administration, and the body of judicial power.

From the early Middle Ages the Armenian Apostolic Church became responsible for spiritual development, education, and, partially, the judiciary (the landlords in their territories were entitled to judicial power). In the periods of the loss of the kingdom, the Church also assumed legislative responsibilities and took control over the judiciary.

It is noteworthy that the organizational structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church has not incurred serious changes during seventeen centuries of its existence, which, no doubt, speaks to its efficiency (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Organizational Structure of the Armenian Apostolic Church¹⁸

After the abolition of the Armenian Arshakuni kingdom (428 AD) both the Persian and Byzantine parts of Armenia retained certain elements of Armenian statehood. With certain privileges, army, and relative independence, the ministers continued to govern in their domains. The Persian court had appointed a *marzpan*¹⁹ in Eastern Armenia. The Church continued to run the ministry of *Mets Datavarutyun*. *Hazarapetutyun* and *Sparapetutyun* continued to function as the main ministries of the Persian Armenia²⁰. The *Hazarapet* (the minister of finance) remained responsible for taxation and matters of state building, while the *Sparapet* (the minister of defense) for the army. The government bodies were functioning under the supervision of the Persian royal court. The Armenian statehood (based on the *nakharar* system), was preserved owing to the rebellions headed by Vardan Mamikonyan (450 - 451) and Vahan Mamikonyan (481 - 484), as well as the hierarchic governance of the Armenian Apostolic Church²¹.

The Byzantine part of Armenia retained the hereditary entitlements of the Armenian landlords until 536 AD. Afterwards, administrative-military reforms implemented by Justinian I (527-565) in the government system of the Empire became dominant, and the Armenian landlords, being restricted in their hereditary economic rights, lost their political and military power in Western Armenia²².

¹⁸ Because of historical circumstances, different Patriarchates have been formed over time, and the Catholicate of the Great House of Cilicia, all are in the hierarchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church headed by the Catholicos of All Armenians.

¹⁹ The title of a governor of a territorial administrative unit of the Sasanid kingdom.

²⁰ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 2, Երևան, 1984, էջ 166:

²¹ Դանիելյան Է. Լ., Հին Հայոց պետականության գաղափարական ընկալումը վաղ միջնադարյան հայկական աղբյուրներում, Հարք, Երևան, 2006, 1, էջ 18-31:

²² Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 2, էջ 219-221, 239-241:

Marzpan of Eastern Armenia was supervised directly by the Persian king. From the 30s of the 7th century, according to historical sources, the country was governed by the Prince of Armenia. After the fall of the Sassanid Kingdom (651 AD) in the second half of the 7th century, in conditions of the rivalry between the Byzantine and the newly formed Arab Caliphate, Armenia restored its territorial integrity and independence²³. The Prince of Armenia was an independent ruler, albeit not with hereditary entitlements²⁴. The Church, especially the Catholicos, and the landlords participated in the government of the country.

At the beginning of the 8th century Armenia was dominated by the Arab Caliphate. The governing system of Armenia appeared under the supervision of an Arab governor-general (*vostikan*), appointed by the caliph²⁵. In the 8th-9th cc. the Armenian people's struggle against the Arab domination outgrew into the national-liberation struggle reflected in the epic "Davit of Sasun" the roots of which are grounded in the depths of the millennia-old Armenian history.

After the restoration of the Armenian Kingdom, during the reign of the Bagratuni dynasty (885-1045 AD), the king (the monarch) was the head of state, whose powers, like during the former kingdoms of Great Armenia, was of an hereditary nature. State governance, although based on the traditions and features of the earlier Armenian statehood, had its distinctive specifications from the Arshakuni period. The Bagratunis retained the old titles of a number of positions from the past systems of government. The Bagratunis, particularly, favored "the King of Kings" and "the Prince of Princes"²⁶.

The Prince of Princes was considered the representative and the deputy of the Armenian king. This position is similar to the position of *Hazarapet* of the Arshakuni period. The Prince of Princes was supervising all the regional governors, city governors. He was responsible for taxation, and, together with the *Sparapet*, was heading the Armenian army during wars.

The Church had a considerable input in the government of the country, and the Bagratuni kings were trying to strengthen the spiritual center of Armenia.

The *Sparapet*, as the commander of the Armenian army, was the second person in the country after the king. In most cases this position was filled with members of the royal family.

The heads of small kingdoms, such as Vaspurakan, Kars, Syunik, and Tashir-Dzoraget, had an important role in the government of regions (*nahang*) and sub-regions (*gavar*). The main territories of the kingdom, on the other hand, were governed by

²³ Тер-Гевондян А., Армения и Арабский халифат, Ереван, 1977, с. 47-49. Դանիելյան Է.Լ., Հայաստանի քաղաքական պատմությունը և Հայ Առաքելական Եկեղեցին (VI-VII դդ.), Երևան, 2000, էջ 207-225:

²⁴ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 2, էջ 318-319:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 363.

²⁶ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 3, Երևան, 1976, էջ 266:

governor-princes, appointed by the Armenian king. The heads of small kingdoms, too, needed an approval of their authority from the Bagratuni king²⁷.

The social-economic system, including state governance, had a legislative basis. The Armenian kings carried out both executive and legislative functions. As per historical sources (the works of Movses Khorenatsi, Agantangeghos, Pavstos Buzand, Eznik Koghbatsi and Ghazar Parpetsi), the kings enacted different laws, charters, and edicts, aimed at regulating the socio-economic relations in Armenia²⁸. “*Gahnamak*” and “*Zoranamak*,” two unique types of edicts, had ratified the position, role, and the size of the military of the governors and landlords in the kingdom. These edicts also classified the governors and landlords based on the Great Armenia system of four military governors and landlords. The regulation of the religious and socio-economic relations was carried out based on the *Kanonagirk Hayots* (Armenian Book of Canons), which had been in use from ancient times until the beginning of the 20th century. The secular Code of Laws (*Datastanagirk* by Mkhitar Gosh²⁹) was also in use in medieval Armenia.

The system of the state governance in Cilician Armenia (a great principality in 1080-1198 and a kingdom in 1198-1375) was formed based on the above-mentioned principles of the governance that existed in the times of the Kingdom of Great Armenia, as well as some experience of the European countries³⁰.

Bdeshkhs (margraves *vitaxae* or duches) kept the second position after the king in ancient Armenia. They were followed by senior landlords, junior landlords, and the free class (ազատներ). In Cilician Armenia, however, the same structure of institutions and the same type of hierarchy had different names: instead of the term *nakharar* were used the terms *prince* and *baron*, alongside of *chatelliens* (բերդակալներ) and the free class or knights (ասպետներ)³¹.

As in the past, the king had exclusive rights (to coin money, levy duties, build cities, strategic fortresses, and bridges). The king was the supreme commander of the armed forces and was in charge of foreign affairs; he was entitled to enact laws and manage other important state matters. The centre of the whole country's governance was the royal court. The governing bodies in the court included the supreme authority (գերագոյն ատեան, դիւան) and the central administrative bodies (ministries - գործակալութիւններ)³². The management of the ministries was implemented not by the

²⁷ Ibid., p. 267, 271, 276-277.

²⁸ Հայ ժողովրդի պատմություն, հ. 2, էջ 483:

²⁹ See: Смбат Спарамет, Судебник, перевод и предисловие А. Галстяна, ред. С. Аревшатян, Ереван, 1958, с. XIX-XXIV.

³⁰ Cf. Микаелян Г.Г., История Киликийского армянского государства, Ереван, 1952, с. 238.

³¹ Սուքիասյան Ա.Գ., Կիլիկիայի Հայկական պետության և իրավունքի պատմություն (XI-XIV դարեր), Երևան, 1978, էջ 154:

³² Ibid., pp. 159-160:

representatives of the landlord (nakharar) families but by meritocrats. The chancellor ("royal scribe") (նպրապետ-drapet) was in charge of foreign affairs, the state seal, preparing royal decrees together with the king, etc. The *Sparapet* (Gundstable) was managing the military establishment, while the head of customs affairs (*Maksapetutyun*) was in charge of customs, and domestic and foreign trade³³.

Local self-governing bodies had an important role in the government system of Cilician Armenia. There were cities and districts (*gavars*) under the direct supervision of the king and governed by governors appointed by the king. Those *gavars* which were in the domain of landlord-vassals, were governed by barons, who, like landlords, were both landowners and governors³⁴. The barons had broad administrative, military, financial, and judicial authorities. There were also representative bodies, the council or assembly of seniors, in the government of *gavars*. Each *gavar* consisted of rural communities, which were governed by the council of the seniors (աւագանի) of the community (the priest was also participating in the government of the community)³⁵. It is noteworthy that the cities, besides the head of the city, also had bodies of sovereignty, such as councils of citizens, guilds, and unions. Like in Great Armenia, the judicial system consisted of state, estate, and religious courts³⁶.

State governance in Cilician Armenia was implemented according to Smbat Sparapet's *Datastanagirk* (Code of Laws) (1265), which was a unique and very important legislative-normative document. It was created by the objective necessity of reinforcing the statehood and was based on the accomplishments of Armenian theoretical thought and the tradition and experience of state governance in the country.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Սուրբհայրյան Ա.Գ., op. cit., p. 168.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 176.