



## DAYEAKUT'IWN

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**DAYEAKUT'IWN** (< *dayeak*, Arm. lw. < Mid. Pers. *dāyag*; cf. NPers. *dāya*, “wet nurse”; cf. Vedic *dhāpáyatē* “suckles”; Skt. *dhātrī*, Prakrit *dhattī* “wet nurse”), a form of child rearing practiced in Armenia and other parts of the Caucasus. In modern Armenian *dayeak* means only “wet nurse,” but in its earliest attestations (4th-5th centuries) it referred to one entrusted with educating and nurturing a child for an extended period. At that time the young sons of Armenian lords (*naxarars*) were sent to be raised and educated by other lords, sometimes in distant districts. Probably at age fifteen years a youth (*san*) would return home, perhaps with a bride from his “adopted” family. Between him and the host lord (*dayeak*) there was a lifelong bond, and marriage between the two houses might advance the interests of both.

When *dayeakut'iwn* originated among the Armenians cannot be determined accurately. References to *dayeaks* abound in historical sources from the 4th and 5th centuries (e.g., *Agathangelos*, *Faustus*, Lazar P'arpets'i), evidence that the institution was already pervasive. Moses of Khorene, a later author whose dates are a matter of debate, projected *dayeakut'iwn* into Armenian prehistory. It perhaps arose as a response to almost continuous warfare among dynastic lords and the centralizing, or “feudalizing,” crown. In 4th- and 5th-century Armenia the Arsacid dynasty tried on more than one occasion to exterminate recalcitrant lordly families and to confiscate their lands. As such a family might include thousands of individuals, this effort meant that every male member had to be killed. Should even one male infant survive, he could (on reaching majority) reclaim all the lands of his clan and, under the prevailing



customary law of Armenia, could be restored to his full prerogatives. Under such uncertain circumstances the clans took such precautions as *dayeakut'awn* in order to prevent total annihilation. Custody of surviving noble children was of paramount importance among the *naxarars*, who stood to gain from merging their houses with those of their wards. Beyond ensuring a clan's survival in dangerous times, *dayeakut'awn* thus also served as a means of drawing lordly families together.

Lazar P'arpets'i, author of a history of the Armenians, also referred (2.60, p. 204) to Persian *dayeaks*, apparently confirming the existence of this institution in Persia in the late 5th century. Among Armenians *dayeakut'awn* remained part of customary law and is thus not mentioned in extant formal codes and church canons; in Persia, however, "guardianship" became the focus of precise legal formulation in the later Sasanian Law Book.

After the 5th century *dayeakut'awn* is more difficult to trace in Armenia, perhaps because of the nature of the sources. Although the term was used occasionally between the 6th and 15th centuries, it was not as frequent as before. In one form or another the institution did endure into the 19th century, though information on more recent survivals comes from Georgia and other parts of the Caucasus, rather than from Armenia.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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