

СОФИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ  
„СВ. КЛИМЕНТ ОХРИДСКИ“



SOFIA UNIVERSITY  
ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI

FACULTY OF CLASSICAL AND MODERN PHILOLOGY  
DEPARTMENT "CLASSICAL EAST"  
ARMENIAN AND CAUCASUS STUDIES DEGREE PROGRAM

**THE HERO ARCHETYPE IN THE OLD AND MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN  
LITERATURE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

of a Doctoral thesis

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor",

in professional field 2.1. Philology, PhD Program "Literature of the Peoples of Europe,  
America, Asia, Africa and Australia" –  
(Armenian Literature)

PhD student:  
Antoaneta Milanova Anguelova

Sofia, 2025

## TABLE OF CONTENTS OF THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

<b>I.</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS</b> .....	3
1.	Object and subject of the study.....	3
2.	Aims of the study.....	3
3.	Research objectives.....	4
4.	Methodology.....	5
5.	Topic relevance.....	6
<b>II.</b>	<b>STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION</b> .....	7
1.	INTRODUCTION.....	8
2.	Chapter I – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	12
3.	Chapter II – THE IMAGE OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL HERO IN ANCIENT ARMENIAN LITERATURE.....	13
4.	Chapter III – THE HERO KING OR WARRIOR IN ANCIENT AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN LITERATURE.....	16
4.	Chapter IV – THE HERO’S JOURNEY IN THE MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN EPIC <i>SASNA TSRER</i> .....	18
5.	CONCLUSION.....	21
<b>III.</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTIONS</b> .....	25
<b>IV.</b>	<b>PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC</b> .....	26
<b>V.</b>	<b>LITERATURE CITED IN THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	27

# I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS

## 1. Object and subject of the study

**The object** of this study is ancient and early medieval Armenian literature, spanning from the pagan period to the end of the 7th century, encompassing mythological texts, legends, historical prose, and epic works in which heroic images are prominent.

**The subject** of the study is the archetype of the hero and its variations within the literary corpus under consideration—mythological heroes, hero kings (historical figures) or hero warriors (historical figures). The study focuses on how different cultural, religious, and historical contexts influence the portrayal and development of the heroic image in the Armenian tradition.

## 2. Aims of the study

The **aim** of this study is to analyse and present the meaning and manifestations of the heroic in the images of the Armenian literary tradition, with a focus on the mythical, religious, military and historical heroes of the ancient and early medieval literature. The study seeks to show how these heroic images influence the development of Armenian literature and contribute to the preservation of the Armenian spirit, national self-consciousness and cultural memory. In the Armenian literary tradition, these heroes occupy a central place as bearers of cultural values and ideals, inspiring the struggle for survival and independence.

Although several scientific publications have partially examined the topic of the hero's image, a comprehensive and systematic study of its various manifestations across different historical periods and genres is lacking. The present PhD thesis seeks to fill this gap by offering a consistent tracing and analysis of heroic images from oral tradition (myths and legends) to ancient and early medieval Armenian literature (including historical prose and medieval epic), with an emphasis on the period up to the end of the 7th century.

The study does not pretend to be exhaustive, but through a systematic selection of texts, motifs and themes, it seeks to trace the emergence, parallel existence and functions of different types of heroes - mythological, Christian and warrior/king (historical figure) - depending on the cultural and historical context. The analysis covers texts from different genres - legends, epic songs and historical narratives, written in Old Armenian and Middle Armenian.

### **3. Research objectives**

Under the goal set and within the specified object and subject, this study sets the following tasks:

1.1. Translation and analysis of key fragments and excerpts from Armenian mythological and early medieval literary works related to the image of the hero - mythological, king and warrior. The translations fill a significant gap in the Bulgarian scientific and cultural environment and serve as a basis for subsequent literary and cultural interpretation.

1.2. A study of the mythological archetype of the hero with a view of its role as the basis for the development of the image of the hero-king and the hero-warrior in ancient and early medieval Armenian literature. A systematised presentation of the primary sources related to Armenian mythology and ancient epic tradition is also necessary.

1.3. An analysis of the manifestations of the hero in cultural and religious changes - from the pagan mythological hero to the Christian ruler, to the warrior hero with historical dimensions. We pay particular attention to the role of these heroes in shaping Armenian cultural memory, national identity, and literary tradition.

1.4. Applying Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" (monomyth) model as an analytical framework for understanding the functions, symbolism, and structural role of the epic hero in the Armenian medieval epic *Sasna tsrer*.

#### 4. Methodology

The study draws on a diverse corpus of primary and secondary sources written in modern Armenian, English, French, and Russian. This linguistic range allows for integrating different scholarly perspectives and provides an opportunity for a comparative, interdisciplinary analysis of the image of the hero in the Armenian literary tradition.

We apply an interdisciplinary approach to achieve the set goals, combining literary, cultural-historical, and archetypal analysis. The central methodological framework in the last chapter of the study is the model of the “hero’s journey” (monomyth), formulated by Joseph Campbell, and the archetypal theory of C. G. Jung. The work uses Jung as its basis. These theoretical models are used to analyse the image of the hero in Armenian mythology, early literature and medieval epic.

We initially reviewed the primary literary sources, including epic poems, legends, historiographical works, and variants of the medieval epic *Sasna tsrer*. The analysis focuses on the various manifestations of the hero archetype - mythological, hero-king or warrior - in texts from the pagan period and texts up to the end of the 7th century. We also consulted later references where appropriate, illuminating the persistence of certain images and motifs.

Literary analysis serves to interpret heroic images and trace their narrative functions, variability and symbolism. A cultural-historical approach considers heroic archetypes within specific social, religious, and political processes. The aim is to reveal how heroic images function as carriers of cultural memory and symbolic expressions of national identity.

A significant contribution of the study is the translation of key fragments of the works under consideration from Armenian to Bulgarian. They not only support literary analysis but also provide access to little-known texts of significance for Bulgarian scholarship and comparative literary studies.

The methods used allow us to examine the development and coexistence of different types of heroes in the Armenian tradition - from mythological figures to images of Christian rulers and warriors, in view of broader Indo-European and Christian cultural influences.

## **5. Topic relevance**

The relevance of this study is determined by the universal nature of the considered heroic images, which reflect fundamental human qualities, as well as by the lack of exhaustive studies on the topic of the hero archetype in Armenian literary studies, both in Armenia and internationally.

The relevance of the study of the hero's journey in the Armenian medieval epic is emphasised because there is no comprehensive and systematic analysis on this specific topic, or at least we are not aware of any. Although numerous philological, historical, and cultural studies have focused on the Armenian epic, no one has yet examined it through the prism of Joseph Campbell's theory of the "hero's journey." The present work seeks to fill this gap by analysing the structure of the epic narrative under the conceptual framework proposed by Campbell, in order to clarify the mechanisms of construction of the heroic figure and its significance in the Armenian cultural tradition.

## **II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION**

The dissertation follows the set goals and objectives in its structure. It covers 408 pages<sup>1</sup>, of which 397 pages are scientific text and appendices - tables with the most common characteristics of the characters, as well as a dictionary of Armenian names, 8 pages of bibliography of 91 titles, divided into sources and scientific studies in Bulgarian, Russian, Armenian, French and English.

The work comprises:

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. CHAPTER I – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
- 3. CHAPTER II – THE IMAGE OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL HERO IN ANCIENT ARMENIAN LITERATURE**
- 4. CHAPTER III – THE HERO KING OR WARRIOR IN ANCIENT AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN LITERATURE**
- 5. CHAPTER IV – THE HERO’S JOURNEY IN THE MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN EPIC *SASNA TSRER***
- 6. CONCLUSION**
- 7. CONTRIBUTIONS**
- 8. APPENDIX 1: TABLE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL HERO IN ANCIENT ARMENIAN LITERATURE**
- 9. APPENDIX 2 – TABLE OF STAGES OF THE “HERO’S JOURNEY” IN *SASNA TSRER***
- 10. APPENDIX 3: DICTIONARY OF COMMON SPECIFIC ARMENIAN NAMES**
- 11. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

---

<sup>1</sup> 420 standard pages, 409 pages scientific text and appendices, 20 primary sources and 71 specialised studies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout its centuries-old existence, Armenian literature and folklore have gathered an impressive corpus of ancient and contemporary works that reflect the richness of the Armenian language, culture, and traditions. The images of the characters recreated in these works reveal the beliefs, values, and long history of the people. The excerpts from the ancient Armenian epic of *Hayk and Bel* and the epic of *Vipasank*, quoted by the 5th-century historian Movses Khorenatsi, as well as the medieval epic of *Sasna tsrer* (also known as *David of Sassoun*), which probably dates back to the 7th century, are magnificent poetic and prose works that have gradually attracted the attention of literary scholars from all over the world. The study of new or poorly studied aspects related to these Armenian epics continues to this day, with the continuous scholarly interest in them and the many translations into various languages testifying to their significance for the world literary heritage, as well as to their artistic merits.

Modern Armenian Studies has a vast and in-depth body of scientific research that emphasises the importance of the ancient Armenian epic as a key source of knowledge about the mythological and heroic history of Armenia. Among the authors of fundamental works in this field, Levond Alishan (1820–1901), Manuk Abeghyan (1865–1944), Karapet Melik-Ohandzhanyan (1893–1970), Hovsep Orbeli (1887–1961), Grigor Halatyants (1858–1912) and others stand out, whose research laid the foundations for the scientific understanding of the Armenian epic tradition. Along with them, various motifs and aspects of Armenian mythology and epic, as well as their reflection in religious and literary literature, are the subject of in-depth research by prominent contemporary specialists in cultural studies and literary studies.

The scholarly interest in mythological, epic, and historical narratives also attracts contemporary Armenian scholars such as Dickran Kouymjian, Azat Yeghiazaryan, Hayk Hambardzumyan, and many others. Their works significantly expand the understanding of the poetics of the epic, its origin, and its place in Indo-European epic traditions. This study includes their works to present the current state of the problem in contemporary Armenian

literary studies and to provide Bulgarian scholars with access to these concepts through translation and interpretation of previously inaccessible materials.

Various motifs and aspects of Armenian mythology and epic, as well as their reflection in religious and literary literature, have been the subject of in-depth research by specialists such as Frederick Conybeare (1856–1924), James Russell, Peter Cowie, Michael Stone, Theo Van Lint, and many others. Despite the considerable number of works devoted to this topic, certain aspects, such as the transformation of mythical images into religious, epic, and historical ones, remain unexplored. Currently, there are no studies examining the heroic image in historiographical texts through the prism of literary theory. Therefore, the present study includes tracing the sources for these images, systematising existing studies, as well as analysing their passage through different literary periods and genres.

After accumulating a solid scientific foundation, interest in Armenian mythology and epic continued in the literary sphere, where it had a lasting influence on the work of several prominent Armenian writers and poets. Various themes, motifs and characters from Armenian mythology and epic are reflected in the work of significant poets such as Mkrtych Peshiktashlian (1828 - 1868), Rafael Patkanian (1830 - 1892), Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869 - 1923), Avetik Isahakyan (1875 - 1957), Daniel Varuzhan (1884 - 1915), as well as notable writers such as Raffi (1837 - 1888), Ghazaros Aghayan (1840 - 1911), Levon Shant (1869 - 1951), Nairi Zarian (1901 - 1969) and others. The significance of the epic *Sasna tsrer* is significant – many of these authors dedicate works to its characters and plots, which emphasises its role as a cultural and literary symbol. This way, the ancient epic and mythological images are not only preserved but also reworked to reflect modern social and cultural realities. An example of this is the poem *David of Sassoun* by Hovhannes Tumanyan, inspired by the third branch of the medieval epic *Sasna tsrer*, and the novel by Nairi Zarian, based on the unified modern version of the same text. These interpretations do not simply revive archaic figures, but enrich Armenian literature with new artistic layers that strengthen the connection between the cultural past and the literary present. Although Armenian mythology and epic are the subject of increased academic interest by scholars from different countries, certain aspects, such as the transformation of mythical images into

a religious, epic, and historiographical context, remain poorly developed. The present study seeks to fill this gap by tracing the origins of some of the key images, through a critical review of the existing scholarly literature, and an analysis of heroic images through various literary stages and genre transformations.

This study includes the theoretical developments of the mentioned authors because their work partially reflects the current state of the problem and the level of its study in contemporary Armenian literary studies. This would allow Bulgarian scholars dealing with mythology and comparative literary studies to expand their knowledge by accessing Armenian concepts that have not been available until now because of the lack of translations.

Throughout the centuries, Armenian literature has created heroes who have inspired the people to overcome challenges and find meaning in life. From epic poems to contemporary literature, these literary and folkloric images serve as a powerful tool for expressing the ideals and cultural identity of the Armenian people, as well as for inspiring their spirits. The study of mythological and epic images, including Armenian ones, provides researchers without a deep knowledge of the language with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with these works, as well as to better understand the cultural and historical contexts that underlie them. This study has the potential to reveal universal themes and motifs that apply to comparative studies in the fields of literature, religion, and cultural anthropology.

In the light of the above we successfully implemented the following research tasks:

1.1. We translated and analysed significant excerpts from Armenian mythological and early medieval texts that focus on the image of the hero—mythical, king, and warrior. These translations fill an important gap in the Bulgarian scientific space, providing a basis for further literary and cultural interpretation.

The mythological archetype of the hero serves as the basis for later images of the hero-king and the hero-warrior, which scholars have studied. A systematisation of the primary sources related to Armenian mythology and the ancient epic tradition has been made in order to trace the enduring symbols and functions of the hero.

1.3. We analysed the transformations of the mythological hero in the course of cultural and religious transitions—from the pagan hero through the Christian ruler to the hero with a historical function. These figures function as carriers of cultural memory, building elements of national identity and literary tradition.

1.4. We used Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey” (monomyth) model as an analytical framework to understand structurally the development and symbolism of the epic hero. Thus, we derived both the universal and specifically Armenian characteristics of the hero in ancient literary forms.

These tasks resulted in the development of a comprehensive and well-argued concept of the evolution of the hero in Armenian literature, from a mythological image to a historical and cultural symbol, tracing his change in different eras and genres.

## 2. Chapter I – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework for studying the hero archetype in ancient and early medieval Armenian literature. The main methodological support in the analysis is the archetypal theory of Carl Gustav Jung. Jungian archetypal theory shows the hero's image as a manifestation of a universal archetype, inscribed in the collective unconscious, possessing certain functions, stages of development, and symbolism reflected across various cultural contexts. Jung's concept allows us to trace the deep structure of the hero image and its transformation through different eras - from the mythical prototype to the historical figure.

According to Jung, archetypes are formed unconsciously, and play a role in the formation of personality, so it is the unconscious that causes archetypes to manifest in people and define their personalities as individuals (Lyons, 2023). Symbols, themes, images/characters, and settings or situations representing universal patterns of human nature and shaping story structure are also known as archetypes in literature (Xue, 2022). "A word or image is symbolic when it contains something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a broader "unconscious" aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained" (Jung 2002: 18).

Jung spoke of archetypes as "archaic remnants" or primordial images, a term he borrowed from Freud. According to him, "an archetype is a tendency to form similar images for a motif – which may vary without losing their basic character." He gives the example of the motif of warring brothers, which has many variations but remains the same (Jung 2002: 76).

Jung states: "A person certainly needs common ideas and beliefs that give meaning to his life and help him find his place in the world" (Jung 2002: 96). And this is certainly the case for the Armenian people. Literature allows the Armenian to find light and meaning even in the darkest periods of his history. This is the main reason for the development of this dissertation.

In terms of the analysis of the epic narrative in medieval Armenian literature, the epic of *David of Sassoun*, the main theoretical framework used is the model of the “hero’s journey” (the monomyth) formulated by Joseph Campbell. This model offers a structured approach to the development of the heroic narrative and is useful in identifying recurring motifs, phases, and functions of the hero in different texts.

In the prologue to his book, Campbell emphasises that throughout the world and in all times and circumstances, myths flourish and are the living inspiration for everything born from the activity of the human mind and body.

Campbell argues every person goes through the full cycle of life – from “the tomb of the womb to the womb of the tomb.” “And when we look back on what promised to be our unique, unpredictable, and dangerous adventure – all we find in the end is this series of standard metamorphoses that men and women go through in every corner of the world, in all documented eras, and under every strange guise” (Campbell 2021: 22).

Although of more limited relevance to the specific topic, the chapter also briefly presents the theoretical contributions of Vladimir Propp, Georges Dumézil, and Northrup Frye. The chapter discusses these theories in light of their general significance for literary studies and mythological analysis, but does not directly apply them in the present study due to the specificity of the Armenian cultural and literary context, which does not fully correspond to the structuralist or trifunctional models these authors proposed.

Chapter one thus serves as a conceptual basis for the development of the analysis in the following parts of the dissertation, outlining the main analytical tools and justifying their choice in relation to the research material.

### **3. Chapter II – THE IMAGE OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL HERO IN ANCIENT ARMENIAN LITERATURE**

This chapter examines the archetype of the mythological hero in ancient Armenian literature, focusing on its earliest manifestations in the cultural memory of Armenia. The primary emphasis is placed on texts by Agathangelos and Movses Khorenatsi, which

transmit legendary narratives, drawing inspiration from even more ancient oral and epic traditions. All these myths reflect past stages of development, and go back to the tribal society, to the times of the eponymous ancestors of this or that clan or tribe, which is part of the Armenian ethnos (Melik-Ohandzhanyan 2006: 9).

These chronicles feature the hero as a central symbol; they construct notions of identity, valour, and sacred mission around him. The hero is both mythical and historical – he operates on the border between the fantastic and the real, between the pagan roots and the Christian future of Armenia. The chapter shows how new religious and political contexts transformed and adapted these mythological images, while preserving their symbolic power.

The concept of the hero in Armenian literature and folklore has deep roots, dating back to the Urartian period. The mythological images of the hero gradually intertwined with the new heroes of the period after the adoption of Christianity as the state religion.

It is difficult to establish the exact time when oral Armenian literature appeared and with it the first images of the hero, but from the events described in the excerpts of the considered oldest Armenian epic, the one about Hayk and Bel, it is probably about the 9th – 7th centuries BC. Scholars assume that the described events took place in the kingdom of Urartu. A theory suggests this epic built upon older legends, likely from the Hayasa kingdom era (Abeghyan 1985: 5).

Excerpts from this ancient epic, as well as several legends from pagan times, have reached us through the work of Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Khoren, 5th century), considered the father of Armenian history, as well as those of the historians Agathangelos (5th century) and others.

Scholars conclude from the preserved fragments that two clearly distinguishable cycles of epic stories (songs and legends) existed. The first tells the story of the struggle between Hayk and Bel, and ends with the story of Ara the Beautiful and Shamiram. They originate from the early period of the Urartian kingdom and, in later centuries, were further developed by adding several new episodes to the story. This ancient Armenian epic

gradually became a description of the struggle of the Armenian people against Assyrian rule.

Through the analysis of fragments from the works of Agathangelos and Khorenatsi, the chapter emphasises that the literary imagination of Armenia is deeply connected to the figure of the hero – the bearer of folk memory, morality, and strength. Thus, the mythological hero is a bridge between antiquity and the Middle Ages, between legend and history, between the past and the present.

From the images and storylines examined in this chapter, we can outline a clearly structured model of the mythological hero in the old Armenian literary tradition. Heroes such as Hayk, Aram, Ara the Beautiful, Vahagn, Tork Angel, Tigran, Artashes and Artavazd form a complex system of archetypal figures, united by their symbolic load, physical power, moral resilience and connection with the collective identity of the Armenian people.

Hayk appears as a forefather and leader of divine origin, strong and handsome, skilled with a bow, a defender of the weak, and a bearer of a moral mission. Aram, his successor, continues the patriotic line – just, hardworking, wise and brave, he expands the borders of the country and becomes the eponymous hero, who gave a name to the people themselves. Ara the Beautiful embodies the ideals of fidelity, honour and integrity – both to his wife and to the homeland – and dies tragically, thus becoming a moral symbol.

Tigran the Great's features, presented as a conqueror, a wise king, and a bringer of prosperity, are reminiscent of Vahagn—a figure with fiery hair and a divine or human essence whose legacy mythology imbues with power. His wisdom, diplomacy distinguishes King Artashes and striving to establish order and justice, while his son Artavazd is an ambivalent figure – in some versions proud and punished, in others – a closed hero with a tragic fate, wrapped in legendary imagery. Tork Angel completes the pantheon with his gigantic strength, artistry and heroic actions. Although deformed, he possesses a creative impulse and defends his homeland with mythical means.

The study shows that the Armenian mythological hero is not only a symbol of strength and valour but also a means of expressing the national ideal. These figures

transcend their individual characteristics and become collective images - the embodiment of the struggle for freedom, justice and self-affirmation. Their exploits function not simply as legendary narratives, but as cultural landmarks and models for behaviour.

An important conclusion is that with the development of the narrative tradition, there is a tendency towards historicization of mythological figures. They “come closer” to reality, moving from semi-divine and cosmic entities to figures with historical density – kings, warriors, state leaders. This does not lead to the loss of their heroic features, but on the contrary – strengthens them by inserting them into a new cultural and religious context.

In this process, the high adaptability and continuity of the Armenian cultural tradition is clear. The mythological hero remains a structural element in the literary and spiritual fabric of Armenian identity, passing through different phases - from myth to history, from paganism to Christianity. His persistence testifies to the deep need for a figure who embodies collective aspirations, moral foundations and cultural self-reflection.

Already in the earliest layers of Armenian literature, Armenian writers formed the conceptual model of the hero as the embodiment of the national, the sacred, and the ethical—a model that remained relevant throughout different historical stages. This places the mythological hero at the centre of literary symbolism and assigns him a permanent place in the construction of Armenian cultural and spiritual identity.

#### **4. Chapter III – THE HERO KING OR WARRIOR IN ANCIENT AND EARLY MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN LITERATURE**

The third chapter examines the archetype of the hero in ancient and early medieval Armenian literature in the period from the emergence of the written tradition to the end of the 7th century – a time of profound cultural and religious transformations. The adoption of Christianity in 301 and the creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots in the early 5th century laid the foundations of Armenian literary identity. In this context, the community constructs the heroic image not simply as a historical figure, but as a symbolic

bearer of its moral and spiritual ideals. Literature combines myth, history, and religious ideology; the heroic narrative forms and preserves cultural memory.

The first authors, among whom Movses Khorenatsi, Pavstos Buzand, Elishe and Agathangelos stand out, create texts that go beyond the dry chronicle form. The story's intertwining with mythological elements and spiritual suggestions gives the characters—warriors, kings, and martyrs—archetypal density; these characters not only act but also embody moral and national principles.

Particularly important is the image of King Trdat III, who undergoes a profound personal transformation – from a harsh pagan ruler to a Christian monarch. This is not just a political event, but a symbol of a collective spiritual change, represented through the archetypal motif of conversion and moral elevation. His example shows how the entire literary tradition views power as divinely inspired and ethically conditioned.

The warrior-martyr also occupies a central place in this tradition. Vardan Mamikonean is a model of heroism that combines military prowess, religious devotion, and self-sacrifice. His battle at Avarayr is not just a battle, but an act of resistance to spiritual enslavement and a refusal to compromise with faith. This type of hero embodies a model of sacrificial valour—a figure combining Christian ethics and ancient warrior honour.

Lazar Parpetsi introduces another direction in the hero's image – that of the political realist, embodied most fully by Vahan Mamikonean. This hero's glory comes not from battlefield heroism, but from diplomatic resilience, moral consistency, and the desire to preserve cultural and religious autonomy. Therefore, the archetype of the warrior becomes an image of moral resilience and wise governance focused on real historical effectiveness.

The image of the hero in ancient Armenian literature is multifaceted: it unites royal power, religious faith, military duty and cultural memory. The hero can be a ruler, a defender of the people, a spiritual leader or a martyr, but regardless of his specific role, he always embodies a sense of mission and responsibility. This period's literary figures, including Trdat, Arshak, Vache, Vardan, and Vahan, are viewed not as ordinary characters but as continuations of older archetypes—Hayk, Aram, Tigran, Sanatruk—refracted through the new Christian moral code.

This continuity between the pre-Christian and Christian heroic models is one of the most distinctive features of the Armenian tradition. Although not strictly following the structure of Campbell's "hero's journey", figures such as Vardan, Trdat, and Vahan go through trials, inner crises, purification, and moral transformation, establishing their significance through spiritual leadership, self-sacrifice, or resilience. These are not archetypes of the victorious conqueror, but rather of a leader whose strength is shown through service to faith, people, and cultural continuity.

Thus, Armenian literature by the end of the 7th century created a complete system of heroic images that not only reflected historical realities but also served as a symbolic code for moral orientation and spiritual survival. Literature, in its portrayal of the hero, became a meaningful narrative, providing not only historical memory but also a model for conduct in times of crisis. The Armenian tradition portrays the hero, in this sense, not as a frozen icon, but as a dynamic figure who reflects the anxieties, hopes, and inner strength of a people striving to preserve their spiritual and cultural integrity.

#### **4. Chapter IV – THE HERO'S JOURNEY IN THE MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN EPIC *SASNA TSRER***

This chapter, devoted to the hero in the Armenian medieval epic, examines each of the main characters of the four branches separately, through the prism of Campbell's theory. Campbell states that the standard path of the hero's mythological adventure expands the formula used in rites of passage: separation – initiation – return, which is also the core of the monomyth. For example, "Prometheus ascends to heaven, steals fire from the gods, and descends. Jason passes through the Symplegades rocks and enters a sea of wonders, outwits the dragon that guards the Golden Fleece, and returns with the fleece and the power to reclaim from the usurper the throne that is rightfully his" (Campbell 2021:38).

The hero archetype and Joseph Campbell's concept of the "monomyth" illuminate the journey of Sanasar and Bagdasar, central figures in the first branch of the Armenian

medieval epic *Sasna tsrer* (*The Braves of Sassoon*). In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell describes the universal structure of the heroic narrative as comprising three main stages: departure, initiation, and return (Campbell 2021: 22-23). Although created in a specific cultural and historical context, the epic *Sasna tsrer* contains elements that correspond to this universal scheme.

The hero's path in the Armenian epic *David of Sassoun* does not mechanically follow the structure outlined by Joseph Campbell, but is its organic adaptation, inscribed in the cultural and spiritual context of the Armenian tradition. The four main parts of the epic – “Sanasar and Bagdasar”, “Mher the Elder”, “David of Sassoun” and “Mher the Younger” – do not simply develop different plot lines, but present four models of heroic behaviour, four directions in the archetype's development and four types of response to a historical and moral crisis.

The difference between these cycles lies mainly in the presence and absence of supernatural elements and in how the characters in them realise their mission. Mythological and miraculous motifs saturate the first two parts, centred around Sanasar, Bagdasar, and Mher the Elder. Sanasar's connection to the natural elements is clear; his baptism over the *tonir* symbolises his deep inner potential, and possessing the lightning sword and the horse Kurkig Jalali affirms his connection with cosmic and martial powers. The sea depths yielded both gifts, emphasising their supernatural nature. Together with Bagdasar, they show invincible strength by defeating monsters and dragons – a clear connection with universal mythological twins, such as Castor and Pollux or Romulus and Remus.

In these early images, heroism is almost otherworldly—the heroes are both human and symbolic, their actions determined by fate, and the battle itself is a ritual affirmation of order rather than a moral test. The heroes of the remaining chapters, including David and Mher the Younger, keep their physical prowess, generosity, and devotion to freedom, but exhibit inner contradictions, psychological depth, and human vulnerability.

*David of Sassoun* is best structured according to the Campbell model. He goes through all the main stages – from the call to adventure to the inner transformation. His victory over Msra-Melik is not just a military achievement, but an archetypal clash between

order and chaos, between good and evil. Although he does not seek violence, David enters battle when necessary because he believes in justice as a supreme value. His human weaknesses – emotionality, naivety, impulsiveness – make him more accessible and convincing to the audience. His death – at the hands of his own offspring – carries a strong tragic charge and symbolically ends his path to self-sacrifice and surrender of the mission.

In the story of David, the epic and the everyday are skilfully intertwined. His image unites the heroic ideal with the national spirit: he is both a defender and a moral compass, the embodiment of the enduring values of the Armenian people. This is also clear in the epic's language – poetic, figurative, but also firmly rooted in reality. Social and family virtues, honour and generosity, along with the ability to forgive and compassion, define the hero not only as a warrior but also as a moral model. In this sense, David goes beyond the individual feat and becomes a collective projection of the national conscience.

The fate of Mher the Younger is quite different, whose story represents a tragic reversal of the archetypal model. In his story, there is no refusal of the call – he immediately responds. There is no supernatural help in the genuine sense – the world no longer offers miracles. The battle cross is also absent – Mher does not encounter a force equal to his, because the conflict is no longer cosmic, but entirely historical and human. After avenging his father, he finds no home, no meaning in returning. He wanders aimlessly, without seeking victory, only peace. But even this is denied him—immortality, a punishment rather than a gift, is his condemnation.

The absence of the sub-stage “freedom to live” in Mher the Younger speaks of the deep alienation that the hero carries at the end of the epic. He does not transform, does not return, does not free himself – he freezes. Without the possibility of death, without a path to community, he becomes a closed circle of power with no way out. Here, heroism no longer leads to harmony, but to isolation and ruin.

In conclusion, *David of Sassoun* presents the heroic journey in development – from mythological exaltation through realistic epic to tragic fragmentation. Each part of the epic marks a different stage in the disintegration of the heroic: Sanasar and Bagdasar as creators of order; Mher the Elder as the limit of power without a way out; David as a full-fledged,

albeit tragic bearer of a moral ideal; and Mher the Younger – as a figure of historical pathlessness. It is this internal dynamic that turns the epic not simply into a reflection of the Armenian soul, but into a kind of philosophical reflection on the limits of the heroic, the meaning of struggle and the fate of the nation in history.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study traces the development and transformations of the hero archetype in Armenian literature from the mythological era to the end of the 7th century, examining the transition from pagan representations through the Christian tradition to the medieval epic *Sasna tsrer (David of Sassoun)*. The analysis is based on the understanding that the figure of the hero is not just a narrative centre, but a cultural and spiritual carrier, expressing the collective identity, moral norms and historical self-consciousness of the Armenian people. To achieve this goal, we examined the works of major authors of the period—Agathangelos, Pavstos Buzand, Movses Khorenatsi, Elishe, and Lazar Parpetsi—as well as the folk epic, analysing each work within its specific cultural, genre, and spiritual context.

The first corpus of analysed texts clearly outlined the structured model of the mythological hero in the pagan Armenian tradition. Figures such as Hayk, Aram, Ara the Beautiful, Vahagn, Tigran and Artashes are not just characters from ancient tales, but archetypal images loaded with strong symbolism. They possess physical power, moral resilience and a sacred mission, acting not only within the mythological world but also as fundamental models for collective identity and historical affirmation. The Armenian tradition clearly historicizes these figures, shifting them from the afterlife to the concrete, from divine myth to political history. Thus, real personalities—kings, commanders, defenders of the faith, and later even saints—gradually replaced mythological heroes. This dynamic shows high adaptability of the archetype to changing cultural paradigms, while preserving its core - the willingness to sacrifice, mission and ethical height.

The next stage of the study traced how authors adapted and modified this basic heroic structure in the context of Christian literature and historiography. Authors such as

Elishe, Lazar Parpetsi and partly Khorenatsi presented the image of the hero not only as a king or warrior but also as a saint, martyr and moral leader. The hero is no longer measured solely by the number of victories, but by his inner moral resilience and the ability to bear responsibility towards faith and community. Thus, the type of the hero-king (such as Trdat), the martyr-warrior (in the person of Vardan Mamikonean) and the diplomat-protector (in the person of Vahan Mamikonean) appears. Each of these images continues the ancient tradition, but refracts it through the prisms of Christian ethics, historical necessity and political reality.

The analysis of historical heroes in Armenian literature shows that they are rather stable archetypes of the king and the warrior - figures who combine political power, spiritual mission, and personal responsibility to the community. These images do not simply lead or fight, but embody the defence of the people, faith and cultural identity in conditions of external threat and internal crisis. Often, portrayals depict the king as the bearer of divine order and mediator between heaven and earth, and the warrior as a moral leader and guarantor of loyalty to the religious and national cause.

Vardan Mamikonean embodies the classical archetype of the warrior hero, the advocate — he is a leader, martyr, and spiritual fulcrum, whose self-sacrifice becomes a symbol of faith and identity. His death is not simply a historical fact, but a cultural act of heroization, in which the collective consciousness finds a source of resilience and moral orientation. King Trdat embodies the archetype of the transformed hero-king — a figure who has undergone a fall and inner purification, who restores the harmony between power and spirituality. Vahan Mamikonean represents a more complex image of the hero-state leader — a diplomat, a believer, a peacemaker who defends the interests of the people not by the sword, but by word, perseverance, and strategic wisdom. Despite differences in behaviour and means, these heroes function as cultural codes of self-sacrifice, moral resilience, and service to the common good.

The dissertation's final section focused on the Armenian epic *Sasna tsrer* and its interpretation of the heroic model. Here, I applied a deeper archetypal reading, supported by Campbell's theory. This analysis showed that the four main parts of the epic — *Sanasar*

*and Bagdasar, Mher the Elder, David of Sassoun, and Mher the Younger* — present four different versions of the heroic. Each version offers a specific cultural and moral response to existential uncertainty caused by historical threat, political decay, or losing moral orientation, outlining distinct directions of the archetype's development — from creative power and mythological clarity to decay, isolation, and the tragic, closed cycle of immortality. While Sanasar and Bagdasar embody the mythological ideal of twin creators and fighters against chaos, Mher the Elder expresses the inexhaustible power, and David most fully fulfils the functions of Campbell's hero - from the call, through the external test and internal transformation, to the tragic death. His figure combines courage, human emotionality, generosity, responsibility and moral integrity, and his epic image goes beyond individual feat and becomes a national-ethical compass.

The fate of Mher the Younger represents a tragic reversal of the archetype—a figure who cannot achieve liberation, who finds no place in the community, condemned to immortality not as a blessing but as a burden. In his narrative, heroism leads not to harmony but to stagnation and alienation. This last figure is most profoundly philosophical and testifies to the capacity of the Armenian tradition not to be content with praising the heroic, but to reflect on its limits, crises, and possibilities.

In comparing the heroes of historical texts and the heroes of the epic, several clearly articulated trends stand out. While in the former case heroism is based on sacrifice, moral resilience and the ability for spiritual leadership, in epic, it often carries an element of physical omnipotence, but also of a deep personal crisis. Campbell's model functions as a useful analytical tool, but only when applied critically and adaptively. The Armenian tradition does not perceive the structure of the hero's journey literally, but reworks it, shifts it and discards stages according to its cultural logic.

Our research reveals several key conclusions about the heroic archetype in Armenian literature. The Armenian hero is an extremely adaptable figure; his content and functions transform depending on the historical, religious, and cultural context, yet he maintains a stable inner core. Regardless of whether it is a mythological ancestor, a Christian martyr or

an epic warrior, the hero remains the bearer of collective virtues - courage, justice, sacrifice, loyalty and moral stability.

In different literary genres and eras, the heroic figure fulfils different cultural roles. In the mythological narrative, it is the creator of order and a symbol of ethnicity; in historical chronicles, it is the defender of faith and a moral guide; in the epic, it is the embodiment of the national spirit and a moral compass. “Heroism is not a frozen category, but is subject to constant rethinking – with a clear awareness of its limits, downfalls and reincarnations.

Joseph Campbell’s “hero’s journey” model proves to be a productive tool for comparative analysis, but when applied to the Armenian material, it reveals many culturally specific modifications. The Armenian tradition does not mechanically follow the established sequence of the archetypal path, but transforms it according to its internal logic and spiritual needs. This reveals not only universal structures but also a cultural interpretation intertwining myth, history, and spirituality.

The heroes analysed in this dissertation show that Armenian literature does not use the heroic narrative merely to perpetuate the past, but as an active mechanism for cultural consolidation, ethical orientation, and resistance to external and internal decay. They are not simply images of glory or tragedy, but real spiritual resources that accompany the people in their historical existence.

The Armenian heroic archetype, in all its incarnations – from creator and warrior to martyr and political diplomat – establishes a sustainable vision of man as a morally responsible participant in history. The hero is not an autocratic ruler, but a servant of faith, community, and moral order. Physical might does not measure his strength only, but by the depth of conviction, the capacity for self-sacrifice and the ability to inspire generations.

In this sense, the Armenian heroic tradition shows not only literary depth and cultural self-reflection but also exceptional resilience – it goes through various historical cataclysms, but keeps its ethical semantic core and continues to play the role of a cultural reference point and spiritual support.

### III. CONTRIBUTIONS

1.1. The dissertation represents the first systematic academic study of ancient and early medieval Armenian literature, carried out in Bulgarian, and fills a significant gap in Bulgarian Oriental and Comparative Studies.

1.2. We do not consider the archetype of the hero in isolation, but situate it within the broad cultural and literary-historical context of the Armenian tradition—from mythological tales to historical prose to epic narrative. Thus, the study contributes to enriching the understanding of the genre and symbolic dynamics of Armenian literature.

1.3. For the first time in Armenian scientific literature, the archetypal theory of C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" model is applied in parallel to Armenian material, differentiating their applicability across various genres and cultural contexts.

1.4. The development of the heroic image from the mythological tradition to the epic cycle of *Sasna tsrer* has been traced, which represents a comprehensive model of the evolution of the archetype depending on various cultural, historical, and religious factors. Until now, there has been no study that has traced this line in its completeness and depth of meaning.

1.5. This essay examines the social function of heroic images in the Armenian tradition, exploring their role in constructing and preserving collective identity, mobilizing the spirit, and resisting external pressure. This study establishes the hero as a cultural and moral mediator, and not simply as a literary character.

1.6. The translation of several Armenian fragments and excerpts from major works makes up a significant contribution. These fragments and excerpts, presented in Bulgarian for the first time, will benefit future research in Armenian studies, literary studies, and cultural studies.

1.7. An additional contribution is the proposal for an analytical division of the main Armenian heroes – mythological creator, king-protector, warrior-martyr, spiritual leader and tragic antagonist of the archetype – which can serve as a basis for a typological study of heroic images in Armenian literary works of the following eras.

#### IV. PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC

1. Ангелова Антоанета. *Образът на жената в староарменския и в средновековния арменски епос*. ред. проф. Моллов, издателство „Парадигма“, ISSN (print) 978-954-326-552-7, стр. 275-285, 2024.
2. Ангелова Антоанета. *Образът на жената в арменския средновековен епос за Давид Сасунски*. XVIII научна конференция на нехабилитирани преподаватели и докторанти във Факултета по класически и нови филологии 2021 г., съст. проф. д-р Мадлен Данова, ISSN (print): 2738-8158, стр. 131-138, 2022.
3. Ангелова Антоанета. *Арменски средновековен епос Давид Сасунски*. Годишник на департамент „Романистика и германистика“ на Нов български университет. Том 1., 2015

## V. LITERATURE CITED IN THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Xue 2022:** Xue, Jennifer. (2022). *Types of Archetypes in Fiction Literature: Story, Character, Setting, and More*. NY.

**Lyons 2023:** Lyons, Jeff. (2023). *Writing and the Archetypes: Are They the Best for Developing Characters?* — Part 1. NY.

**Jung 2002:** Юнг, К. Г. *Човекът и неговите символи*. София, 2002.

**Campbell 2021:** Кембъл, Дж. *Героят с хиляди лица*. София, Елементи, 2021.

**Melik-Ohandzhanyan 2006:** Մելիք-Օհանջանյան, Կարապետ. *Հայ ժողովրդիկական վիպական բանաստեղծությունը, պատմական հանառոտ ակնարկ*, Վան Արյան, Երևան, 2006: (Melik-Ohandzhanyan, Karapet. Hay zhoghovrtakan vipakan banasteghdzutyuna, patmakan hamarod aknark, Van Aryan, 2006)