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**SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE OF ETHNIC MINORITIES**

**(ACCORDING TO THE HISTORICAL WRITING OF**

**AGATHIAS SCHOLASTICUS)**

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The Eastern Roman Empire of the 5 th -6 th centuries represented a state formation extended over a very large territory, artificially united by conquest of mainly different ethnic tribes. This was an artificial conglomerate of different tribes and peoples, who lived peacefully according to their own way of life before the appearance of the invaders on their lands, but fell victim to the aggressive policy of the Empire. There is a long list of the national minorities about which historian Agathias Scholasticus narrates sometimes in detail, sometimes moderately, with a few strokes (e.g. about the Burgundians he notes that they are a Gothic people, outstandingly warlike, - (Agath., 1,3), whereas he says about the Franks that “it is the practice of the Frankish kings never to have their hair cut… Custom has reserved this practice for royalty as a sort of distinctive badge and prerogative. Subjects have their hair cut all round, and are strictly forbidden to grow it any longer.” But if we trust the author, he always tells us everything without deliberate embellishment.

Agathias refers to ethnic minorities with terms gevno" and e[qno". The author does not differentiate strictly these terms. Of course, he also calls these peoples barbarians. The term gevno" occurs 50 times in the work, meaning origin, tribe, genus, variety. e[qno" is found much more often than gevno" and it denotes tribe (ethnos) and people. Which are the characteristics according to which Agathias singles out ethnic minorities? The following general picture takes shape: 1. Common habitats. They conceptualize themselves on a certain geographical territory. Sometimes it is stressed that they have a rich natural environment and fertile land; when describing the residence, for orientation the sea, the river or the vicinity of a big city is taken; 2. Common origin. They are mostly intuitively aware of the common past; 3. Common religion and culture; 4. Having of a ruler of the country. They recognize and protect the balance between different social strata; 5. They have their own language, different from others. Agathias mostly emphasizes these characteristics.

Agathias states at the beginning of his work that when relating the events of the past he will focus attention only on the truth and impartial coverage of stories and events. The article will discuss the evidence of Agathias, the objective reality of the Laz, the Chans and other ethnic minorities. Some tribes have a king, have a deliberative council, are characterized by mutual respect. They try to resolve issues peacefully, by diplomatic adjustment, they practice craftsmanship, have the historical memory and are proud of their past, are distinguished by their bravery. Some tribes cannot forgive the insult to the invader and, in Agathias view, fall victim to their arrogance, some tribes have legalized socially distinctive signs, have their own distinctive weapons, military tactics, and also other characteristic features of socio-economic life. Agathias justifies the policy of conquest of the Empire, but tries to be right, does not hide the shortcomings of the Romans, often their unjustified cruelty to the conquered tribes, due to which, e.g. the Laz, and not only them, find it difficult to accept the Romans and to tolerate their policy and way of life.

It is difficult to say for certain whether the information provided by Agathias about one or another tribe is reliable, e.g. the evidence of Agathias about the Franks is very different from what is known from the work of Gregory of Tours (Lat. Gregorius Turonesis, circa 538-594) - A History of the Franks and from other western chronicles. If we trust the author, he always narrates everything without intentional embellishment. As Agathias states at the very beginning of his work, when relating the events of the past he will focus attention only on the truth and impartial coverage of stories and events. And still, embellishment of the truth is not alien to the Byzantine historian. His purpose is to glorify the Emperor and his deeds. Thus, for example, the collection of epigrams known as Anthologia Palatina or Anthologia Graeca, has preserved three prefaces by Agathias of Myrina for this collection. The second section of the preface written in dactylic hexameter is a panegyric dedicated to the Emperor. The eulogy created in the lofty style narrates that peace is reigning in the Empire and the rule of the wise invincible Emperor is spread over the whole world: “The regions of no foreign land shall receive you, but you will be amid the possessions of our wise King, whichever way you progress, since he has encompassed the world in his dominion” (AP, IV, 3). In the poetic preface of Agathias of Myrina, when describing the success of the Emperor’s foreign policy, the place name Iberia is mentioned. It does not imply Iberia of the Caucasus, but Iberia of Spain (The Greek Anthology, 1916, 117-125). As is known from history, despite numerous attempts, Byzantium failed to snatch Iberia from Iran (G.Gozalishvili, 1979: 58-75). Notwithstanding the actual situation, the poet wishes to convince his listeners that the whole world obeys the Roman Emperor. Therefore, he resorts to the so-called “obfuscation” method, well-known in rhetoric. Among the subordinated countries he mentions Iberia, but means Iberian Peninsula, where the Roman Empire succeeded. By naming Iberia in general, the poet evokes an association and tries to represent the desired as a true fact. In order to glorify the Emperor, he “obfuscates” the truth, creates a poetic-rhetoric allusion, which is a characteristic feature of the narrative style of Agathias as a historian.

Although Agathias Scholasticus is interested in the life of barbarians mainly in relation to Byzantium, he nevertheless shows interest in ethnic minorities and devotes quite a lot of attention to the tribes subordinated to Byzantium, the ethnoses engaged in wars, the neighbouring peoples of the Empire. When providing information about them, a sense of moderateness and tolerance does not fail the author, brought up with secular and classical education.