

ON SOME PECULIARITIES OF SERFDOM IN GEORGIA (FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD).

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Introduction

From the Middle Ages onwards in Georgia serfs used to be an integral part of feudal property, and their exploitation and services were used to strengthen both the economic and political power of the lord. It should be noted that the serfdom in Georgia was not presented as a one-layer class. The phenomenon of serfdom in Georgia had some distinctive features, where the word “serf” did not quite correspond to the classical understanding of this term. Along with the development of feudalism, different strata of slaves were formed, which were differed not only in economic opportunities, but also in types of obligations towards the lord, as well as rights and position in society. The serf population, as a rule, in late medieval Georgia was better known under the general terms of “glekhi” and “kma”¹. In general, the entire population of late medieval Georgia who lived in feudal dependence was divided into two categories – *msakhuri* and *mebegre glekhi* (*moinale* in western Georgia)². However, there were also other strata of the serf population, and most of them are known as *msakhuri*, *bogano*, *khizani*, *nebieri*, *natskalobevi*, *mojalabe*, *tavdakhsnili*, *mkvidri*, etc. The article attempts to present a diverse and variegated picture of the phenomenon of serfdom in Georgia³.

¹ It should be noted that the terms “glekhi” and “kma”, although sometimes used synonymously, are not the same thing. Glekhi is a peasant who could have been a free man, but kma was obligatory a dependent, at that kma did not have to be a peasant, he could be also an *aznauri* or a nobleman in the servant of the *tawadi* (prince) or the church.

² Mebegre glekhi – taxed peasant, from Persian “begar/bigar” (one of the main duties, and also common name of the taxes).

³ The author expresses his gratitude towards colleagues from Georgia, particularly to Dr. Shota Matitashvili (Tbilisi State University) and to Dr. Khatuna Gaprindashvili

Msakhuri (მსახური – servant): The mshakhuris stood “at the top of the hierarchy” of the serf class in Georgia⁴. It was a group of servants endowed with a number of privileges⁵, fulfilling mostly military and administrative duties to the lord, and joining his guard⁶. The price of a msakhuri blood was 24 tumans (according the Code of Vakhtang VI), twice higher than the price of the blood of a glekhi⁷. It witnesses of the high position of the msakhuri⁸. They received mostly lands⁹ in exchange for their service. In Russia’s feudal system there also existed a privileged group similar to this class of serfs, called “great kholops” (большие холопы)¹⁰.

Glekhi (გლეხი – peasant): The term was understood as both the general name of the serf population and the peasantry as a whole¹¹. In late medieval Georgia the entire serf population was perceived under the term “glekhi”¹². The glekhis were a large group of land-dependent population¹³. Despite their obligation to serve their lord on the land they occupied, traditionally had their own rights to their property¹⁴. Glekhi corresponds to the “ramik” or “shinakan” (peasant) in medieval Armenia’s feudal system¹⁵ or the villeins¹⁶ in medieval England¹⁷. The word glekhi derives from the root *glakhaki* meaning indigent beggar¹⁸.

Kma (კმა – vassal, serf, slave): Kma derives from the term “krma”, which means young man, and then the word became one of

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⁴ Zejdlie 1872, p. 219; Tavartkiladze 2014, p. 82.

⁵ Juškov 1961, p. 418.

⁶ Surguladze 1968, p. 55; Gvritišvili 1961, pp. 110-111.

⁷ Kovalenskij 1866, p. 61.

⁸ According to the “Lawbook of Beqa and Arbugha”, the price for the blood of a glekhi was 400-1.000 tetri (silver coin), whereas the price for msakhuri blood was the 12.000 tetri. Sudebnik 1960, 38.

⁹ Gvritišvili 1961, p. 111.

¹⁰ Ključevskij 1990, pp. 240-241.

¹¹ Lordkipanidze 1974, p. 14.

¹² Bregvadze 1983, p. 19.

¹³ Topurija 1970, pp. 6-8.

¹⁴ Kalantarov 1877, pp. 19-21, 1877.

¹⁵ Novosel’cev 1980, p. 249.

¹⁶ Lane Poole 1993, pp. 43-50.

¹⁷ Chikobava 2018, pp. 115-130.

¹⁸ Silogava 2007, p. 39.

the general term for a vassal in the feudal system of medieval Georgia¹⁹. However, later, due to the development of the serf class and the enslavement of the previously vassal-dependent class, the term became universal for the entire serf class²⁰. As already mentioned, one of the common names for serfs along with *glekhi* was *kma*, but according to G. Kalantarov, *kma* in a narrow sense means a serf who sold himself to the servanthood of a lord²¹, and only later did the term *kma* acquire a general meaning for the serfdom. The term “*kma*” came into use no later than the 8th-9th centuries²².

Natsqalobevi (ნაწყალობევი): These were serfs donated to churches by secular authorities. The term is mostly found in letters of donation from Georgian kings to churches. The *natsqalobevs* were not only peasants whom the kings and princes granted to the church; the term generally refers to a peasant who came to the landlord freely and the landlord accepted him. The peasants of this category had the right to leave whenever they wished, but they often lost this right. Often there used to be the practice of a verbal agreement between the peasant of this category and the landlord. In contrast to the *mkvidri glekhi*, he did not possess his own land, but could buy a part of it.

Nebieri (ნებიერი): *Nebieri* were the people who fled or those who were released from serfdom and “sold” themselves as serfs again to a new patron (often to churches)²³.

Mona (მონა): According to G. Kalantarov, the serfs known by the term *mona* were those who were acquired through purchase²⁴. They ranked lower than the serfs of the *glekhis*, although over time they could acquire property and some rights²⁵. The term “*mona*” had been known among Georgians since the Early Middle Ages; its meaning corresponded to the Armenian “*ծառն*” (*ts’ara* – servant)²⁶. The purchased serfs were known also by the term **naskidi** (ნასყიდი). A **naskidi**, or bought peasant, had almost no rights. He was bought

¹⁹Novosel’cev, Pašuto 1972, pp. 91-92.

²⁰Akop’ašvili 1981, pp. 134-149.

²¹Zejdlic 1872, pp. 219-220.

²²Džavahov 1905, p. 73.

²³Zejdlic 1872, p. 219.

²⁴Zejdlic 1872 p. 219.

²⁵Kalantarov 1877, p. 20.

²⁶Novosel’cev, Pašuto 1972, p. 92.

without land, he almost possessed no property and the prince could have sold him without land (but he could not kill him without any good reason).

Khizani (ხიზანი): The khizanis were the serfs who left the lands of the former lords for economic and political reasons and passed to a lord richer and more powerful²⁷. The khizanis could have left the former landlord with or without his consent. In the first case, the serf retained some of his obligations to the former master. An escaped khizani not only had no such status, but he received new arable land and shelter from the new master. The dependence was only in an economic sense and the khizani did not “belong” to the new master²⁸. A khizani paid to the new landlord only the taxes related to the land, and the latter had no right to levy other taxes or to punish them²⁹. The new landlord, in turn, tried to keep him in his estate as long as possible³⁰, trying to enslave him, since the khizani, who stayed by the new landlord for more than 30 years became his serf³¹.

Bogano (ბოგანო): A bogano, according to the Code of Vakhtang VI, was a villager who did not have a vineyard, had a shelter, a cattle-shed, may or may not have land, just as a bogano could not be considered a glekhi³². The bogano was one of the poorest strata of the people, in fact, a very poor glekhi, but carrying almost no tax obligations. There is a theory stating that bogano and khizani appeared in the same way, but in case of pauperization, other kinds of serfs also could be turned into bogano³³.

Mkvidri (მკვიდრი): The mkvidris were hereditary serfs, they were the other multitudinous stratum of the serf class. They used to be tied to the land and lived in the same place for generations³⁴. The main characteristic of the mkvidri was that he had his own land, which passed from father to son by inheritance. Similarly to the msakhuri,

²⁷Avaliani 1920, p. 142.

²⁸Vatejšvili 1973, p. 91.

²⁹Pantshava 1957, p. 165; Gutnov 2008, p. 110.

³⁰Pantshava 1973, p. 111.

³¹Avaliani 1920, p. 145.

³²Purceladze 1980, p. 108.

³³Gvritišvili 1961, p. 114.

³⁴Gvritišvili 1961, p. 120.

they also occupied local administrative positions of natsvals, mouravs and mamasakhlis³⁵.

Mojalabe (მოჯალაბე): The mojalabes were the least privileged among the various types of serfs in late medieval Georgia. They did not possess any plot of land and lived in the house of their lord performing the most humiliating duties such as looking after the cattle and cattle-shed, fetching woods, cleaning yards, etc. Any lord had a right to sale a mojalabe with his entire family or any member of his family. Lord's rights over a mojalabe and his family were almost unlimited. There were some rare cases when a lord handed a plot of land to a mojalabe. Mostly, they lived near the house of their masters and did not have any actual property. The word "mojalabe" derives from the word "jalabi" meaning family, household³⁶.

There are other classifications of the serfdom in medieval Georgia. For instance, N. Berdzenishvili classifies serfs in the following categories: 1. serfs who pay full tax to the mouravs, 2. those who pay half the tax, 3. and those who pay a quarter the tax, the poor³⁷. According to another classification, the class of serfs, especially, in Eastern Georgia consisted of msakhuris (მსახური), of taxed serfs (მეზეგრე გლეხები), redeemed (თავდახსნილი), naskidis (ნასყიდი), nebieris (ნებიერი), khizani (ხიზანი) serfs³⁸.

The serf class in Georgia was not homogeneous: types of serfs could differ from each other in their obligations, economic status, and the factor to whom they belonged. For example, church serfs used to have a more advantageous, privileged status and were partially or fully exempt from taxes. It is true that serfs were attached to the land (for instance, when a village passed to another feudal lord, serfs also passed to him, too) but serfs could leave the former patron with or without his consent (for example by escaping from him). Another distinctive feature of the Georgian serf system is that the privileged part of the serfs (e.g. msakhuri) could obtain military and administrative positions and resemble more the minor nobility in vassal dependence than the serfs in the literal sense of the word.

³⁵ Itonișvili 1984, p. 172.

³⁶ Church 2001, p. 154.

³⁷ Berdzenișvili 1938, p. 29.

³⁸ Dumbadze, 1973, pp. 187-199.

Apart from the fact that the Georgian serf system used to be multi-layered, it had its own specific peculiarities, namely that a serf could have his own serf, that is, a msakhuri or a glekhi could own a khizani or other poorer serfs. In addition, for instance, if a church serf had his own serf³⁹, the latter was also considered the property of the church although the church also added other means to the ranks of its serfs, for example, unborn children were considered serfs of the church⁴⁰.

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(ՄԻՋՆԱԳԱՐԻՑ ՄԻՆԶԵՎ ՆՈՐ ՇՐՋԱՆ)**

Գոռ Մարգարյան

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Վրաստանում ավատատիրական ունեցվածքի բաղկացուցիչ մասն էին կազմում ճորտերը, որոնց շահագործման և ծառայությունների հիման վրա էր կառուցվում ֆեոդալի ինչպես տնտեսական, այնպես էլ քաղաքական կարողությունը: Հարկ է նշել, որ Վրաստանում ճորտերի դասը միաշերտ չէր: Վրացական ճորտատիրությունն ուներ տարբերակիչ առանձնահատկություններ և ամբողջովին չի համապատասխանում «ճորտ» եզրի դասական ընկալմանը: Ավատատիրական կարգերի զարգացմանը զուգընթաց ձևավորվել էին ճորտերի տարբեր շերտեր, որոնք տարբերվում էին իրարից ոչ միայն տնտեսական հնարավորություններով, այլ տիրոջ նկատմամբ պարտավորությունների տեսակներով, իրավունքներով և հասարակության մեջ զբաղեցրած դիրքով: Ճորտ բնակչությունը իր տեսակներով, որպես կանոն, ուշ միջնադարում և վաղ նոր շրջանում Վրաստանում ներկայացվում էր *գլեխի* կամ *կմա* եզրերի ներքո: Գոյություն ունեին ճորտերի տարբեր շերտեր՝ *մասխուրի*, *մոջալաբե*, *կմա*, *գլեխի*, *բոզանո*, *խիզանի*, *նեբիեռի*, *նածկալոբևի*, *մկվիդրի* և այլն: Բացի այն, որ վրացական ճորտատիրական համակարգը աչքի էր ընկնում նման բազմաշերտությամբ, այն ուներ ևս մեկ առանձնահատկություն, այն է՝ ճորտերը ևս կարող էին ունենալ ճորտեր, այսինքն մասխուրին կարող էր ունենալ ճորտեր՝ մկվիդրիներ կամ գլեխիներ, իսկ վեր-

³⁹ **Žordania** 1896, p. 90; **Zejdlic** 1872, p. 221.

⁴⁰ **Bakradze** 1887, pp. 101-102.

ջիններս էլ, օրինակ զլեխին կարող էր ունենալ իր ճորտերը, օրինակ խիզանիներ:

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⁴¹ The transliteration of the bibliography is made according to ISO 9:1995.

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