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(Baku, Azerbaijan) mammadlielmin@gmail.com**CAUCASIAN ALBANIA AND KINGDOM OF IBERIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS SYSTEM (I–III CENTURIES)**

Albania and Iberia, the oldest states of the South Caucasus for the first time entered the system of great power politics by involving in the sphere of Roman influence in the middle of the 1st century BC. The formal dependence of Albania and Iberia on Rome did not last long, and they regained their independence.

Due to the lack of information in local sources on the history of the Albanian and Iberian states in the 1st–3rd centuries, this matter has hardly become an object of detailed research in the historiography of the homeland. In the presented study, a number of issues have been analysed through a comparative study of local sources along with ancient sources. In this context, the article “Caucasian Albania and Kingdom of Iberia in the International Relations System (I–III centuries)” is of great relevance.

The presented research contains an analysis of the political orientation and partly mutual relations of the Albanian and Iberian states during the Parthian-Roman conflict in the 1st–3rd centuries. As a result of a comparative analysis of ancient literature, which played the role of the main source for this period, it was determined that the favorable military-strategic and economic-commercial position of the South Caucasus countries constituted the main sphere of interest for two great empires of the time, and the struggle for the region did not pause for a moment.

Skillfully taking advantage of their strategic edges, the Albanian and Iberian states astutely played the shifting balance of power in the region, alternately favouring Parthian or Roman interests through agile political maneuvering. As a result of the growing influence of Parthia in the South Caucasus in the middle of the 1st century CE, Caucasian Albania and Iberia were forced to adopt a pro-Parthian position, and small branches of the Parthian Arsacids were brought to power in these countries.

Unlike Albania, Iberia has been found to have more pro-Roman stance, and diplomatic relations between these countries were more intense.

The research process led to the following conclusions:

1. In the 1st–3rd centuries, the Albanian and Iberian states were actively involved in the system of international relations amidst the Parthian-Roman conflict.

2. The balance of power formed in the region played a key role in determining the military-political orientation of these states.

3. As a result of external influence, the mutual relations between the Albanian and Iberian states were, as a rule, of an allied nature, and in some cases, local conflicts also occurred between the two parties.

Towards the end of the 2nd century CE, the strengthening of Rome's position in the region as a result of the Parthia's weakening did not last long. So, with the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in the 20s of the 3rd century, the balance of power in the South Caucasus changed again.

Key words: Albania, Iberia, Parthia, Rome, military-political and economic conflict.

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аспірант

Національної академії наук Азербайджану
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В СИСТЕМІ МІЖНАРОДНИХ ВІДНОСИН (І–ІІІ СТ.)**

Албанія та Іберія, найдавніші держави Південного Кавказу, вперше увійшли до системи великої політики, опинившись у сфері римського впливу в середині I століття до нашої ери. Формальна залежність Албанії та Іберії від Риму тривала недовго, і вони відновили свою незалежність.

Через брак інформації в місцевих джерелах з історії Албанської та Іберійської держав у I–III століттях, це питання майже не стало об'єктом детального дослідження у вітчизняній історіографії. У представленому дослідженні було проаналізовано низку питань шляхом порівняльного вивчення місцевих джерел разом з античними джерелами. У цьому контексті великої актуальності набуває стаття «Кавказька Албанія та Іберійське царство в системі міжнародних відносин (I–III століття)».

Представлене дослідження містить аналіз політичної орієнтації та частково взаємних відносин Албанської та Іберійської держав у період парфяно-римської війни в I–III століттях. У результаті порівняльного аналізу античної літератури, яка відігравала роль основного джерела для цього періоду, було визначено, що сприятливе військово-стратегічне та економічно-торгівельне положення країн Південного Кавказу становило головну сферу інтересів двох великих імперій того часу, і боротьба за регіон не припинялася ні на мить.

Вміло використовуючи свої стратегічні переваги, Албанська та Іберійська держави проникливо використовували мінливий баланс сил у регіоні, по чергово віддаючи перевагу парфянським або римським інтересам завдяки гнучкому політичному маневруванню. У результаті зростання впливу Парфії на Південному Кавказі в середині I століття нашої ери, Кавказька Албанія та Іберія були змушені прийняти пропарфянську позицію, і до влади в цих країнах було приведено невеликі гілки парфянських Аршакідів.

На відміну від Албанії, щодо Іберії було виявлено більш проримську позицію, і дипломатичні відносини між цими країнами були інтенсивнішими.

У процесі дослідження було зроблено такі висновки:

1. У I–III століттях Албанська та Іберійська держави брали активну участь у системі міжнародних відносин в умовах парфяно-римської війни.

2. Баланс сил, що склався в регіоні, відігравав ключову роль у визначенні військово-політичної орієнтації цих держав.

3. Унаслідок зовнішнього впливу взаємні відносини між Албанською та Іберійською державами мали, як правило, союзницький характер, а в деяких випадках між двома сторонами також виникали локальні конфлікти.

Наприкінці II століття нашої ери посилення позицій Риму в регіоні внаслідок ослаблення Парфії тривало недовго. Так, із піднесенням династії Сасанідів у 20-х роках III століття баланс сил на Південному Кавказі знову змінився.

Ключові слова: Албанія, Іберія, Парфія, Рим, військово-політичний та економічний конфлікт.

Statement of the problem. The article explores the participation of the South Caucasus countries of Caucasian Albania and Kingdom of Iberia in the system of international relations during the 1st–3rd centuries CE and to study their unique role in great power politics of the era. During the period in question, the fierce struggle for military-strategic, economic-trade interests brought many regions of the East, including the Parthian and Roman empires in the South Caucasus, into conflict. Although the role and position of Albania and Iberia in this conflict were touched upon separately by some researchers, in historiography the approach from the context of these states' common interests has been somewhat overshadowed. In terms of approaching the issue from this prism, scientific relevance of the presented study is beyond doubt.

The purpose of the article. During the campaign of the Roman general Pompey in 66–65 BCE, the countries of the South Caucasus for the first time entered the sphere of influence of Rome. The formal dependence of Albania and Iberia on Rome did not last long, as in 53 BCE, Rome's influence in the East was significantly shaken after the victory of Parthia near Carrhae. It is clear from the information of M. Khorenatsi and M. Kaghankatvatsi that in the Battle of Carrhae, along with the Parthians and Armenians, the Albanian and Iberian troops also united on a single front against Rome (Хоренаци, 1990: 75), (Kalankatuklu, 2006: 22–23). Rome, which could not reconcile itself to the loss of its influence in the region, actively intervened in the region again in the 30s of the first century BCE, and the triumvirate Mark Antony was appointed commander of the Eastern

campaign. Plutarch, who gives extensive coverage to this campaign of Mark Antony, writes that Antony's general Canidius managed to advance to the Caucasus by capturing region of Armenia, and defeating Iberian and Albanian kings (Плутарх, 1994: 416). Dion Cassius, who describes Canidius' campaign in the South Caucasus, notes that after defeating the Iberian king Pharnavaz and then the Albanian king Zober, both of them were drawn into an alliance with Rome (Кассий, 1890: 620). Analysis of ancient sources shows that Mark Antony had to take this step in order to neutralize the possible intervention of Albania and Iberia in the events before the decisive battle against the Parthian–Atropatenian alliance, or to gain the support of the South Caucasian states. Interestingly, there is almost no information in local sources about the Albanian ruler Zober and the Iberian king Pharnavaz, who are mentioned in ancient sources in connection with these events (Алиев, 1962: 23–29).

Research analyses. After the failure of Mark Antony's campaign against Parthia and Atropatene in 36 BCE, the dependence of Albania and Iberia on Rome most likely ended. However, Parthia's hegemony in the region did not last long either. Octavian Augustus' Eastern campaign in 20 BCE resulted in the defeat of the Parthian king Phraates IV, and according to the agreement reached, a number of vassal kingdoms, including Atropatene, were included in the sphere of influence of the Roman Empire (Кузищин, 1981: 204–205). The shift in the balance of power in the region also affected the political orientations of the Albanian and Iberian kingdoms. This fact is confirmed by the statement, reflected in the inscription

of the Deeds of the Divine Augustus (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*) compiled in Ancyra during the reign of Octavian Augustus (30 BCE–14 CE), that the kings of Albania, Iberia and Atropatene, along with many other nations, wanted to establish friendly relations with Rome by sending envoys (Augustus, 1998). The periodic separatism and betrayals by the rulers in Armenia forced Rome to take decisive steps in foreign policy; hence, during the visit of Octavian's son, Gaius Caesar, to the region in 20 BCE, the administration of Armenia was entrusted to Ariobarzanes, son of the ruler in Atropatene, and after the Ariobarzanes' death, to his heir Artabazus II (Тацит, 1969: 45–46).

Thus, the two countries of the South Caucasus were included in the sphere of influence of the Roman Empire towards the end of the first century BCE.

Presenting main material. The mutual relations between Rome and the South Caucasus states, which were founded in the middle of the first century BCE, further continued intensively in the first century CE. Although there is no information about this in local sources, some information has been preserved in ancient sources. According to C. Tacitus, the Roman Empire stationed four legions in the East at the beginning of the first century CE in order to protect the Eastern provinces, including the Iberian and Albanian kingdoms, from foreign military aggression (Тацит, 1969: 116).

It is clear from C. Tacitus' information that during the Parthian–Roman strategic confrontation in the mid-30s CE, the Albanian and Iberian states took the side of Rome. After the death of Zeno, who was appointed as the ruler of Armenia by Tiberius, in 35 CE, the Parthian king Artabanus III (13–38) tried to put his son Arsaces on the throne. On the other hand, Tiberius' candidate for the throne was Tiridates, who was also supported by Albanians and Iberians (Тацит, 1969: 116), (Очерки истории Грузии, 1989: 198), (Azərbaycan tarixi, 1998). According to Dio Cassius, in exchange for this help, Rome promised the son of the Iberian king the rule of Armenia (Кассий, 2014: 4). As documented by Cornelius Tacitus, the aforementioned military expedition was conducted under the leadership of Pharasmanes, son of the Iberian monarch Mithridates, with the Albanian and Sarmatian contingents also participating in the advance (Тацит, 1969: 169–170). As a consequence of this campaign, Parthia suffered defeat, and the governance of Armenia, albeit temporarily, devolved to the Iberian prince Mithridates. It is clear from the information of C. Tacitus that Mithridates' rule did not last long; during the reign of Emperor Gaius Caligula (37–41), he was summoned to Rome and subsequently imprisoned (Тацит, 1969: 182–183). While the precise reason for Mithridates' arrest is unknown,

G.A. Melikishvili posits that it was most likely connected with Mithridates' steps to escape from Roman control and his desire to get closer to the pro-Parthian nobles (Меликишвили, 1959: 38–39).

There is also some information about the Albanian–Iberian alliance, which began in the middle of the first century BCE, experiencing certain tensions in the middle of the first century CE. Although the sources do not contain precise information about the reasons for this tension, the Roman historian C. Tacitus recorded that, in 51 BCE, the Iberian ruler Pharasmanes did not provide assistance to his brother Mithridates during the war against Albania (Тацит, 1969: 182). The Georgian historian G.A. Melikishvili posits that the substantial growth of the Iberian kingdom's military-political influence under Pharasmanes I, coupled with the latter's aspirations to exert dominance over Albania, precipitated a conflict between these two neighbouring polities of the South Caucasus. This context further motivated Iberia to adopt an assertive stance vis-à-vis Albania, which, seeking to counterbalance Iberian influence, gravitated towards Parthian affiliation with Roman support (Меликишвили, 1959: 341–342).

Although the precise parameters and ramifications of the mid-1st century CE Albanian–Iberian conflict remain unknown, the potential consolidation of Iberian power resulting from a resurgence of Parthian activity in the region did not last long. According to Cornelius Tacitus, the military expedition led by the Parthian king Vologases I culminated in the expulsion of Iberian forces from Armenian territories, and throne in Armenia was given to his brother Tiridates I (Тацит, 1969: 240–243). Concurrently, a small branch of the Parthian Arsacids was brought to power in Albania. This fact is confirmed by the inscription attributed to Movses Kaghankatvatsi, which records the appointment of «Aran, a descendant of Japheth and the lineage of Sisakan,» as ruler by the decree of Vologases I (Kalankatuklu, 2006: 19). The Roman Empire, unable to acquiesce to this unfavourable shift in the Eastern political and military equilibrium, according to Tacitus, orchestrated a reversal in 58 CE. Under the command of Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, new military forces were deployed, and the Iberian king Pharasmanes I was integrated among Rome's allies during this campaign (Тацит, 1969: 240–244).

During the reign of Emperor Nero (54–68), Albania's rapprochement with Parthia prompted Rome to initiate preparations for a military campaign against it. However, this expedition was not achieved due to the outbreak of a rebellion within the imperial territories. According to the notes of Tacitus, Emperor Nero had to recall the legions mobilized from Germania, Britannia,

and Iberia, which he had dispatched towards the Caspian Gates for a war against the Albanians, in order to suppress the Vindex revolt (Тацит, 1969: 37). M. Rasulova has linked Nero's planned campaign to the objectives of preventing Albania's growing power, halting the predatory raids of northern nomadic tribes into Rome's Pontic territories, and securing control over the trade route to India (Расулова, 2008: 148–149). In our view, however, Nero's intended campaign was not solely motivated by the mentioned factors. The shift in Albania's political orientation towards Parthia during the period in question, coupled with Rome's loss of control over Armenia, collectively signified a failure of the empire's Eastern policy. Consequently, this campaign was likely undertaken with the primary aim of restoring Rome's diminished prestige. Nevertheless, the emergence of a more dangerous rebellion within the empire necessitated the postponement of this expedition.

One of the rare pieces of information pertaining to the Roman Empire's South Caucasus policy in the final quarter of the first century CE is the inscription, likely dating from 81–96 CE, carved on a rock in the Gobustan Böyük Daş ridge, discovered in 1948. The inscription reads: "Emperor Domitian Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Lucius Julius Maximus, Centurion of the Legio XII Fulminata" (Ямпольский, 1950: 182), (Пахомов, 1949: 79–88). While the precise reasons for the presence of a small Roman military division as far as the Caspian coast remain unclear, historiography offers various interpretations. One attempt at explanation suggests that the Parthian king requested Roman assistance to counter Alan incursions (Пахомов, 1949: 111–113), (Тревер, 1959: 86). G. A. Melikishvili disagrees with this view, arguing that it is implausible for Rome to dispatch a small military unit to the Caspian coast solely to prevent Alan–Sarmatian raids. According to the author, a small contingent of the Roman army was sent to support the Iberian ruler during his campaign against Albania (Меликишвили, 1959: 351). However, written sources provide no information about this alleged campaign against Albania during the reign of the Iberian king Kartam. Although Georgian chronicles emphasize that the Iberian king Kartam was a contemporary of the Roman Emperor Vespasian (69–79), no campaign of his against Albania is recorded, and his era is characterized as a period of peace and stability (Мровели, 2012: 31).

In the early 2nd century CE, the Parthian–Roman conflict persisted, and the balance of power in the region inevitably influenced the political stance of the Albanian and Iberian kingdoms. In 114 CE, the Eastern campaign of the Roman Emperor Trajan proved successful, with the Parthian capital Ctesiphon being

captured and Roman forces advancing as far as the Persian Gulf. Evidently, this campaign also had repercussions for the history of the peoples and states of the South Caucasus. Describing this campaign of the Roman Emperor, fourth-century historians Eutropius and Festus stated that «Trajan gave king to the Albani, and received the kings of Iberians, Sarmatians, the Colchians» and others into his protection, thereby indicating the inclusion of the South Caucasus within the Roman Empire's sphere of influence (Eutropius, 1886), (Festus, 2001), (Мровели, 2012: 113), (Меликишвили, 1959: 352). However, the dependence of the South Caucasus countries on Rome was short-lived as the Emperor Hadrian (117–138) halted the war with Parthia, concluding a peace treaty and re-establishing the border along the Euphrates River between the two states. Although friendly relations were maintained between the Roman Empire and Albania and Iberia during Emperor Hadrian's reign, the South Caucasus countries largely pursued independent policies. The biographer of Emperor Hadrian, Aelius Spartianus, indirectly confirms this fact by writing, «Hadrian established friendly relations with the Albanians and Iberians and generously rewarded their rulers, but they cautiously declined his invitation to appear before him» (Тревер, 1959: 114), (Спартиан, [no date]).

Although sources provide no information regarding the ruler of Albania during this period, the king of Iberia is known to have been Pharasmanes II. Ancient sources indicate that Emperor Hadrian treated Pharasmanes II with great respect, unlike other rulers, and bestowed upon him very valuable gifts (Меликишвили, 1959: 358). During the reign of Pharasmanes II, the Iberian kingdom significantly strengthened, and even managed to seize a part of Colchis, and apparently, for these successes, he was honoured with the epithet «Kveli» (Brave) in ancient Georgian sources (Мровели, 2012: 34).

Albania and Iberia, strategically located at the geographically advantageous northern passes of Derbent and Daryal, occasionally attempted to exploit this factor. One such instance was recorded in the mid-30s of the 2nd century. During the reign of Pharasmanes II, the Iberian kingdom established kinship ties with the Alans and, with their help, organized raids into the Caucasus, Parthian territories, and Roman-controlled areas of Asia Minor, aiming both to acquire trophy and to strengthen their own positions in the region. According to the Roman historian Dio Cassius, after the conclusion of the Jewish War, a new war was initiated by the Alans at the instigation of Pharasmanes, and as a result of this war, Albania, Media, Armenia, and Cappadocia suffered significant

damage (Кассий, 2011: 139). Research indicates that this event recorded by Dio Cassius occurred between 134 and 136 CE, during the reign of the Parthian King Vologases (105–147). Further Alan incursions were prevented by King Vologases offering them substantial gifts, and Flavius Arrianus, Roman governor of Cappadocia, repelling them on the battleground (Кассий, 2011: 139). Analysis of the sources reveals that during the period in question, the Iberian kingdom was nominally under the patronage of the Roman Empire, but this dependence was purely formal. Dio Cassius' account also confirms the formal nature of this dependence. According to the author, following this event, the Parthian King Vologases sent his envoys to Rome, leveling certain accusations against Pharasmanes. Due to both Parthian demands and the damage inflicted on Roman territories in Asia Minor by the Alan incursions, Pharasmanes was summoned to Rome, but the Iberian king refused this invitation (Кассий, 2011: 139). After Pharasmanes' refusal to heed this summons, the Roman governor of Cappadocia, Flavius Arrianus, was dispatched to the Caucasus on a diplomatic mission, but the negotiations with the Iberian king yielded no desired results (Меликишвили, 1959: 359), (Очерки истории Грузии, 1989: 207). Georgian historians, citing the accounts of Dio Cassius, believe that the Roman Empire sought to improve relations with Iberia in order to protect its eastern provinces from the raids of northern nomadic tribes, and even did not hinder Pharasmanes II from expanding the territory of the Iberian kingdom towards Colchis (Меликишвили, 1959: 361).

Research indicates that the tensions that arose between the Roman Empire and the Iberian Kingdom during the reign of Emperor Hadrian could not be resolved diplomatically. It appears that this tension was alleviated during the subsequent reign of the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE), as Pharasmanes II accepted the empire's invitation and journeyed to Rome with a large group of representatives. Dio posits that the emissaries of Pharasmanes was received with great honour in Rome; sacrifices were performed during the reception on the Capitoline Hill, and even a statue of Pharasmanes on horseback was erected in the Temple of Bellona. The chronicler notes that Emperor Antoninus Pius himself also observed the military exercises organized in honour of the Iberian King Pharasmanes, his son, and the Iberian (Кассий, 2011: 149).

Given that the Roman Empire did not always have the capacity to maintain control over the South Caucasus, a region situated far beyond its direct borders, through military force alone, it sought to preserve its

influence in the area through certain concessions and enticing measures. It was precisely for this reason that the expansion of the Iberian Kingdom's territories in the direction of the Black Sea–Colchis was, to put it mildly, overlooked.

Regrettably, almost no information can be found in either ancient or local sources regarding the mutual relations between the states of Albania and Iberia during the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries CE, nor concerning the connections of these states with Parthia and Rome. Although ancient Georgian chronicles list the names of several representatives of the Pharnavazid dynasty who ruled after Pharasmanes II, they do not address their foreign relations, including Iberia's relations with Albania, Parthia, and Rome, focusing instead on brief information about the internal affairs of the Iberian Kingdom during their respective periods (Мровели, 2012: 36–38).

The weakening of the Parthian state due to internal political struggles in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries CE, and the emergence of the Sasanian state as a result of the events of 224–226 CE, marked a new stage in the history of the South Caucasian countries. The centuries-long Parthian–Roman confrontation for control of the region was replaced by Sasanian–Roman conflicts.

Conclusions. To end with, the states of Caucasian Albania and Iberia, situated in a strategically important geographical location – the crossroads of East and West – through which international and regional trade routes passed, were drawn into the system of international relations from the mid-1st millennium BCE. However, their intensive relations with Rome commenced in the mid-1st century BCE. Following Pompey's campaign in the South Caucasus, the South Caucasian countries formally fell under Roman influence. In the 1st–3rd centuries CE, they became one of the main points of conflict between the economic-commercial and military-strategic interests of the Parthian and Roman Empires.

While the economic interest consisted of trade routes and access to the local market, political interest was that both empires wanted to use the region as a buffer zone against each other. For this reason, both empires tried to put vassal kings to the thrones in the region instead of completely ending the local autonomy and annexing the land. Depending on the balance of power in the region, the states of Albania and Iberia periodically maneuvered in their political orientation, attempting to maintain a balanced political course in their relations with the two great empires. Such political orientation can be justified by a security perspective. The two countries have mostly been in alliance with the Roman Empire because it would otherwise

place their security in jeopardy; center of Parthian empire was geographically closer to the region. The victory of an alliance over another “leaves weaker members of the winning coalition at the mercy of the stronger ones” (Waltz, 1979: 126). If Albania and Iberia were to cooperate with Parthia, this alliance would prevent Roman influence in the region, and in the long term, two states would become the next target for Parthia. Conversely, this situation would be less likely to happen with Roman empire due to its geographical position and limited capability to intervene quickly to the region, as the case of emperor Nero’s campaign demonstrated. Rome’s comparatively diminished capacity for immediate response was also motivating factor for Albania and Iberia to pursue conciliatory strategies with Parthia. Consequently,

rather than engaging in direct conflict, both states typically acknowledged Parthian autonomy during its campaigns in the South Caucasus.

Despite occasional tensions arising from Albania’s pro-Parthian and Iberia’s pro-Roman foreign policy orientations, amicable relations were generally sustained between the two South Caucasian polities. This relative peace was primarily predicated on the exigencies of shared external threats. As evidenced during Pompey’s campaigns, the structure of the regional international system incentivized an alignment of interests between Albania and Iberia, encouraging de facto alliance. Throughout the 1st to 3rd centuries CE, the South Caucasus, with noted exceptions, was formally incorporated within the hegemonic sphere of influence of the Roman Empire.

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