

Marcin Wieczorek

Streszczenie

The dissertation examines the role and significance of two regions of the South Caucasus: Iberia (modern Eastern Georgia) and Lazica (modern Western Georgia) in the foreign policy of the Roman Empire between the 4th and the mid-7th centuries AD. The research explores how, according to the new model of world-system theory called the double-centre system, geographical, cultural, and political factors influenced the development of relations between the Roman Empire, Persia, and the local states of the Caucasus. The primary objective of the study is to determine how environmental and geographical conditions shaped Roman policy in the region and how Iberia and Lazica functioned within the broader framework of imperial rivalry and double-centre system.

The first chapter of the dissertation presents a reconstruction of the physical geography of the South Caucasus in Late Antiquity. Based on Greek, Roman, Georgian, Armenian and some Persian geographical writings, archaeological data, and very limited paleoclimatic and palynological studies, the work analyses the structure of mountain systems, river networks, climate zones, and vegetation patterns. Particular attention is paid to the logistical and strategic challenges these natural conditions posed for Roman and Persian armies, as well as to their impact on trade routes and patterns of settlement. The analysis demonstrates that limited accessibility, climatic contrasts, and ecological diversity shaped both the economic potential and political fragmentation of the region and made most of it inaccessible to the Romans during times of peace. The palynological data show the direct impact of climatic and civilizational changes, such as the increasing use of trees (possibly as fuel) and the expansion of land under cultivation. Due to the limited data, all paleoclimatic conclusions remain hypothetical.

The second chapter focuses on the social and cultural geography of Iberia and Lazica. It examines how these territories were described in Greco-Roman,

Byzantine, and Georgian sources, including mythological traditions that associated the Caucasus with legendary figures such as Prometheus and the Argonauts. It shows how mythic geography evolved into biblical and eventually historical geography, in a process through which ancient perceptions of the Caucasus as a remote, semi-mythical land were gradually replaced by a more pragmatic understanding of its geopolitical importance when the Roman army became involved in military actions in the area. The presence of Roman fortifications along the Black Sea coast and in the Lazian hinterland exemplifies the transformation of mythological geography into real, physical and strategic space.

The dissertation also discusses the religious and ideological dimensions of Roman-Caucasian relations. The Christianization of Iberia (in the 4th century) and Lazica (in the 6th century, though Christians were present there earlier) is interpreted as both a spiritual and political act and declaration of loyalty to Constantinople as the centre of the Christian world. This process, however, did not eliminate Persian influence; rather, it created a complex network of overlapping allegiances that reflected the broader double-centre system of Late Antiquity and generated tensions between the empires.

In conclusion, the geographical environment of the South Caucasus determined not only the course of military campaigns and diplomatic relations but also the structure of local societies and their cultural development. Neither the Roman nor the Persian Empire succeeded in establishing lasting control over the region, precisely because of its fragmented relief, ethnic diversity, and ecological barriers. Iberia and Lazica thus remained semi-independent entities that pursued their own policies, with allegiances shifting according to the changing balance of power between the two empires. The results of the study demonstrate that the geography of the Caucasus made the region a strategic contact zone between the Roman and Persian worlds. Lazica, due to its position on the Black Sea coast,

served in the 6th century as a key military and commercial base for Roman operations in the Caucasus, while Iberia functioned as a political buffer and intermediary between the Mediterranean and Iranian spheres. The adoption of Christianity by both kingdoms had not only religious but also political implications, symbolizing a shift toward Constantinople and integration into the Mediterranean cultural world.

11.11.2025 r.

Marcin Wierzbicki