

ROMAN IMPERIAL COMMONWEALTH: IBERIAN CASE OF AFFILIATION

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the political relations between the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Iberia (Eastern Georgia). It explores the Roman Empire's policies and attitudes toward its peripheries, particularly the Kingdom of Iberia, as well as Iberia's aspirations to integrate into the imperial framework. The research highlights the formation of a Roman imperial network, reflecting the alignment of interests and interactions between these two political entities. The relationship between the Roman Empire and Iberia is analysed using two Roman imperial sources: *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and the inscription of Vespasian, along with Caesars Titus and Domitian. Through the interpretation of these materials, the study aims to model the dynamics of this relationship.

KEYWORDS: Roman politics, Iberian Kingdom, Res Gestae, empire, periphery.

Introduction

The relationships and attitudes of empires toward subordinate countries and states are inherently diverse, determined by the specific political objectives of the dominant power. Subordinate entities' responses to imperial policies often align with the overarching goals of the empire, fostering reciprocal relationships. This study proposes analysing imperial dynamics through the conceptual framework of "imperial affiliation" to define the essence and phases of these relationships. The concept of "imperial affiliation" offers a novel approach to understanding the processes underlying imperial interactions and is closely tied to the discourse on imperialism.

The interconnectedness and interdependence between the Roman Empire and Georgian states (Western and Eastern Georgian kingdoms and political entities, Egrisi/Lazika, and Iberia) illustrate a distinct pattern of "imperial affiliation," where geographical constraints diminished due to political, social, and cultural ar-

rangements. In the case of Iberia, “Roman imperial affiliation” did not lead to cultural homogenization or complete political integration. Instead, it represented an arrangement between the dominant empire and a subordinate state — specifically, its local elites and power-oriented communities — where the latter restructured itself to meet international challenges and comply with imperial directives.

The notion of “imperial affiliation” encapsulates the societal preparedness of the Iberian community — particularly its elites — to align with the dominant empire’s influence. It also highlights the social-psychological and political susceptibilities that facilitated Iberia’s acceptance and retention under imperial influence. In this context, power-oriented elites willingly accelerated their interdependence on the imperial metropolis, adopting its religious, political, social, etc. patterns.

However, the concept of “empire” is per se insufficient, as it typically represents only the dominant power’s perspective. The process of “imperial affiliation” becomes more comprehensible when analysing the responses of subordinate entities to imperial challenges. These responses — manifested through local reactions and adaptations — are tangible and explicit, providing critical insight into the dynamics of imperial relationships.

To fully understand the Roman-Iberian relationship, it is essential to explore how Iberia perceived, displayed, and replicated the influence of the imperial core. Additionally, it is necessary to examine why the Iberian monarchy sought recognition of its policies and state identity from the Roman metropolis. The policy dynamics of this affiliation shifted periodically, influenced by historical phases and varying regional configurations. This study contends that analysing the sense of connection — or “imperial affiliation” — is key to understanding the nuanced relationship between the Roman Empire and its peripheries. These connections were marked by diverse indicators, reflecting the complex interplay of political, social, and cultural forces.

The interpretation of Iberian “imperial belonging” during the early Roman Empire period warrants a comprehensive analysis from a dual perspective. First, it is essential to examine what the empire demands and what it offers in return. Second, it is necessary to assess the concessions made by the subordinate state and the forms of service it selects in response. This discussion will focus on the specifics of imperial belonging using two significant sources from the Roman Empire. The first source is *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, originating from the early imperial era, when the Roman Empire had yet to develop a substantial interest in Iberia, and Iberian rulers independently sought to establish subordinate relations with Rome. The second source pertains to the inscriptions of Emperor Vespasian, along with those of Caesars Titus and Domitian, which provide valuable insight into the dynamics of mutual relations and cooperation.

The concept of "imperial affiliation" arises from examining the political, religious, and cultural influences exerted by imperial powers on affected communities. This interpretation is informed by Michael Doyle's seminal definition of empire and imperialism:

Empire [...] is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society. It can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, social, or cultural dependence. Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire.¹

Early Roman Empire during Octavian Augustus (63 BC –14 CE), Historical Epoch Modelling

The Roman Empire's influence on global history and neighbouring states is unparalleled. It functioned as one of the major political units in the transregional system, acting as a geopolitical transmitter and mediator in disseminating new political and religious ideas, institutions, techniques, goods, media, and art. Consequently, the Empire's influence extended beyond its formally recognized territory. The Roman Empire employed diverse goals, motives, and methods when dealing with subjugated communities. These practices highlighted the strategies employed by the Empire, which varied across regions, and the responses of subordinate states ranged from acceptance and willingness to fully affiliate with Rome to outright rejection of imperial association.

Res Gestae Divi Augusti is a source associated with the reign of Gaius Octavius Augustus, the first emperor of the Roman world (27 BCE–14 CE, emperor from 31 BCE). Written shortly before his death on August 19, 14 CE (or perhaps earlier), the text is authored in the first person, reflecting Augustus's political intentions. The inscription was created and distributed as a political statement under his direct supervision. Its primary purpose is to glorify the emperor, detailing his achievements, political career, honoured titles, military victories, and contributions to the Roman state and its people. The imperial paradigms addressed in this text include imperial ambitions, diplomatic relations, military conquests, territorial expansion, and the formation of the Roman *commonwealth*. The source also provides insight into the Roman Empire's relations with local, regional, and transregional spaces, including distant peripheries that were not directly part of the empire.

The desire to engage with the Roman Empire and acquire "commonwealth" status motivated distant regions such as India (a country in South Asia), the Bastarnae

¹ Doyle 1986, 45.

(Lower Danube, north of the Roman border), Scythians (Pontic steppes, the territories of modern Ukraine and southern Russia), Sarmatians (central Ukraine, south-eastern Ukraine, southern Russia, the Volga and southern Ural regions of Russia, and the territories of the north-eastern Balkans and Moldova), Albanians (north of the Lesser Caucasus and adjacent territories of the Caspian Sea), and Iberians (modern eastern Georgia bordered by Colchis in the west, Caucasus Albania in the east, and Armenia in the south), the kings of Media (Atropatene, Midia Atropatene, the lands of modern Azerbaijan). This aspiration is highlighted in Augustus's *Res Gestae* (31.1):

"Embassies were often sent to me from the kings of India, a thing never seen before in the camp of any general of the Romans. Our friendship was sought, through ambassadors, by the Bastarnae and Scythians, and by the kings of the Sarmatians who live on either side of the river Tanais, and by the king of the Albani and of the Hiberi and of the Medes."²

The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* text, a monumental inscription engraved on steles, monumental buildings and temple walls distributed across the Roman Empire, was originally engraved on bronze plates and attached to two columns adorning the entrance to the Mausoleum of Augustus.³ Written in Latin with accompanying Greek translations, it exemplifies the linguistic imperialism of the Roman Empire.⁴ Latin served as the official language, while Greek functioned as the lingua franca in the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Asia (so-called Roman Orient).

The imperial policy of Augustus in the Caucasus and the Near East is outlined in five key passages of the *Res Gestae*: the affairs of Armenia (27.2), the restoration of military standards by Tiberius in the name of Augustus (29.2), embassies from

² For various translations and editions of the text see: Rex Wallace, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti, Monumentum Ancyranum and the Monumentum Antiochenum*: Introduction, Grammatical Notes, Historical Commentary, Facing Vocabulary. Wauconda, Ill. 2000; Velleius Paterculus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, Compendium of Roman History. Translated by Frederick W. Shipley, Loeb Classical Library 152, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924; Alison E. Cooley, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Cambridge University Press, 2009; Augustus, eds. P.A. Brunt, J.M. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, Oxford University Press, 1969; W. Fairley, *Monumentum Ancyranum, The Deeds of Augustus*, Vol. V, No. I, Leopold Classic Library, 2015.

³ Cf. Ball Platner, Ashby 1929, 332-336; Kornemann 1921.

⁴ Avaliani, Erguvan 2019, 21-26.

distant kings to Augustus (31.1–2), fugitives and hostages (32.1–2), and rulers appointed by Rome.⁵ Embassy of distant kings (31.1–2) provides a rather vague picture of political relations between the Roman Empire and peripheral Iberia. The text does not indicate the names of Iberian Kings, but according to C. Toumanoff's list and chronology of the early Kings of Iberia, potentially three candidates would be eager to keep and build strong friendship with the Roman Emperor.

According to the chronology, Augustus's reign (27 BCE–14 CE) coincides with the rule of three Iberian kings: Meribanes/Mirvan II (30–20 BCE), Arshak II (20 BCE–1 CE), and Pharsmanes I (1–58 CE).⁶ These rulers likely sought to align with Rome, recognizing its status as a global power and demonstrating loyalty. Examples of active imperial tendencies, control of the country's governance from the outside, and the establishment of kings are evident only in the case of Armenia.⁷ Unlike Armenia, Iberia and Albania voluntarily sought inclusion in Rome's "friendly" network and expressed their readiness for "Romanization".

Res Gestae (26) offers a detailed account of the Roman Empire's attitude toward various states and regions. The imperial policy of territorial expansion is depicted as advancing through two primary directions: military conquest and colonization, or through diplomatic arrangements, as exemplified by the satellite kingdom of Greater Armenia. Notably, the Roman Empire did not incorporate Iberia and Colchis into the Asian province. These territories were also excluded from the newly established Asian provinces of Galatia and Pamphylia (in Anatolia), which were created during the reign of Augustus. According to the *Res Gestae* (Chapter 31), regions considered part of the empire's distant periphery proactively dispatched diplomatic missions to the metropolis, seeking to establish "friendship" with the imperial centre. While *Res Gestae* provides limited information about the kingdom of Iberia, both Latin and Greek sources consistently reference "the king" as the sovereign authority of this realm. *Res Gestae* explicitly mentions two distinct entities, Iberia and Albania, within a single context. This indicates that the Roman Empire's policy toward these two states was consistent during the Augustan period. The rulers of Iberia and Albania actively sought to join the imperial commonwealth. The initial steps toward closer relations with the empire's metropolis were taken by the satellite states. According to sources, the Roman Empire showed little interest in subjugating these states, instead granting them the status of "friendly" states.

Imitations of denarii of Augustus and aurei circulated within Iberia for an extended period. These were mostly imitations, though coins minted in Roman

⁵ Benoist 2019, 48–49.

⁶ Toumanoff 1969, 11.

⁷ Benoist 2019, 48–49.

mints have also be found.⁸ A total of 158 denarii of Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE), minted between 2 BCE and 4 CE at the mint in Gaul (Lugdunum), have been discovered. The number of Iberian imitations of denarii of Augustus in the collection of the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia is recorded at 15 pieces. A total of 206 coins of Augustus have been found in locations such as Mtskheta-Aghajan-Nastakisi, Zghuderi, Ertso, Magraneti, Kushanath Gora, and Zhinvali. In the numismatic section of the gold collection at the Simon Janashia National Museum, a silver denarius of Octavian Augustus (2 BCE–4 CE) minted in Rome is on display, along with a bronze sestertius of Octavian Augustus, also minted in Rome.⁹ The museum exhibits imitations of both denarii of Octavian Augustus and aurei.¹⁰

The inscription of Emperor Vespasian, the Caesars Titus and Domitian, modelling the historical era

The inscription of Harmozica (Armaz)¹¹ was created in the name of members of the Roman Flavian dynasty, namely Emperor Vespasian (69-79 CE)¹², and his sons, Titus (79-81 CE) and Domitian (81-96 CE). Upon Vespasian's proclamation as Emperor of Rome, his sons were granted the title of Caesar by the Senate.¹³ The inscription is a dedicatory text of a constructional nature and was discovered in the capital of Iberia, Armaz.¹⁴ It is dedicated to the King of Iberia, Mithridates, and his people (ἔθνος/ethnos).¹⁵ During this period, the royal throne in Iberia was likely passed from father to son. In the 30s-60s CE, Iberia was ruled by King Pharasmanes I, the son of King Mithridates I (Dio LVIII, 26, 1-4). In the 70s-80s CE, the throne

⁸ The coins of the Roman Empire were used not only for commercial purposes but also to disseminate the image of the ruling class. Minting coins in the ancient world was a form of mass communication, as it spread the visual representations of the ruler and the text describing his achievements and titlature throughout the empire. Coins served as a form of political messaging for all, carrying a propagandistic nature. Cf. Ketting 2021, 26.

⁹ Cf. The Numismatic Section of the Gold Fund of the National Museum of Georgia. Exhibit N 9–10.

¹⁰ Cf. The Numismatic Section of the Gold Fund of the National Museum of Georgia. Exhibit N 11–13.

¹¹ The National Museum of Georgia holds a stone slab (measuring 123 x 115 cm) discovered 7 kilometers away from Mtskheta, on the right bank of the Mtkvari River, which bears a Greek inscription composed in the name of Vespasian.

¹² Vespasian was proclaimed emperor on July 1, 69 CE. Cf. Ritner 1998, 1–33.

¹³ Cassius Dio, Roman History LXV.1.

¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of Roman linguistic imperialism was manifested in the bilingualism of the empire. Cf. Avaliani, Erguvan 2019, 21–26.

¹⁵ Cf. Longden 1931, 24, note.1.

was held by Pharasmanes I's son, Mithridates.¹⁶ Both Pharasmanes and Mithridates are referred to as kings in the Greek inscription (βασιλεῖ Ἰβήρων Μιθριδάτη, βασιλέως Φαρασμάνου). The final portion of the Greek text has generated some scholarly debate. Tsereteli suggests that the individual referred to as Amazaspuh (Iamazpuh) may have been Mithridates' mother, whereas K. Tumanov posits that the person mentioned was presumably Mithridates' son.¹⁷

The inscription is dated to a period after July 1, 75 CE. According to Homer Curtis' dating, it is likely to fall between July and December of 75 CE.¹⁸ The inscription is written in Greek.

[Αὐτοκράτωρ Καί]σαρ Οὐε[σ-
 πασιανός σεβ]αστός ἀρ-
 χιε[ρεύς μέγιστο]ς δημαρχικῆ-
 ς ἐξο[υσίας τ]ὸ [Ζ] αὐτοκράτ[scil. ω]ρ τὸ
 5 ἸΔ' ὕπατος τὸ [Ζ] ἀποδεδειγμέ-
 νος τὸ Ζ' πατήρ πατρίδος τ[scil. ει]μη-
 τῆς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Τίτος καίσαρ
 σεβαστοῦ υἱός δημαρχικῆς ἐ-
 ξουσίας τὸ Ε' ὕπατος τὸ Δ' ἀπο-
 10 δεδειγμένος τὸ Ε' τιμητή-
 ς καὶ Δομιτιανός καίσαρ σεβα-
 στοῦ υἱός ὕπατος τὸ Γ' ἀπο-
 δεδειγμένος τὸ Δ' βασιλεῖ
 Ἰβήρων Μιθριδάτη βασιλέως Φ-
 15 αρασμάνου καὶ Ἰαμασασποῖ υἱῷ
 φιλοκαίσαρι καὶ φιλωρωμαίῳ καὶ ἔ-
 20 θν[scil. ει] τὰ τείχη ἐξωχύρωσαν¹⁹

The English translation of the text:

Imperator Caesar Vespasianus Augustus, pontifex maximus, holding the tribunician power for the seventh time, imperator for the fourteenth time, consul for the sixth time, and designated for the seventh, father of the fatherland, censor and imperator Titus Caesar, son of Augustus, holding the tribunician power for the fifth time, consul for the fourth time and designated for the fifth, censor, and Domitianus Caesar, son of

¹⁶ Cf. *Studies in the History of Georgia, from Ancient Times to the 4th Century CE, Volume I*, edited by Giorgi Melikishvili, Publishing House "Soviet Georgia," Tbilisi, 1970, p. 451; cf. Toumanoff 1969, 11–12.

¹⁷ Cf. Tsereteli, 1958, 19; Toumanoff 1969, 1–33, 13.

¹⁸ Cf. Kauhchishvili 2000, 252; Rapp Jr 2014, 224; Curtis 1902, 132.

¹⁹ Kauhchishvili 2000, 251–252.

Augustus, consul for the third time and designated for the fourth, for the king of the Iberians, Mithridates, son of King Pharasmanes, and Amazaspus, friend of Caesar and of the Romans, and for his people [Iberians] they [Romans] fortified the walls.²⁰

This text serves as a clear example of Roman imperialism in action. The inscription demonstrates how the emperor's name is closely tied to his spheres of influence. His benevolence reflects the power dynamics and loyalty-based relationships between the empire and its subordinate rulers. The political relations between Rome and Iberia are explicitly conveyed through this inscription.²¹ The inscription can be regarded as a component of Vespasian's propaganda in the Caucasus.²² Public inscriptions and sculptures bearing the emperor's name in the provinces of the Roman Empire played a pivotal role in projecting his political authority.²³ It is plausible that this approach was similarly applied to interactions with peripheral regions. On the one hand, it functioned as a gesture of care towards subjugated subjects, while on the other hand, it served as a form of political discourse, continually reminding the population of his presence and cultivating respect.

The inscription from Harmozica (Armaz) underscores the expanded boundaries of the Roman Empire's influence, the objectives of the Roman emperor, and his relationship with the king of Iberia. In a broader context, the emperor's policy and ideology were shaped by two key factors: on the one hand, the extent of the emperor's supreme political and military power, i.e., his authority, and on the other, the recognition of this authority by his subjects.²⁴ Vespasian's inscription highlights the client status of Mithridates, the king of Iberia, as well as the position of the Iberian kingdom as a satellite state.²⁵ The king of Iberia received the emperor's favour with gratitude, which was manifested in the reinforcement of the walls of the Iberian capital. To commemorate this act of patronage, a stele bearing an inscription was erected in the capital, acknowledging the benevolent emperor,

²⁰ Cf. The inscription of Vespasianus 77. The Epigraphic Corpus of Georgia. <http://v.epigraphy.iliauni.edu.ge>.

²¹ For additional information about the propaganda of the Roman emperor's power, see: Revell 2009, 21–22.

²² Many contemporary scholars believe that during Vespasian's reign, special attention was given to propaganda. Cf. Charlesworth 1938, 54–62.

²³ Cf. Revell 2009, 83–84.

²⁴ For additional information about the relationship between the emperor and a satellite ruler, see: Elsner 1998, 53.

²⁵ For additional information about the relationship between the patron and the client, see: Revell 2009, 101.

alongside his sons, who cared for the people of Iberia, and recognizing the beneficiary of his favour — the king of Iberia and his people. It is significant to note that underlying this imperial action were distinct geopolitical interests. The emperor sought to secure the empire's borders against the incursions of the Parthians and the potential threats posed by the Sarmatians and Alans.²⁶ Mithridates, the king of Iberia, confronted the same dangers and sought to fortify the walls of his capital. In this instance, the interests of the local ruler and the emperor were closely aligned.

The content of the inscription, the emperor's titles, the titles of his sons, the mention of the Iberian king's parents, and the emphasis on social connections (with Mithridates being referred to as φιλοκαίσαρ/*philokaisar*, friend of the Caesar, and φιλορώμαιος/*philorhomaïos*, friend of the Romans) all testify to the established social and interpersonal relationships between the rulers of Rome and Iberia. These connections are substantiated by epigraphic evidence. In the inscription, the ruler of Iberia - Mithridates - is described as φιλοκαίσαρ (friend of the Caesar) and φιλορώμαιος (friend of the Romans),²⁷ both of which are honorary titles granted by the Roman emperor. The use of such titles, particularly during the late Republican and Imperial periods, was relatively irregular.²⁸ Honorary titles such as *philopatris*, *philosebastos*, *philoromaïos*, and *philokaisar* emerged during the civil wars and the reign of Augustus.²⁹ The terms *philokaisar* and *philoromaïos*, as mentioned in the text, were typically used to designate Roman client kings.³⁰ Mithridates was awarded the honorary title of *philokaisar* for specific imperial services. This title attests to his particular merit, distinguishing him from other Iberian nobility and signalling his loyalty to Rome.³¹ Given the scarcity of inscriptions from the Kingdom of Iberia, it is difficult to ascertain the full extent to which Mithridates' titles reflect his personal loyalty and service to Rome. It is possible that these titles were part of a dynastic tradition, linked to his father, King Pharasmanes' service history.³² The Roman emperor Tiberius had mediated Pharasmanes' claim to the throne, ultimately bringing him to power (Tacitus, *Annals* VI.32; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LVIII.26.4). Tiberius also requested Pharasmanes to control the Alans

²⁶ Curtis 1902, 19–20.

²⁷ These titles were widespread in the Roman province of Asia. Cf. Heller 2017, 1.

²⁸ Braund 1984, 105–107.

²⁹ Heller 2017, 1.

³⁰ Heller 2017, 1.

³¹ For additional information about the client king's service, the emperor's favor, and titles, see: Chin 2023, 215.

³² For additional information about Pharasmanes' relations and alliance with Rome, see: Tacitus, *Annals* VI.32; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LVIII.26.4.

and Sarmatians, who were aiding the Parthian king Artabanus (Tacitus, *Annals* VI.32). Pharasmanes cooperated with Emperor Claudius during the Parthian civil wars (Tacitus, *Annals* XI.8), and later Tiberius became increasingly concerned with regional issues involving Iberia and neighbouring Albania (Tacitus, *Annals* XII.44). Therefore, it is not surprising that Tacitus (*Annals* XIII.37) reports that the king of Iberia was ready to undertake missions on behalf of Rome "to prove his loyalty" (*fides*).³³ It is evident that Mithridates continued the "policy of loyalty" toward the Roman emperor, influenced by his father's successful experience. Moreover, it is noteworthy that in 75 CE, Vespasian refused to assist the Parthians in stopping Alan invasions. It is plausible that Mithridates controlled the movement of the Alans,³⁴ making him a valuable ally for Rome. In 76 CE, the Parthians captured Syria, but Vespasian recaptured it in 77 CE.³⁵ Mithridates' loyalty and service were undoubtedly beneficial to the Roman Empire during its conflict with the Parthians. Vespasian's Eastern policy aimed to expand the empire's territories by subjugating satellite states and transforming their territories into provinces. In 72 CE, the Roman-loyal kingdom of Commagene was dissolved and incorporated into Syria. The province of Cappadocia was expanded by annexing the lands of Lesser Armenia, where the vassal kingdom of Aristobulus was abolished.³⁶ The province of Galatia also expanded through the annulment of the kingdom of Polemon of Pontus.³⁷ Lycia and Pamphylia were re-established as provinces, and other smaller client kingdoms were dissolved. Against this backdrop, Vespasian demonstrated patronage and care toward the king of Iberia, and was concerned with the security of his northern ally. The issue of the security of Iberia and Albania was particularly relevant in the context of the Alan invasions of 72 and 75 AD, which threatened the empire's borders. In 72-73 AD, the Alans invaded Armenia and Media.³⁸ Within this political framework, the sovereignty of Iberia was strategically acceptable to the Roman Empire, as it functioned as a client kingdom, serving a buffer role against northern tribes.³⁹ The inscription from Harmozica (Armaz) clearly reflects the Flavian dynasty's involvement in these strategically significant territories from distant Rome. Interestingly, several of the emperor's inscriptions from 75 CE are dated to

³³ Aitor Blanco Pérez, *The Flavian Emperors and the Walls of Iberia (Caucasus)*. Publishing date: Thu, 02/16/2017 (<https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/flavian-emperors-and-walls-iberia-caucasus>. Accessed: 01/03/2024).

³⁴ Mattingly 1930, XXV

³⁵ Mattingly 1930, XXV.

³⁶ Mrozewicz 2010, 14

³⁷ Mrozewicz 2010, 14.

³⁸ Chaumont 2011.

³⁹ Dąbrowa 1980, 386.

the Asian provinces and Lesser Armenia, regions to which the empire paid particular attention. The emperor allocated resources for the construction and restoration of buildings and roads, and to immortalize his projects, dedicatory inscriptions were placed. These inscriptions have been found in Bithynia, Smyrna, Galatia, and Lesser Armenia.⁴⁰ Notably, an inscription from Lesser Armenia, dated to 75 CE, is associated with road construction in the region, underscoring the empire's focus on the security of Asia Minor and its allies during this period.⁴¹

The statues and inscriptions of the Roman emperors, prominently displaying their names, made a lasting and influential impression on the inhabitants of the cities, even when the emperor was distant from the settlement.⁴² The inscription of Emperor Vespasian and his sons serves as evidence that they were regarded as supreme political figures by the Iberian elite. In this context, the goodwill and patronage of the Roman emperor, alongside his political authority, extended to the periphery, effectively subordinating it to the metropolis.⁴³ A personal agreement existed between Emperor Vespasian and King Mithridates of Iberia, wherein the Roman emperor assumed the role of patron, and the Iberian king became his client. The patron was responsible for protecting, financing, and benefitting the client, establishing a clear example of Roman *patrocinium* (patronage). Some scholars suggest that during Vespasian's reign, a Roman garrison may have been stationed in the Iberian capital.⁴⁴ It is possible that Roman legionaries were indeed stationed there and worked on fortifying defensive structures.⁴⁵

The initiation of political cooperation between the Roman emperor and the Iberian kings was likely driven by mutual strategic interests. At this time, Roman diplomacy was characterized by goodwill toward the Iberian rulers, as the Iberians had the capacity to control Alan invasions and strategically utilize this military force in Rome's favour.⁴⁶

Vespasian's coins have been discovered in significant quantities across the territory of Georgia. A hoard found in Ghurzuli (Gerzuli, western Georgia, Gulripshi district) includes silver coins minted in the city of Caesarea (Cappadocia), with a total of 30 coins bearing the image of Vespasian. In the Mtskheta-Aghiani-Nastakisi region, additional coins depicting the image of Vespasian (69-79 CE) have been uncovered, including one minted in Rome around 77-78 CE and another minted in

⁴⁰ Cf. Curtis 1902, 68–70.

⁴¹ Curtis, 1902, 132.

⁴² Cf. Revell 2009, 89.

⁴³ Cf. Revell 2009, 99.

⁴⁴ Cf. Kudriatsev 1949, 60.

⁴⁵ Cf. Amiranashvili 1938, 172.

⁴⁶ Toumanoff 1969, 13.

Lugdunum.⁴⁷ Similar to the inscription commemorating the construction of Armaz, where Vespasian's sons are mentioned, coins minted under the emperor's orders depicted his children: a coin bearing the image of Vespasian's son - Titus (79-81 CE), minted in 73-76 CE, i.e., during Vespasian's reign, with additional aurei minted in Rome in 80 CE; the coins bearing the image of Vespasian's son - Domitian (81-96 CE), dated to 76 CE - during Vespasian's reign; an aureus minted in Rome and three denarii minted around 77-78 CE, totalling four pieces. In Zghuderi, a coin stamped with the image of Domitian (77-78 CE), minted in Rome, was found, corresponding to the period of Vespasian's reign. The aurei bearing the images of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian are currently displayed in the numismatic section of the Gold Fund at the Simon Janashia National Museum.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The analysis of two historical sources reveals the evolving interests of the Roman Empire toward the Kingdom of Iberia at different periods. The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* outlines the empire's relationships with various states, where the Kingdom of Iberia is not highlighted as a primary area of concern, but rather mentioned alongside other states seeking the empire's favour. To secure this favour, diplomatic delegations were sent to the metropolis. In contrast, the second source, the *Inscription of Emperor Vespasian, Caesars Titus and Domitian* (known as the *Stele of Vespasian*), clearly demonstrates Rome's distinct interests in the Kingdom of Iberia. Roman beneficence is specifically revealed in the reinforcement of the fortification of Armazi walls by Emperor Vespasian. In this inscription, the Iberian king is referred to as φιλοκαίσαρ (*philokaisar*, friend of the Caesar) and φιλορώμαιος (*philorhomaïos*, friend of the Romans), indicating his status as a vassal and ally of the Roman emperor in the Caucasus, tasked with defending the empire's borders from Sarmatian and Alan invasions. In conclusion, the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Iberia should be analysed as part of a broader historical context, as the interests of Roman rulers evolved in response to shifting geopolitical circumstances.

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⁴⁷ G. Dundua, T. Dundua 2006, 126.

⁴⁸ Cf. T. Dundua 2014, 38; 40.

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