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HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE WESTERN BORDERS OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA

This article provides a comprehensive and detailed study of the historical, geographical, political, economic, and cultural features of the western borders of Caucasian Albania. The research focuses on the geographic contours of the border; identifying key strategic points such as fortresses, transit routes, and mountain passes, as well as examining the interactions between Caucasian Albania and neighboring states, including Iberia, Armenia, and the Sasanian Empire. The study systematically analyzes a wide range of sources, including ancient chronicles, medieval historical texts, archaeological excavation reports, and contemporary scholarly research, allowing for a multidimensional understanding of the border's significance.

Special attention is paid to historiographical debates regarding the precise demarcation of the western border. Different interpretations by scholars are compared, and the study highlights the importance of integrating archaeological evidence with historical sources. The article explores how the natural landscape—particularly the Kura River, the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, and surrounding valleys—shaped the political and military strategies of Caucasian Albania, influencing the location of settlements, fortifications, and trade networks.

Economic and cultural aspects of the border are also thoroughly examined. Trade routes passing through the western border facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultural practices, while settlements along these routes reflect a blend of local and neighboring influences. The study emphasizes the border's role not only as a defensive and administrative line but also as a zone of cultural interaction, where different communities interacted, exchanged knowledge, and participated in regional economic networks.

Furthermore, the political and diplomatic dimensions of the western border are analyzed in depth. The border served as a dynamic interface between Caucasian Albania and powerful neighboring states, affecting diplomatic relations, military campaigns, and alliances. The article highlights the contribution of modern archaeological, geoinformation, and remote sensing methods in refining our understanding of the border's exact location, structure, and functional significance.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the western border of Caucasian Albania was a central factor determining the region's political positioning, economic activities, and cultural interactions. By integrating historical, geographical, archaeological, and sociocultural perspectives, the research provides a solid scientific foundation for future studies, contributes valuable insights to regional historiography, and offers both theoretical and practical directions for a more comprehensive exploration of historical borders in the Caucasus region.

Key words: Caucasian Albania, western borders, historiography, geographical analysis, strategic points, archaeology.

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ІСТОРИКО-ГЕОГРАФІЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ЗАХІДНИХ КОРДОНІВ КАВКАЗЬКОЇ АЛБАНІЇ

Ця стаття пропонує всебічне та детальне дослідження історичних, географічних, політичних, економічних та культурних особливостей західних кордонів Кавказької Албанії. Дослідження зосереджується на географічних контурах кордону, виявленні ключових стратегічних точок, таких як фортеці, транзитні шляхи та гірські перевали, а також на вивченні взаємодій Кавказької Албанії з сусідніми державами, включно з Іберією, Вірменією та Сасанідською імперією. У роботі систематично аналізується широкий спектр джерел, включаючи давні хроніки, середньовічні історичні тексти, звіти археологічних розкопок та сучасні наукові дослідження, що дозволяє отримати багатовимірне розуміння значення кордону.

Особлива увага приділяється історіографічним дискусіям щодо точного визначення меж західного кордону. Порівнюються різні тлумачення вчених, підкреслюється важливість інтеграції археологічних даних

із історичними джерелами. У статті досліджується, як природний ландшафт – зокрема річка Кура, Малий Кавказ та навколишні долини – формували політичні та військові стратегії Кавказької Албанії, впливаючи на розташування поселень, фортифікацій та торговельних шляхів.

Економічні та культурні аспекти кордону також детально розглянуті. Торговельні шляхи, що проходили через західний кордон, сприяли обміну товарами, ідеями та культурними практиками, тоді як поселення вздовж цих маршрутів відображають поєднання місцевих та сусідніх впливів. Дослідження підкреслює роль кордону не лише як оборонної та адміністративної межі, а й як зони культурної взаємодії, де різні спільноти взаємодіяли, обмінювалися знаннями та брали участь у регіональних економічних мережах.

Крім того, політичні та дипломатичні виміри західного кордону аналізуються глибоко. Кордон служив динамічним інтерфейсом між Кавказькою Албанією та потужними сусідніми державами, впливаючи на дипломатичні відносини, військові кампанії та альянси. Стаття підкреслює внесок сучасних археологічних, геоінформаційних та дистанційних методів у уточнення розташування, структури та функціонального значення кордону.

Результати цього дослідження демонструють, що західний кордон Кавказької Албанії був центральним чинником, що визначав політичне становище регіону, економічну активність та культурні взаємодії. Інтегруючи історичні, географічні, археологічні та соціокультурні перспективи, дослідження забезпечує надійну наукову основу для майбутніх досліджень, вносить цінний внесок у регіональну історіографію та пропонує теоретичні й практичні напрямки для більш комплексного вивчення історичних кордонів у Кавказькому регіоні.

Ключові слова: Кавказька Албанія, західні кордони, історіографія, географічний аналіз, стратегічні точки, археологія.

Introduction. Caucasian Albania, as one of the most ancient state formations of the Caucasus, played an important role in the history of Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus (Mammadova, 1993: 12). Defining its borders precisely is significant both historically and geographically. In particular, studying its western borders provides a clearer understanding of Albania's relations with neighboring states, the balance of power in the region, and cultural interactions (Bunyadov, 1989: 45).

The western borders were not only physical lines but also spaces where economic and cultural connections developed. The Kura River basin and the Lesser Caucasus Mountains are considered the main natural barriers that determined Albania's western boundaries (Mammadova, 1979: 78). The changes of these borders across historical periods, as well as their strategic role in relations with neighboring states, require special attention (Strabo, 1964: 45).

Archaeological and historical sources show that the fortresses and villages located in the border areas were integral parts of Albania's defense and trade policies (Aliyev, 2005: 33). The settlements, trade routes, and fortress systems situated along Albania's western border strengthened the state's strategic and economic potential.

Modern research also demonstrates that the study of western borders is not only about determining a geographical line but also about understanding Albania's cultural and diplomatic relations (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 22). Archaeological excavations, ancient written sources, and ethnographic data collected along these borders provide a more comprehensive picture of Albania's historical geography.

2. Sources and Literature Review. The sources on the western borders of Caucasian Albania can be divided into three main groups: ancient authors, medi-

eval Armenian and Georgian sources, Arab geographers, as well as modern researchers. Each group is significant in terms of defining the border line and its historical interpretation.

2.1. Ancient Authors

Strabo (Strabo, 1964: 45–63) describes the western boundaries of Caucasian Albania as bordering Iberia. His account shows that the border was based on natural geographical elements—rivers and mountain ranges. Pliny (Pliny, 2006: 33–50) and Ptolemy (Ptolemy, 2006: 12–35) also confined Albania's territory to the Caucasus Mountains and mentioned towns and villages located in the border zone. When their information is comparatively analyzed, it appears that Albania's western border was primarily formed along the Kura River and the Lesser Caucasus.

2.2. Medieval Armenian and Georgian Sources

The History of the Albanians (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 22–55) and Georgian chronicles indicate that the western border was adjacent to Kartli. These sources define the border both politically and geographically. In medieval accounts, the border region is accompanied by fortresses and strategic routes, which emphasize its military and commercial functions.

2.3. Arab Geographers

Ibn Khordadbeh and al-Istakhri described the western borders of Albania within the South Caucasus (Istakhri, 1975: 14–28). Their accounts show that the border region had strategic significance in terms of trade routes and ethnic interactions. Arab authors particularly highlight the economic role of the border, and their information is considered valuable in historiography compared to other sources.

2.4. Modern Researchers

Azerbaijani and international historians note that Albania's western borders mainly stretched along the Kura River and the Lesser Caucasus range (Mam-

madova, 1993: 78; Bunyadov, 1989: 45). Modern research also emphasizes the cultural and economic functions of the border. Archaeological excavations and topographic studies provide accurate mapping of the border (Aliyev, 2005: 33–67).

2.5. Synthesis and Analysis

The review shows that the western borders were not merely a physical line, but also a zone of cultural and economic interaction. At different times, the border shifted, influenced by strategic logic and natural barriers. Therefore, the studies discussed in this article ensure that the border is evaluated not only geographically, but also from cultural and economic perspectives.

3. Historical-Geographical Features of the Western Borders

The western borders of Caucasian Albania changed throughout history, but the main geographical and strategic factors remained stable. These borders stretched along the Kura River, the Lesser Caucasus range, and the historical Karabakh region (Mammadova, 1993: 82). Studying the border is significant not only for identifying a geographical line but also for understanding Albania's relations with neighboring states and its cultural influences.

3.1. The Kura River Basin

The Kura River was the primary geographical element defining Albania's western border. Ancient and medieval sources mention villages and trade routes located on both banks of the river (Strabo, 1964: 47; Bunyadov, 1989: 49). As a natural barrier, the Kura River played an important role in military defense. Archaeological excavations show that fortresses located along the riverbanks protected Albania's western border (Aliyev, 2005: 33).

3.2. The Lesser Caucasus Mountains

The Lesser Caucasus range naturally shaped Albania's western border. These mountains served both defensive and cultural isolation functions (Mammadova, 1979: 81). According to ancient sources, a number of fortresses and strategic strongholds were located along the mountain range (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 25). The mountains formed the basis for military operations as well as cultural and economic interaction in the border region.

3.3. The Historical Karabakh Region

Historical Karabakh held strategic importance at the center of Albania's western border. Medieval sources indicate that the region functioned as a crossroads for trade and military routes (Istakhri, 1975: 14–28). Mapping of the western border in this area was carried out in various periods, and the border's shifts were closely linked to political events.

3.4. Political and Cultural Functions of the Borders

The western borders were not merely geographical lines but zones regulating Albania's economic and diplomatic relations with neighboring states (Bunyadov, 1989: 53). The presence of mountains and rivers determined the location of towns and villages, the formation of trade routes, and the spread of cultural influences. Strategic strongholds, fortresses, and passageways along the western border were key elements of Albania's defense and economic policies.

3.5. Archaeological Findings and Border Mapping

Archaeological excavations along Albania's western borders and the discovery of ancient fortresses and settlements allow for a more precise determination of the border line (Aliyev, 2005: 37). Maps and topographic studies show that the border was shaped not only by physical barriers but also by strategic and economic locations.

3.6. Analysis and Modern Approaches

Modern historians emphasize that the border line was formed through a combination of natural and political factors (Mammadova, 1993: 88). The study of Albania's western borders contributes to a better understanding of historical processes in the region and its relations with neighboring states.

4. Relations with Neighboring States

The western borders of Caucasian Albania were significant not only geographically but also politically and diplomatically. Albania established relations at different times with neighboring states—primarily Iberia, the Sasanian Empire, and Armenia (Bunyadov, 1989: 59).

4.1. Relations with Iberia

Albania's western borders were contiguous with Iberia. Historical sources show that the fortresses and passageways in the border region held strategic importance for both states (Strabo, 1964: 49). Trade connections and diplomatic relations with Iberia enhanced the economic and political functions of the border.

4.2. Relations with the Sasanian Empire

The Sasanian Empire influenced Albania's western border and at certain times controlled its military outposts (Pliny, 2006: 36–40). Sasanian rulers utilized fortresses and road networks in the border region to serve their strategic interests. This had a significant impact on Albania's defense policies.

4.3. Armenia and Other Neighbors

According to medieval Armenian and Georgian sources, Albanian villages and fortresses located along the western border maintained interactions with Armenia (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 33–44). Trade, cultural exchange, and military interactions were particularly noticeable in the border region.

4.4. Trade and Cultural Exchange

Trade routes along the western border enabled Albania's economic relations with neighboring

states. Rivers and mountain ranges naturally directed trade passages, allowing Albania's cultural influences to spread into neighboring regions (Aliyev, 2005: 45–52).

4.5. Diplomatic and Military Aspects

The strategic importance of the western border played a crucial role in Albania's military and diplomatic policies. At different times, fortresses, watchtowers, and border crossings in the region strengthened the state's defense and diplomatic capabilities (Mammadova, 1993: 92).

5. Debated Issues in Historiography

Research on the western borders of Caucasian Albania contains a number of historiographical debates. These disputes mainly concern the precise delineation of the border, the location of strategic points, and the political function of the frontier (Bunyadov, 1989: 61).

5.1. The Precise Border Line

Ancient sources (Strabo, 1964: 47; Ptolemy, 2006: 12–35) present the general geographical outline of the border, but disagreements exist regarding its exact line. Among modern researchers, there are differing views on whether the border followed the Kura River and how it connected with the Lesser Caucasus range (Mammadova, 1993: 88; Aliyev, 2005: 37–40).

5.2. Strategic Points and Fortresses

Historical sources provide varied interpretations of the fortresses and other strategic sites located along the border. Some historians consider these points to have been exclusively for military defense, while others emphasize their trade and diplomatic functions as well (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 33).

5.3. The Political Function of the Border

The political and diplomatic aspects of the western border are also contested. The influence of the Sasanian Empire and Iberia on the border line is interpreted differently by various scholars (Pliny, 2006: 36–40; Istakhri, 1975: 14–28). Modern historians tend to evaluate the strategic importance of the border in terms of both military and economic factors (Bunyadov, 1989: 63).

5.4. Analysis of Archaeological and Geographical Data

Archaeological excavations make it possible to map the border more precisely, but in some areas, findings remain insufficient. Modern topographic and geoinformation methods provide more accurate determinations of the border (Aliyev, 2005: 45–52).

5.5. Research Perspectives on the Debates

The study of these debated issues allows for a fuller understanding of the history of Albania's western borders and the region's political development. For this reason, modern historiography prioritizes analyzing the border line not only from a geographical standpoint but also through its political, economic, and cultural dimensions (Mammadova, 1993: 92).

Conclusion. The historical-geographical study of the western borders of Caucasian Albania shows that the border was not merely a physical line, but a fundamental factor shaping the political, economic, and cultural activities of the state (Mammadova, 1993: 92). The Kura River and the Lesser Caucasus range served as natural barriers, ensuring both defensive and economic-strategic functions.

Albania's relations with neighboring states were regulated through fortresses, towns, and village centers located along the border (Bunyadov, 1989: 61). Its interactions with Iberia, the Sasanian Empire, and Armenia reinforced the border's military, diplomatic, and trade functions.

The historiographical debates on the precise border line and the interpretation of strategic points demonstrate that the border must be assessed not only in geographical terms but also in political and cultural contexts (Kağankatvasi, 1984: 33–44). Archaeological excavations and modern geoinformation studies make it possible to determine the border line more precisely, although in some areas the data remain insufficient (Aliyev, 2005: 45–52).

Based on the findings, the western borders of Albania can be characterized as follows:

1. Geographical aspect: Defined by the Kura River and the Lesser Caucasus Mountains.
2. Strategic aspect: Fortresses and passageways ensured defense and trade functions.
3. Political and diplomatic aspect: The border regulated relations with neighboring states.
4. Cultural and economic aspect: The border region functioned as a hub of cultural influences and trade connections.

Thus, the western borders of Caucasian Albania should be viewed not merely as geographical lines, but as key factors determining Albania's position in the region and its relations with neighboring states. By jointly analyzing the historical-geographical and political-cultural aspects, this study expands the foundation for future research on the subject.

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