

## **Navigating the Periphery: The Role of Caucasian Iberia in Roman Expansion During the Mithridatic Wars**

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### **Abstract:**

In the Greco-Roman world, perceptions of the Caucasus, particularly its eastern regions, were significantly shaped during the Mithridatic Wars. Prior to this period, the Caucasus, aside from the Black Sea coastline, remained an obscure and remote periphery, understood predominantly through myths that influenced the primary stereotypes held by the Greco-Roman populace. Although both later medieval Georgian and Greco-Roman sources date the formation of Iberia and Armenia to the post-Alexandrian Hellenistic period, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of the Seleucids on the Caucasus was largely superficial. Contrary to the common narrative that credits Artaxias and Zariadris as the founders of the Armenian kingdom, it was, in fact, local dynasties with Iranian names, likely of indigenous origin and rooted in the Iranian cultural sphere, who played a foundational role.

Even if later Georgian sources, to some extent, reflect the historical reality regarding the early kings of Iberia, there consistently emerges a regional or eastern element—specifically, the presence of the so-called Persians. For example, we have the report of Justinus (42, 2, 6) that during the reign of the Parthian king Mithridates II (ca. 124–91), probably in the first half of it, Parthia invaded Armenia.

The significant Hellenistic wars of the second century led to an expansion of Roman influence in Asia, primarily through increased political and cultural dominance rather than through direct territorial acquisition.