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ISMEO
ASSOCIAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE
DI STUDI SUL MEDITERRANEO E L'ORIENTE

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

FONDATA NEL 1950 DA GIUSEPPE TUCCI

DIRETTA DAL 1979 DA GHERARDO GNOLI

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NUOVA SERIE

Vol. 35

ROMA
ISMEO
2023





SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA
N.S. 35

Roberto Dan

STUDIES ON THE ARCHITECTURE
AND ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE ACHAEMENID EMPIRE

DYNAMICS OF INTERACTION AND TRANSMISSION
BETWEEN CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

with a Preface by Rémy Boucharlat



ROMA
ISMEO
2023





This volume is published with a grant from the MUR Project “Storia, lingue e culture dei paesi asiatici e africani: ricerca scientifica, promozione e divulgazione” CUP B85F21002660001.

TUTTI I DIRITTI RISERVATI

ISSN 0582-7906

ISBN 978-88-66872-59-7

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e-mail: info@scienzelettere.com
www.scienzelettere.com

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FOREWORD

The birth and development of the Achaemenid Empire involved no breaks with the previous existing models in the territories that were annexed over the years, nor was there an empty repetition of formulas belonging to previous cultures. The relationship between the centre and the provinces was not one-way, but the contacts, exchanges, and influences between multiple entities, regardless of their degree of complexity, were always reciprocal. Paradoxically, it is much easier to recognise the exogenous elements that were assimilated and reinterpreted in Achaemenid culture, than to see unequivocal evidence of their presence in the various provinces.

This work by Roberto Dan, his third monograph to be published in the Serie Orientale Roma, seeks to provide useful elements for understanding the complex relationship between the centre and the provinces of this empire. This is done from a perspective that is different from the usual ones—i.e. starting from a deep knowledge of the archaeology of the Caucasus and the Near East, Urartu and Assyria in particular, and analysing issues of considerable importance in the context of the Achaemenid civilization with a fresh approach. However, there are many significant issues, addressed in the volume with rigour and method, that concern essential elements of Achaemenid culture.

The volume is made up of nine chapters that deal with a multiplicity of aspects inherent to the archaeology and architecture of the empire. Many issues are addressed in it, and many answers are given to the questions raised in these pages. There is a special emphasis on tracing the origins of certain traditions that came to characterise the Achaemenid civilization, particularly those related to the years of Darius I—innovations that concern both architectural aspects (connected to palace and funerary architecture) and epigraphic matters (on which there is an in-depth analysis of rock and column epigraphy), as well as ritual aspects (foundation rituals). We are therefore faced with a thorough investigation of the origin of some of the essential components of Achaemenid culture, with elements that are traced

back to the Mesopotamian area as well as to the regions of the Southern Caucasus.

Among Dan's most important contributions is undoubtedly an examination of the type of relationships (in some ways still enigmatic) that connect Urartian civilization with many aspects of Achaemenid culture—especially during the reign of Darius I, as the author clearly demonstrates. The innovations introduced by Darius faded over time, to the point that already after Xerxes some of the architectural and epigraphic elements introduced only a few decades before had disappeared or been markedly altered. Of particular relevance, among others, is the attempt at a detailed analysis of the Achaemenid presence in North-Western Iran, which the author rightly believes to be a privileged area for understanding the complex dynamics between the centre and the periphery of the elusive Achaemenid Empire. This section demonstrates unequivocally that settlement and cultural continuity are frequently hypothesised but rarely supported by specific and wide-ranging studies of archaeological data from such a large area. The last chapter of the volume is dedicated to further consideration of various elements of great importance that in principle connect the Urartian and Achaemenid civilizations. This chapter constitutes a further deepening of the research that has already been published by the author; *From Armenian Highland to Iran. A Study on the Relations between the Kingdom of Urartu and the Achaemenid Empire* (2015).

In conclusion, the present study brilliantly shows that the information potential of the data in our possession has by no means been exhausted with regard to the definition of the distinctive characteristics of the Achaemenid Empire, and how a change of perspective on problems that might be considered substantially exhausted (or perhaps settled) can generate a new vision. It also demonstrates that the author, despite his young age, may be considered a leading specialist among the scholars of the archaeology of pre-Islamic Iran, and of Achaemenid Iran in particular.

ADRIANO V. ROSSI

PREFACE

The relations between the centre and periphery of the Achaemenid Empire have been, for several years, the focus of numerous in-depth studies. The characteristics of this World Empire, which was a new phenomenon in the ancient Near East, have stimulated this scholarly research, based on written sources, as well as archaeological and cultural evidence. Quite often, the goal of these studies was to assess the impact of the empire's core—a concept whose cultural outline warrants precise definition—within the regions under its control. For several decades, the basic question on the matter put forward by Roger Moorey (*Cemeteries of the First Millennium B.C. at Deve Höyük*, 1980: 128), who challenged the significance of the material traces of Persian domination (considered too flimsy), was echoed by many historians, who indeed have asked whether there “ever was a Persian empire.” That question was raised by Amélie Kuhrt and Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg in the introduction of a book whose title was, relevantly, *Centre and Periphery* (Achaemenid History, IV, 1990).

The empire was very often undetectable or poorly visible in the satrapies, particularly through archaeological documents, as highlighted by Sancisi-Weerdenburg in the conclusion of the same volume, entitled “The Quest for an Elusive Empire.” Doubt about a powerful and robust imperial formation was founded on one of the points most often put forward: the statistical scarcity of archaeological evidence for the presence of a state apparatus in the different provinces. With this doubt in mind, the analysis of already known or recently discovered finds or cultural elements has yielded interesting results, for instance in Asia Minor, when material was considered to be in sufficient quantities to be used in a demonstration. The intensification of excavations in North-Western Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, but also in Syria, the Levant and Egypt, as well as more recently in Central Asia, has highlighted once more the importance of the basic issue of impact of Achaemenid power. The conclusions reached, however, vary according to the assessment each scholar makes on the data, a quite weak power structure if

one thinks that data is not abundant enough (cf. Moorey), or quite the contrary, a strong one when the data is considered more solid. The theoretical discussion based on archaeological data was recently stimulated by Lori Khatchadourian's book *Imperial Matter: Ancient Persia and the Archaeology of Empires* (2016), which focused on the Southern Caucasus in Achaemenid times. Discussions are obviously still open, and doubts about a strong power structure will remain very widespread, since available data are not as impressive, visible and abundant as those of the Roman Empire in areas far from Rome.

One must have in mind the fundamental historical issue of the dynamics of centre-periphery exchange, in order to appreciate the aims of Roberto Dan's book. Yet at a first glance, his goal is exactly the opposite of that of a study of the centre's impact on the periphery, since he attempts first of all to observe the dynamics at work in the other direction, from the surrounding regions (at least those the author has focused on) towards the empire's core. In reality, to posit the existence of 'influences' and exchange, there must be movements from active and productive regions, and not states or cities that died or were turned into 'museums' of sorts before the mid-6th century BCE. When one leaves aside many aspects of art history (Greek, Egyptian, to name the best known and most frequently studied), the author deals with more precise fields, i.e. archaeological data and the transfer of architectural elements originating from regions of North-Western Iran, Eastern Turkey and the South Caucasus (ancient Urartu and beyond), to which he adds several Neo-Assyrian and other elements. This association of the two regions, Urartu and Assyria, is perfectly justified, because it has not always been possible to distinguish Neo-Assyrian from Urartian traits, and this indeed is one of the key points of the author's demonstration. Mobilizing his very deep knowledge of the archaeology of North-Western Iran and neighbouring regions, R. Dan restates the relevance of what was considered secure or evident as a result of often superficial analyses. He provides significant examples in the various chapters, which complete and often update his book published in 2015, *From the Armenian Highland to Iran, A Study on the Relations between the Kingdom of Urartu and the Achaemenid Empire* (Serie Orientale Roma, N.S., 4), Rome.

To illustrate the author's method, I wish first of all to mention a bias he has not only avoided, but even vigorously fought against in his book. In the introduction, he suggests an update on the hypostyle hall, a matter he looks at in more detail in Chapter 7. This type of architecture has all too often been called by generations of archaeologists 'hypostyle hall' or *Apadana*, in particular in the case of ancient Urartu, at sites such as Altuntepe and Erebuni. The term *Apadana*, specific to the Achaemenid period, was extended to sev-

eral Urartian and post-Urartian hypostyle halls, some even reattributed to the Achaemenid period. One must recall the facts: the word *Apadana* is mentioned only towards the end of the 5th century, and not under the reign of Darius, in some rare inscriptions in Old Persian (English translations from <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ario/corpus>). The first is by Darius II at Susa (D²Sa): “[...] regarding the columns [...] the great (King) Darius has built[...] [may Ahuramazdā] protect me together with the gods,” and a second one (D²Sb), which “Proclaims Darius the King: This palace (*Apadana*) Artaxerxes built previously, who (was) my father; this palace (*Apadana*) I later built by the favour of Ahuramazdā.” His successor Artaxerxes II, also on an inscription from Susa (A²Sa), mentions “[...] This palace (*apadana*) built Darius (I), my great-great-grandfather; later, under Artaxerxes (I), my grandfather, it burned; by the favour of Ahuramazdā, Anāhitā and Mithra I ordered this palace (*apadana*) to be (re)built. May Ahuramazdā, Anāhitā and Mithra protect me from all evil; and that which I have built shall neither... nor... (destroy?).” The other series of attestations of the term *Apadana* describing a palace is in an inscription from Ecbatana of the same Artaxerxes II, but one cannot know which type of construction is referred to. One of these two texts (A²Ha) uses simple formulations: “[...] This palace (*apadana*) by the favour of Ahuramazdā, Anāhitā and Mithra, I built. May Ahuramazdā, Anāhitā and Mithra protect me from all evil and that which I made shall not...;” the second inscription (A²Hb) mentions “The palace (*apadana*) with columns of stone, Artaxerxes (II), the Great King, built, who (is) Darius (II) the King’s son, an Achaemenian. May Mithra protect me (?).” Clearly, the second term “in its columns” does not recurrently appear with that of *Apadana*; nor is it systematically associated with this term. Yet based on these two sole occurrences, the term *Apadana* was extended to the great hypostyle hall of Persepolis, which, one must emphasize, is not described by Darius.

Since excavations at Persepolis, almost all columned halls of North-Western Iran and ancient Urartu have been described as *Apadana* by excavators, regardless of their date (in general a matter of contention as concerns the Urartian period), or from the transitional period at the end of the 7th century BCE. As recalled by R. Dan, very recent comments on the hypostyle hall relating to the Kerkenes Dağ expedition mention a “forerunner of the Achaemenid period *Apadana*.” The same applies to the columned halls of Nevşehir, Tille Höyük or even more recently Oluz Höyük in Central Turkey: all are examples quoted with references by R. Dan. To better illustrate this case of the cultural contamination of some archaeologists working in the region, one should signal, inversely, that the columned halls of the Zagros, such as those of Godin Tepe and Nush-i Jan, dated to the period preceding the Achaemenids and built by cultures enjoying cultural proximity with the latter, have hardly

been described as *Apadana*. In a nutshell, I am in full agreement with the author: the term *Apadana* must be restricted exclusively to constructions directly linked to a text mentioning the word. I shall add that the term can be applied to these constructions, whether provided with columns or not, since the latter are an added precision, and not a condition. In all other cases, the use of the word *Apadana* must be banned.

R. Dan therefore shows that the hypostyle hall cannot be considered as a simple transfer from ancient Urartu to Persia, a hypothesis that does not take chronology into account (the dates often being later than what archaeologists previously believed), and neglects the mentioned cited testimonies from the Central Zagros. In any case, they are not *Apadana*!

When looking at the dynamics of centre-periphery exchange, one should highlight a significant instance of borrowing—the word seems to be suitable—from Urartu by the central Achaemenid elite: the rock-cut inscriptions described and studied by the author in Chapter 6. The most famous of Achaemenid inscriptions is that of Bisutun, the first that Darius ordered to carve at the very beginning of his reign, a text which is illustrated by a large relief. The Bisutun monument, still unique among Achaemenid reliefs and rock inscriptions, owes a lot to Elamite, Neo-Elamite and Assyrian reliefs from the Zagros (which associate image and inscriptions), but by no means anything to Urartu. The author nevertheless deals with Urartu's legacy in detail, totally absent at Bisutun but revealed by the double trilingual inscription of Ganj Nameh at the foot of Mount Elvend near Ecbatana. One of the inscriptions was carved by Darius (DEa), the other by Xerxes (XEa) and also by another inscription of Xerxes found near Van, where the king mentions the resumption of his father's project. At Ganj Nameh, each inscription is set back from the rock surface by 0.30 m and carved in a niche measuring 2×3 m, no doubt to protect it from the weather. These inscriptions recall those of Urartu, which were set back in a niche without any figurative imagery, in particular the carved text of King Minua son of Išpuini at Yazılıtaş, from the early 8th century BCE, still visible today. This legacy is even more striking in the inscription of Xerxes (XV) at Van, in the heart of Urartu: it is the only known Achaemenid inscription outside of Iran. It is trilingual just like those mentioned above, but the Old Persian text is magnified and occupies half the niche, which is exceptional in the case of Achaemenid inscriptions. It bears the king's titles, a standard trait in all royal inscriptions, and mentions the fact that his father Darius had planned to carve an inscription in the neighbouring niche, but had finally not done so. This explains why Xerxes ordered an inscription to be carved in his own name. Like all Urartian kings, Darius and Xerxes adopted the form of inscriptions in a niche void of imagery, by contrast with Assyrian inscriptions, which most often associate text and iconography.

Another theme, supposedly the best-known, is analysed by R. Dan in an in-depth discussion: the Urartian temple-tower, generally considered as the direct prototype of the two famous Naqsh-i Rostam and Pasargadae towers. As recalled by the author in the introduction to Chapter 4, “The Urartian Tower-Temple undoubtedly represents the most important building of the Urartian civilization, both from an architectural and a symbolic point of view.” This emblematic type first appears in the form of ‘Gates of Haldi,’ carved in the late 9th century BCE in mountainous locations. The author describes with much precise detail the oldest example from Yeşilalıç, measuring 7×7 m, while others, now numbering 17, have sides that can reach 13-15 m, as for example at Altıntepe, Toprakkale, Çavuştepe, and Kayalıdere, to mention only the best known. They are therefore four times larger than the two Achaemenid towers of Naqsh-i Rostam and Pasargadae, whose sides measure approximately 7.30 m.

Apart from the issue of dimensions, the general plan of the monuments of both series seem close and share several characteristics: firstly context. Tower-temples appear to be associated with royal areas, and are not really separate from the latter. Similarly in the cases of Achaemenid towers, that of Naqsh-i Rostam lying in a built area that also sheltered royal tombs, and the one of Pasargadae, which is not isolated but part of a monumental set of constructions. Another comparable element: the towers’ height, estimated at 15 m in the case of Urartian examples (none is preserved over more than a few metres), and 14 m for Achaemenid ones. One should also note the same use of blind windows, reconstructed from objects found in Urartu, and the same sharp angles at Pasargadae and Naqsh-i Rostam. By contrast, Urartian temple-towers were built on raised ground, but without a podium, while the Naqsh-i Rostam and Pasargadae towers were erected on stepped platforms, whose lower square plinth measures approximately 14 m in length—is this a coincidence in relation to the sides of Urartian tower-temples, which measure 14-15 m? An interesting observation made by the author must be pointed out: a certain similarity between the topographic environment in both cases, the presence of a cliff in the case of the Naqsh-i Rostam tombs, comparable to those at the foot of the Van citadel. In this case, Darius clearly borrowed from Urartu.

It is likely that the main differences, the dimensions and their chamber (c. 5×5 m in Urartu, 3.21×3.98 m with a height of 4.73 m at Pasargadae), and their location at the ground level in Urartu, vs. eight metres above ground in the case of the two Achaemenid towers, are related to functional differences. Moreover, Urartian temple-towers display certain differences between each other, while the two Achaemenid towers are almost identical, even in their minute details, but the latter observation must not be emphasized because the corpus is restricted to these two monuments.

It is true, however, that the exiguity of the Achaemenid towers' upper room, and the absence of an opening for fresh air, prohibited any kind of activity inside, and restricted their function to that of a tomb or depository for objects.

The hypothesis positing a religious function for the tower-temples in the Urartian period is generally accepted, despite certain differences in the architectural environment of several of them; by contrast, the function of the two Achaemenid towers remains totally enigmatic. The only hypothesis that is not a matter of contention, as a result of both environment and architecture, is that of a deposit for objects, very probably of a royal and not a religious nature. One cannot go any further, but it should be recalled that these two towers have no comparative material, whether during the Achaemenid period or later. I don't agree with the author in his proposal to see the Parthian period pavillion of Qal'eh Zohak in Azerbaijan or Nurabad's small Dum-e Mil tower in Fars, which dates from much later times, as descendants of Achaemenid towers, although the one at Nurabad shares an important trait with them: the high position of the interior space. The case of the two Achaemenid towers is an interesting example of an indisputable Urartian architectural legacy, as the author strongly suggests, but they were built for purposes that seem to have been entirely different and restricted to royal use during the Achaemenid period. To go further would require more information on the rites and beliefs of both cultures, which is currently not available for the Achaemenids.

The themes and topics discussed in the other chapters of the book testify to the author's familiarity with archaeological data from Eastern Turkey, North-Western Iran and Armenia on the one hand, and from Persia's royal sites on the other. This is shown by the very numerous photographs taken by the author himself in the two areas he studied, of funerary sites, constructions and details of architecture. Deep knowledge of North-Western regions does not prevent him from scrupulously detecting other legacies such as those of the great Neo-Assyrian capitals, which have led him to balanced conclusions. For instance, Assyrian cities were no doubt in ruin after 612 BCE, but the platforms on which palaces had been erected (at Khorsabad, Nineveh and Nimrud) must have been perfectly visible, and could have been models for the great Achaemenid platforms, a hypothesis rarely put forward until now. By contrast, Urartu did not have any visible examples, as the author confesses, except perhaps at Karmir-blur. The same applies to column bases: antecedents, be they simple tori or tori resting on a square plinth, should be sought in Syria and the Levant, and not in Urartu. Yet the habit of inscribing these bases really does seem to have been an innovation of Urartu, occurring as early as the late 9th century BCE, and not of Assyria, whose great centres did not make use of columns. Inscribing on column bases would not be a trait

adopted immediately in Persia (there are no examples of this at Pasargadae), but would only begin with Darius.

As a consequence of inverted dynamics, the two models of column base (the oriental type and the Lydian-Ionian one) would later spread from the empire's core to the South Caucasus in the 5th century BCE, mostly in regions without Urartian traditions, for instance Azerbaijan and Georgia. They would clearly mark the impact of the centre of power as Persian elements on virgin soil, while neighbouring regions would keep the influences of the Urartian period, but also adopt 'invisible' elements as Persian markers, if they are indeed markers. The author launches into a discussion on a ceramic category typical of North-Western Iran in the Achaemenid period (and in my opinion, of later centuries): painted Triangle or Ardebil Ware, which is a chronological marker, but one which does not imply imperial Persian influence. It is preferable to attribute such a production to Iron Age IV or to the Late Iron Age (LIA), an interval between the end of Urartu (which had very different pottery) and the beginning of the Parthian period, which therefore comprises the Achaemenid period. Such a production, therefore, is above all a chronological marker, but probably not a political and imperial one. The author nevertheless believes that it could have characterized local elites, for want of other testimonies such as architectural innovations and the production of luxury objects. This pottery, as well as other productions, is therefore very important in filling the precious gazetteer of some 100 sites described and tentatively dated: these are illustrated by a series of very informative maps. One can note that 72% of sites were settled before the Achaemenid period, at least certainly in the decades preceding the establishment of the empire. This distribution, therefore, shows much continuity.

These examples are an excellent illustration of the complexity of the issue mentioned at the beginning of these pages: that of the impact of imperial power, and of data allowing one to recognize this impact and assess its importance. In this respect, the final pages the author dedicated to the garden are entirely pertinent, and lead the reader to the matter of the complexity of legacies. The Persian *paridaidā/partetaš* is nowadays understood in its polysemic meaning, and its sense is above all utilitarian, since it is a park, garden, between orchard and agricultural farm, and nursery, functions much less known than those of the Greeks' *paradeisos*, most often a park for leisure or, in the case of the largest ones, hunting. The Persian garden has antecedents appearing on Neo-Assyrian reliefs, which show the digging of watercourses and the construction of pavillions. In Urartu, both Neo-Assyrian texts (Sargon's Eighth Campaign, for instance) and Urartian ones (but unfortunately without representations) are testimonies of the lavishness and luxuriance of well-watered gardens at sites such as Ulḫu, which can be described as a

garden city with its orchards and vineyards. These Urartian gardens were perhaps inspired by Neo-Assyrian examples, but both could have been models in Urartu capable of influencing the Persian elite in the empire's core and in the residences of satraps, for instance in the South Caucasus.

The pages concluding Roberto Dan's book bring the reader back to core issues mentioned at the beginning, on the origins of elements that constitute the culture of the empire's centre, the survival and visibility of the various elements present in the provinces around the end of the 6th century BCE, i.e. several decades after the disappearance of political entities which had created these elements in ancient Urartu and neighbouring regions. The search for continuities can only be based on a precise analysis of locations that have produced them, and on their chronology, which would demonstrate their survival during the period of the Great Kings. R. Dan's book contributes many answers, but also stimulating hypotheses, and these could be a source of inspiration when studying many of the empire's other regions.

RÉMY BOUCHARLAT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It had been a long time that I wanted to collect in one volume a series of contributions and reflections concerning the architecture and archaeology of the Achaemenid Empire. Most of these studies and reflections arise from the observation point provided by the Armenian Highlands and the South Caucasus, regions that are unique in many respects within the vast, complex panorama constituted by the territories that were part of the Achaemenid Empire. In these regions extraordinary evidence of the Persian presence—e.g. the trilingual inscription of Xerxes in Van, the only Achaemenid rock-cut inscription outside the Iranian plateau and one of the few outside the Achaemenid homeland—alternate with the general invisibility, from an archaeological perspective, of the trajectories of interaction with the imperial centre.

This work is certainly indebted to my academic and human relationships with Prof. Adriano V. Rossi and Prof. Elina Filippone with whom many of the topics introduced and developed in these pages have been discussed. I have to sincerely thank the institutions that have supported my scientific research path in recent years and that have allowed me to carry out this work, ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, Tuscia University and the ICEVO-CNR. Regarding the latter I must thank Prof. Mirjo Salvini who introduced me to the problems of cultural relations between the civilizations of the Armenian Highlands and those of the Iranian plateau. In particular, I will always keep in my mind and heart fond memories of the days spent exploring the capital of Urartu, the fortress of Van, with its remains from the Urartian and Achaemenid periods. I would like to express my gratitude to Rémy Boucharlat, who kindly read the drafts of this book, provided his meticulous and precious comments, and wrote the preface. Needless to say, the author alone assumes responsibility for any possible error in the text. For this volume I owe special thanks to my family, in particular my parents, as well as Marie-Claude Trémouille. With them in 2015 I had the opportunity to make a spectacular, and in some ways unrepeatable, trip to Iran, during which many of the images present in this volume were taken. I also have to sincerely thank Stephan Kroll with whom I had the honour and pleasure of exchanging information and opinions especially on the Lake Orumiyeh region. Over the years Stephan has shared with me many unpublished materials and perspectives on the issues of archaeology in North-Western Iran. In the same way, I want to remember and thank Ernie Haerinck and Gocha Tsatskheladze, with whom I had the opportunity to exchange ideas and information on some of the issues dealt with in this text. I owe a big thank-you to Raffaele Biscione too, for having discussed the archaeology of Iran so many times, especially as regards the North-West. It is also necessary to remember the re-

cently deceased colleague Hamid Khatib Shahidi, an important scholar of Urartu with whom I had the pleasure of conversing on specific issues relating to the Urartian presence in Iran, as well as his excavations at Bastam and Hasanlu. To my colleagues and friends Behrouz Khan Mohammadi and Reza Naseri I owe the opportunity to have been able to work on many unpublished sites and finds in the Iranian area. With them I was also able to discuss several of the topics dealt with here.

A particular thanks for direct and indirect contributions to the realization of this volume I owe to Beniamino Melasecchi and Gian Pietro Basello, with whom at different times and in diverse ways I was able to discuss various topics among those addressed in this text. To friends and colleagues Boris Gasparyan, Artur Petrosyan, Vakhtang Licheli, Sandra Heinsch, and Walter Kuntner, with whom I share my field research experiences in Armenia and Georgia, I dedicate a big and heartfelt thanks. I would like also to thank my Armenian friends and colleagues Pavel Avetisyan, Arsen Bobokhyan, Miqayel Badalyan, Yervand Grekyan, Hayk Avetisyan. It would not have been possible to go into detail on the relations between the Achaemenid Empire and the territories that we have investigated together—and will continue to investigate—without these deep collaborations and an unrepeatable unity of purpose. I would also like to thank Lorenzo Costantini and Stefano Russo, friends and colleagues with whom points of view have been exchanged countless times on some topics directly and indirectly connected to those covered in these pages. To Stefano in particular, I owe some of the images in this book. I have to reserve a special thanks to three dear friends, Ghasem Moradi, Mohammad Keshavarz Divkolaee and Faezeh Dadfar, with whom I had the opportunity to visit various parts of the great Iran, who accompanied me to extraordinary places, received me in their homes and made me feel part of their splendid families. Heartfelt thanks go to colleagues and inseparable companions of travels and adventures in the Caucasus and Near East. To Priscilla Vitolo I owe a constant and continuous discussion on multiple aspects of the research presented here; as I have already had occasion to recall on other occasions, her contribution to my research has been decisive. Also, to Andrea Cesaretti, Annarita Stefania Bonfanti, and Davide Salaris, I owe constant support and stimulating discussion on multiple issues addressed in this text.

My last expression of gratitude goes again to my family, Daniela, Maurizio and Stefano, to my wife Laura and my children Arianna and Alessandro, to whom this work is dedicated. I will not endeavour or desire to direct them towards historical and archaeological investigation, but it will instead be my duty to transmit the love and ardent passion for research, of whatever kind.