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Roberto Dan

From the Armenian Highland to Iran

A Study on the Relations between the Kingdom of Urartu
and the Achaemenid Empire



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sede legale: via Santa Maria in Gradi 4, 01100 Viterbo
www.ismeo.eu

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FOREWORD

This volume, the 4th of Serie Orientale Roma n.s., presents the work of archaeologist Roberto Dan, ISMEO member and long-term collaborator of CNR-ICEVO (now CNR-ISMA), who has participated for several years in archaeological missions in Armenia and Iran. In particular, the 2013 Mission in Armenia directed by him may be added to the list of archaeological expeditions that the new ISMEO (continuing the legacy of IsIAO) has conducted in recent years in Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan and Thailand.

The work formed part of the PRIN 2009 Project (2009JHSEE7) “Sedi del potere, comunicazione politica e società nell’Iran achemenide: ricerche e studi archeologici ed epigrafici”, directed at L’Orientale University by Adriano V. Rossi, and is fruit of the Author’s personal research in recent years.

The Author’s perspective is that of a specialist in South Caucasus cultures and in particular in the archaeology and history of Urartu; he offers a systematic and detailed analysis of the vexed question of the origins and development of the eclectic art of the Achaemenid Empire, a most interesting topic, to date mostly treated by specialists of ancient Iran in a superficial way. Those who in the past have written of the alleged Urartian-Iranian koinè, on the basis of an approximate knowledge of Urartian archaeology, have contributed to the creation of assumptions which – although mostly erroneous or unsupported by archaeological evidence – have proven surprisingly resistant over time.

Geographically, the question examined concerns an extensive territory, especially – as the title of the book makes clear – the Armenian and Iranian uplands. Historically, the period investigated is that between the progressive dissolution of the Urartian political system during the second half of the 7th century BC, and the gradual formation of the Achaemenid Empire in the years before the enthronement of Cyrus II the Great, i.e. mid-6th century BC.

In this obscure epoch the almost total absence of written documents, as frequently happens during such periods of the dissolution and renewal of



ancient political systems, renders impossible a detailed analysis of the possible dynamics of the relationship between these two political entities.

In this study, the Author outlines a varied picture of the cultural landscape in the centuries prior to the beginning of the Achaemenid civilization, and shows that Urartu played no special role in the formation and the definition of Achaemenid art, but was only one source of influence among many.

For the new perspectives it offers, it is to be hoped that this meticulous work will renew specialists' interest in the issues raised here, and that future archaeological and philological research will add much to the question of the extent and paternity of the cultural heritage that the "Age of Empires" bequeathed to the wide-ranging Achaemenid Empire.

MARCO MANCINI
President, ISMEO

ADRIANO V. ROSSI
Scientific Director, ISMEO

