

The State/Imperial Political Formation of the Achaemenid Dynasty, an Archaeological Question

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Con questo breve contributo desidero enfatizzare alcune questioni (epigrafiche, storiche, archeologiche, artistiche e architettoniche) relative alla dinastia achemenide. Tali problematiche sono riconosciute per essere piuttosto complesse, e questo breve testo non sarà certamente sufficiente a metterle in luce ogni singola sfumatura. Invero, anche se volessi discutere nuove sensazionali scoperte archeologiche, non sarebbe possibile risolvere un dibattito che si protrae tra gli studiosi da oltre un secolo. Questo articolo tratta la natura del sistema politico, la sua abilità nel comunicare l'informazione ideologica, l'inafferrabilità del dato archeologico, spesso difficile da ricondurre alla fase dinastica, e l'incredibile concentrazione della cultura architettonica e iconografica nel Fars, che rappresentano diversi elementi della grande complessità del periodo.

Introduction

The tradition of Achaemenid studies, in my opinion, in the last century of debate has not paid sufficient attention to the dynasty as an archaeological problem, with some commendable exceptions.

One issue is that the concrete and material consistency collected from contexts considered belonging to the dynasty, have always been taken for granted, whereas there is more than one aspect that remain quite controversial. The historiographical framework, although not supported by many sources (Kuhrt 2008), has always appeared sufficiently authoritative and comforting in order to not address those aspects that, from an archaeological point of view, are, at least, still questionable. Undeniably, the “considered” existing archaeological documentation relating to that dynasty and to that period focused on its political domain. However, in my opinion it presents enormous deficiencies and inner inconsistencies: i.e. poor reliability of the contexts from which many objects come, almost total absence of documentation in many peripheral areas of the political system, difficulty in finding correspondence between the information of the sources with the material witnesses, etc.

With this short and concise contribution,¹ I would like to emphasize, thus, aspects related to the Achaemenid dynasty on which I think it is necessary to pay the due attention in order to widen the long discussed debate between history and archaeology on one hand, and art, architecture and archaeology on the other. I will leave the reader to go through

¹ It is for me a great honor that this article appears in the *East & West Biannual Peer-Reviewed Scientific Journal* published by ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, a traditional journal of ISMEO/ISIAO before and now ISMEO. And for that I would like to thank A.V. Rossi and his staff for having hosted me in this volume of which I greet with joy and satisfaction the publication of the Volume n. 1 of the new series.