

Protecting the Southern Border and the Road to Muşaşir with “Ḫaldi’s Garrison:” Qalatgah, an Urartian and Achaemenid Period Archaeological Complex in the Lake Orumiyeh Basin, Iran

by ROBERTO DAN, BEHROUZ KHANMOHAMMADI

Il complesso fortificato di Qalatgah, pur non essendo mai stato oggetto di ricerche archeologiche sistematiche, è chiaramente uno dei siti più significativi per comprendere le complesse dinamiche che caratterizzarono l’età del ferro nell’Iran nord-occidentale. Il sito fu infatti uno dei primi avamposti urartei costruiti nell’area del bacino di Orumiyeh, al fine di assolvere a una serie di importanti funzioni militari. Questo contributo descrive i risultati di un’indagine effettuata dagli autori sulle strutture architettoniche e sui reperti raccolti nel sito, in vista della sua contestualizzazione storico-archeologica. Qalatgah può essere considerato uno dei siti chiave della media e tarda Età del Ferro nella regione.

INTRODUCTION

Among the many archaeological sites referable to the state of Bia/Urartu in the area of the Lake Orumiyeh basin, the great fortified centre of Qalatgah is undoubtedly one of the most important.¹ This site is highly significant for a series of reasons, first of all its geographical position in relation to the expansion of the state of Urartu in these regions. The site, as is discussed in this text, is situated at what was the extreme Southern border of the state of Urartu in the 9th and 8th century BCE. Qalatgah also controlled the main road that connected the capital of Bia/Urartu, Van fortress/Ṭušpa, to the international sanctuary dedicated to the god Ḫaldi, near Muşaşir, in the heart of the Zagros. Furthermore, from this site comes epigraphic material of the Urartian era which allows its precise historical-chronological contextualization. In addition, the site was re-occupied after a hiatus following the fall of Urartu, in the Achaemenid era. Generally considered one of the most important sites in the area (Muscarella 1969: 5), Qalatgah, whose name means the “place of the fortress” (*ibid.*), is an archaeological complex con-

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