Cover: Antonio Maria Vassallo, Childhood of King Cyrus. Oil on canvas. 74,5 x 110 cm.
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Plates
Preface

O my Friend in the Hot Country, what do you wish me to bring you?
The buds of the wild celery and snow-water are here at my side.
Put melting snow in the water-skin of scented leather,
And carry it to the Hot Country for the fever-stricken youth.

Baxtiyārī poem, Lorimer 1955: 103–107

The present book is a corrected and slightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation completed at the University of Kiel in 2014. The aim of this work is to provide a better understanding of the social organisation and the life-ways of the ancient peoples dwelling in the Zagros Mountains and to clarify their relationship with the surrounding environment and with the state authorities on the plains. The historical period considered here extends from the first Assyrian campaigns into the mountains northeast of Assyria to the Seleucid domination over the entire Zagros Mountains region (ca. 1100–150 BCE). Due to the almost complete absence of local textual sources for this period, the present investigation begins with the analysis of the documents mainly produced by state authorities who referred to this region and its peoples (Chap. 3–6). These authorities include the Assyrians, the Urartians, the Babylonians, the Elamites, the Achaemenids, Alexander the Great and the Seleucids. The analysis of these texts generates a framework that provides an overall picture of the Zagros societies and their relationship with the surrounding mountainous environment even in absence of local written sources. This framework, constructed through the available texts, is then bolstered by archaeological, ethnographic and palaeoecological data (Chap. 7–9).

The juxtaposition of sources from different disciplinary traditions is, in the opinion of the author, essential not only in order to better understand the ‘realities’ of the Zagros societies and their environment thanks to the availability of a wider spectrum of data, but also in order to verify the information supplied by the texts, which very often convey the perspectives of outsiders of both peoples and places of the Zagros. The approach adopted here aids in uncovering the literary topos and the biased ‘foreign’ and ‘ideological’ views, which often characterise the representation of the peoples of the Zagros in both Near Eastern and Classical sources. Such an interdisciplinary approach would not have been possible without the support of the Graduate School ‘Human Development in Landscapes’ at the University of Kiel, in the framework of which this research project has been conceived and realised. Furthermore, one of the strong facets of this work is the integration of data not only from different fields of the humanities but also from the natural sciences. This is a
scheme of scientific collaboration that has been fostered by the members of the GS and is worth continuing in future projects.

Although the aforementioned interdisciplinary approach has surely enriched an analysis that otherwise would have been irreparably biased and partial, the hypotheses that need to be verified are still as numerous as the unanswered questions. These questions mostly concern the ‘realities of life’ of the several peoples of the Zagros mentioned only once or twice in the texts. However, even for the political entities that are better documented, there are still problems of interpretation caused by long gaps in documentation and by the scanty ‘ethnographic’ interest that can be observed in most of the available sources. Moreover, the different quantity of texts available for the considered periods, the diverse nature of these texts and the various source languages often preclude a systematic and linear approach to these sources. The situation is not much better for the published studies of palaeoecological, zooarchaeological and archaeological material, which, with the exclusion of some recent important contributions by Iranian and international scholars, is often limited in scope, partial, preliminary or not up-to-date. Thus, writing about the peoples of the Zagros Mountains is a continuous challenge against the lack or the incompleteness of the sources. Hopefully, in the next years, a renewed program of surveys, core samplings and excavations in the intermontane plains and valleys as well as on the slopes, caves and summits of the Zagros Mountains will contribute new data to substantiate the hypotheses suggested in this work and to open up new research perspectives. The proliferation of new survey and excavation projects over the past few years in Iraqi Kurdistan and the recent increase in archaeological and palaeoecological investigations in Iran are undoubtedly hopeful signs in this direction.

The present lack and incompleteness of the sources justifies the wide perspective—in space and time—of this work. It is necessary in order to develop as clear and complete a picture as possible of the considered socio-political and economic phenomena and of their recurrence through an interregional and diachronic perspective. The recurrence of some phenomena, in fact, may indicate that there were strategies developed by the locals to adapt to the environment of the Zagros Mountains. These strategies, however, frequently remodelled themselves over time in order to deal with changes. The wide perspective adopted in this study does not aim at producing a uniform and static picture of the forms of social organisation and the way of life of the ancient peoples of the Zagros but, instead, it aims at highlighting differences and detecting shifts. Irrespective of the difficulties encountered, this work is the first attempt, after the corresponding chapter in État et pasteurs au Moyen-Orient ancien published by Briant in 1982, to write a socio-economic history of the ancient peoples of the Zagros Mountains in the 1st millennium BCE. While the classical perspective adopted in État et pasteurs does not deal with a significant number of Ancient Near Eastern sources and does not consider palaeoecological and archaeological data to support the reliability or unreliability of certain hypotheses of interpretation, the present work aims at giving a complete, up-to-date and interdisciplinary treatise on this topic.
Although the great majority of available written sources on the ancient peoples of the Zagros have been considered in the present analysis, some texts such as the passages on Median and Persian customs and institutions in Herodotus’s *Histories*, the fragments on the Medes of the *Persica* of Ctesias and other Greek authors, and Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* have been only indirectly dealt with. The choice not to systematically consider these texts here is mainly due to the significant problems of historical accuracy and reliability in Persian matter connected to them. These problems and issues, which have been masterfully highlighted in some recent studies, may create confusion and limit our comprehension of the ‘realities’ of the peoples of the Zagros.

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1 On the representation of the Medes and the Persians in Herodotus see in particular Meier-Patzek-Walter-Wiesehöfer 2004; Rollinger in press; Rollinger 2005; Wiesehöfer 2005; Rollinger in Lanfranchi-Rollinger 2010 and Rollinger-Truschnegg-Bichler 2011. As is clear from these studies and from what follows, especially Herodotus remains an important source for Persian history but the information contained in his work must be very cautiously interpreted in light of other sources. On Ctesias and other writers of *Persica* see Lenfant 2007 and 2011, Stronk 2010, Wiesehöfer-Rollinger-Lanfranchi 2011; on Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* as a problematic source for Iranian History see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1985 and Tuplin 2013. Some controversial biblical passages such as those on Darius the Mede in the book of Daniel are also intentionally excluded from this analysis (see Rowley 1964).