



CERULLI, ENRICO

CERULLI, Enrico (born Naples, 15 February 1898; died 1988), Italian orientalist and diplomat. Between 1950 and 1954 he served as ambassador to Tehran, where he became interested in Shi'ite passion plays (*ta'zias*), at that time held in low esteem in both official cultural and orthodox religious circles. As a young man Cerulli had studied the Semitic and Cushitic languages of Ethiopia with Francesco Gallina and Islamic studies with Giorgio Levi della Vida at the Oriental Institute of Naples (della Vida, p. 795). He then entered the colonial administration, where he rose rapidly, becoming vice-governor of what was then Italian East Africa at the age of thirty-nine. He also continued his scientific work, including a large number of contributions on the languages, literature, history, and ethnology of Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as investigations of relations between East and West in the Middle Ages.

During his stay in Tehran Cerulli became “the first who fully understood the scientific importance of the Persian dramatic production” (Rossi and Bombaci, p. xviii) and formed a collection of approximately 1,050 texts, which are now in the Vatican Library (Cerulli, 1954). In his work on the *ta'zia* he rejected earlier hypotheses that the plays might have been influenced by Western or Byzantine dramatic traditions, though he did admit the possibility of influences from the Far East (1971b). He traced the history of the genre to local Persian religious traditions and argued that its spread and eventual popularity were connected with the propagandistic aims of Shah Esmā'īl (907-30/1501-24), “l'inspireur premier des representations,” and his immediate successors. A catalogue of Cerulli's collection, with useful indexes, has been compiled by



Ettore Rossi and Alessandro Bombaci.

Cerulli also published on the development of the Persian middle class under the Pahlavi dynasty (1971a).

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(Filippo Bertotti)