



GABRIELI, FRANCESCO

GABRIELI, FRANCESCO, Italian Arabist and orientalist (b. Rome, 27 April 1904; d. Rome, 13 December 1996; [Figure 1](#)), who contributed to the study of Persian literature. His first contact with Arabic literature was through his father Giuseppe, who was the librarian of the Accademia dei Lincei and collaborated with Leone Caetani. Among Giuseppe's scholarly works is an important book on the pre-Islamic Arab poetess Ḳansā'. Francesco studied classical Arabic literature at the University of Rome, where he wrote his degree (*laurea*) thesis (1925) on the Arab poet Motanabbī under the guidance of Carlo Alfonso Nallino and Michelangelo Guidi (for excerpts of his translation of Motanabbī's poetry see his *Studi su al-Mutanabbī*, Rome, 1972, Appendix, pp. 115-29).

Gabrieli worked as an editor for classical antiquities and the East for *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1928-35) and taught Arabic language and literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples (1935-38). In 1938 he was appointed professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of Rome, where, until his retirement in 1979, he trained a good number of Italian Arabists, thus contributing a great deal to the advancement of Arabic studies in Italy.

The significance of Gabrieli's contribution was widely recognized. He was a national member of Accademia dei Lincei since 1957 and served as its president in the years 1985-88; from 1968 to 1977 he was president of Istituto per l'Oriente. He was awarded the Feltrinelli Prize for philology and literary criticism in 1955, the Levi Della Vida Medal for Islamic studies from the



University of California in Los Angeles in 1971, and the Balzan Prize for Oriental studies in 1983. He was also a member of many academies of Arabic language (including the academies of Cairo and Damascus), and was granted a doctorate *honoris causa* at La Nouvelle Sorbonne (Paris III) in 1973.

Gabrieli's scholarly interests were divided between Arabic literature and the history of Islam. During the first few years after his graduation, he devoted himself to the study of pre-Islamic and classical Arab poets, collecting the poetry of, among others, Jamīl b. 'Abd-Allāh 'Odrī (d. 82/701) and Kharijite poets. He studied the problem of the authenticity of *šo'lūk* poetry extensively; the importance of his insights on the matter has been widely recognized (see Blachère, pp. 285-86).

As a historian of Arabic literature, Gabrieli firmly adhered to the path of idealistic aesthetics as traced by Benedetto Croce; on several occasions he explicitly, and sometimes polemically, stated the right of Western scholars to examine and judge Arabic literature according to universal aesthetic criteria. This attitude sometimes led him to make substantially negative judgments about some major Arab poets, including Motanabbī.

Although the focus of Gabrieli's studies lay in Arabic literature (he was also the editor of the Italian translation of the *Alf layla wa layla* [*Le mille e una notte*, 4 vols., Turin, 1948; new ed., 1997]), the history of Persian literature was also an important area in his scholarly work: in this field, he produced a general introduction ("Letteratura persiana," in *Le civiltà dell'Oriente*, Rome, 1957, II, pp. 345-94) and several detailed studies. His first important contribution was the annotated translation of Abu'l-Ma'ālī's *Bayān al-adyān* (as "Un antico trattato persiano di storia della religione: *il Bayān al-adyān* di Abū'l-Ma'ālī Muḥammad ibn 'Ubaydallāh," in *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, series 6/8, 1932, pp. 587-644), with emendations to Charles Schefer's edition (he also later published a critical note on Schefer's translation of *Sīāsāt-nāma*: "Studi sul *Siyāset-nāme* I: Note al testo e alla traduzione Schefer," *Orientalia*, N.S. 7, 1938, pp. 80-94). A couple of years later he published a study on a poem by Ebrāhīm Pūr(-e) Dawūd, which he regarded as a revival of Ferdowsī's "national epics" ("Il poemetto d'un persiano moderno sulla fine dell'ultimo Sasanide," in *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana*, N.S. 3, 1934, pp. 82-93). In a short article in 1936, he took a middle position about the attribution of *Nowrūz-nāma* to 'Omar Ḳayyām ("Il '*Nawrūz-nāme*' e 'Omar Ḳayyām," *Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 8, 1936, pp. 83-86), which he regarded as possible, though not demonstrable. In another contribution he



refuted Evgenii Berthels' (q.v.) theory of a "Sunni re-adaptation," of Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow's *Safar-nāma*, by explaining the lack of reference to the author's conversion to Isma'īlism by appealing to the peculiarities of *reḥla* style ("Il 'Sefer-nāmeḥ' e la crisi religiosa di Nāṣir-i Ḥusraw," in *Atti del XIX Congresso internazionale degli Orientalisti, Roma, 1935*, Rome, 1938, pp. 556-59). His interest in the *Safar-nāma* was further shown in one of his last studies ("Il 'Sefer-nāme' e i Fatimidi d'Egitto," in *Studi iranici: 17 saggi di Iranisti italiani*, Rome, 1977, pp. 209-12).

After World War II, Gabrieli's interests focused more directly on Arabic studies; however, he selected and edited a *Šāh-nāma* anthology from the translation of Italo Pizzi (*Il libro dei re*, Turin, 1969). He also translated several Persian works into Italian, including the *Roba'iyāt* of 'Omar Ḳayyām, (tr. as *Quartine: le Rubaiyyāt*, Rome, 1973).

Parallel to his historico-literary works, Gabrieli published several studies about the history of Islam; he was mainly interested in the history of the caliphate and in the period of the Crusades. A sample of his various interests in history may be found in *L'Islām nella storia* (Bari, 1966; 3rd ed., 1989).

Gabrieli wished to make the products of his scholarship available to the general public, thereby contributing to a wider knowledge of the Islamic world among laymen. He wrote articles for newspapers, readily contributed to popular books, and made a deliberate effort to ensure the readability of his publications in works intended for specialists.

For a list of Gabrieli's publications, see his *festschrift* (Traini, ed., I, pp. ix-xix).

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