



ITALY V. IRANIAN STUDIES, PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

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The only comprehensive bibliographical repertory of studies on Iranian subjects, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, published in Italy is the *Bibliografia Italiana dell'Iran* by Angelo Michele Piemontese (1982). Though providing a very informative guide to the subject, it cannot be regarded as complete due to the vast time span (1462-1982) that it covers. Some information on Iranian studies in the 19th century can be found in a little-known article by Italo Pizzi (1897a), which outlines the course of Iranian studies in his time. The half-century 1861-1911 was not particularly fruitful for Iranian studies, so much so that in 1913 L. Bonelli could summarize the results in a series of brief notes. In 1935 Giuseppe Gabrieli published a bibliographical study of Oriental studies, which included Iranian studies. Subsequently Francesco Gabrieli (1950) briefly discussed Iranian studies in his "Cinquant'anni di studi orientali in Italia," while Alessandro Bausani devoted an article to the studies that had appeared between 1940 and 1950 (Bausani, 1950) and provided the chapter on Iran in a volume detailing the Italian contribution to Oriental studies (Bausani 1962). Two informative surveys of a more general scope were the article by Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin (1962) on ancient Iranian studies and the book by Adriano Valerio Rossi (1975) discussing the bibliography of Middle Persian



linguistics between 1966 and 1973. Iranian studies, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, were the subject of works by Giorgio Raimondo Cardona (1970) and Angelo Michele Piemontese (1982, 1988); these are rich in citations of earlier bibliographies. For more recent contributions of Italian scholars, one may consult, among others, the important bibliographies by Ursula Weber and Josef Wiesehöfer (1996), focused on the Achaemenid period and by Gunner B. Mikkelsen (1996) on Manicheism. Classical studies and other related fields are not considered here. On Zoroaster's character as represented by authors who flourished during the Renaissance and early modern period, one may profitably consult the first volume of the work by Michael Stausberg (1998).

Although Italian contacts with Iran date from ancient times, scientific interest in pre-Islamic Iran cannot be traced earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century. Early works which touched on the Avestan ("Zend") language were published by Lorenzo Hervás (1735-1809; e.g., Hervás, 1767). Also, the discoveries of Anquetil Duperron (q.v.) found an echo in the journal *Novelle letterarie pubblicate in Firenze* as early as 1762. But these were isolated cases. The first Italian scholar to study Iranian languages in depth was the philologist Giacomo Lignana (1827-91), who took part in the embassy, which the newly unified Kingdom of Italy sent in 1862 to the Qajar court. Lignana was both a scholar and politician (he served as counselor to one of the main builders of the modern Italian state, Camillo Benso Count of Cavour), and had studied Indian languages under Christian Lassen and Iranian languages under Friederich von Spiegel. Professor of historical linguistics ("Lingue e letteratura comparate"), first in Naples (1861-71), and then in Rome (from 1871), he was to open the way not only to the teaching of Persian language and literature but also to the philological and linguistic study of other Iranian languages. Despite his friendship with Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, a man considered the founder of Italian linguistic studies, Lignana opposed his idea of separating the teaching of linguistics from literary studies, and succeeded in maintaining his Roman chair as the only one where both subjects could be taught. His unpublished papers on Iranian subjects are now preserved in the Fondo Pullé of the Italian National Library in Florence (Dovetto, 1989 and 1991). Ascoli himself wrote a number of contributions on Old Persian, as well as on other aspects of Iranian languages, although Iranian was far from being his main interest. Almost a generation later Leone Caetani (1869-1935), well known as a scholar of Islam and author of the monumental work *Annali dell' Islam*, took an interest in pre-Islamic Iran, although it was limited to the fate of Christianity in that region (Caetani, 1906).



The first Italian scholar to entirely devote himself to Iranian studies was Italo Pizzi (1849-1920). From 1885 onwards he taught Iranian subjects at the University of Turin, first as Chair of Persian language and literature, then teaching Iranian philology as well. He was more a man of letters than a scholar in the modern sense of the word, not being influenced in the least by the great achievements attained by European philology and historical linguistics in that century. He did, however, write a grammar of the two known Old Iranian languages (1897), and translated passages from the Avesta (1914) and occasional excerpts from Pahlavi literature. A less known scholar, also active between the 19th and 20th century was Francesco (Franz) Cannizzaro (1867-1914; q.v.) who met an untimely death at the age of forty-six. He published a translation of the third chapter of the *Vidēvdād* (1913), but his main contribution to Iranian studies, the complete translation of this same book, was put together from his handwritten notes by his father, Tommaso, and I. Pizzi, and appeared in 1916.

Two linguists born at the end of the 19th century were bound to play a very active role in establishing Iranian languages as an independent field of study in Italy: Vittore Pisani (1899-1991) and more importantly, Antonino Pagliaro (1898-1973). Pisani's interest in Iranian studies was only secondary, a small component of his broader interests which focused mainly on Indo-European linguistics and Indian languages. Conversely, one of Pagliaro's main fields of interest was Iranian studies, to which he contributed widely. He had studied ancient and Middle Iranian languages under the renowned German scholar Christian Bartholomae (q.v.) in Münster. After returning to Rome, he taught *Filologia Iranica* (Iranian philology) for many years while officially in charge of the chair called *Glottologia* (general linguistics) at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Rome "La Sapienza." In the field of Iranian studies, Pagliaro's main interest was the Book of Pahlavi, though he also contributed a number of important articles on Old Iranian languages, on the Zoroastrian religion, and on the so-called *irano-graeca*, that is, Iranian loanwords in the works of Greek authors (see Belardi, 1992, pp. 75-78). Particularly interesting are his articles in the field of Middle Iranian (such as the contributions to the study of the Middle Persian juridical vocabulary) and his in-depth study of the history of the game of chess. Very early in his life, Pagliaro began the study of the Book of Pahlavi, a field in which he was to become one of the main experts of his age. At the age of 26, he prepared an edition of the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān* (1925), Two years later he published a translation of the same text as well as of the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšīr ī Pābagān* in a series meant for a wider literary



public. Later in his life he edited the *Wizārišn ī čātrang* (1951), a text which in 1936 had been the subject of a dissertation by his pupil and subsequently teaching assistant, Mario Lucidi. The same text has recently been the subject of a detailed study by Antonio Panaino (1999). Though mainly interested in the non-religious Pahlavi texts, Pagliaro also wrote an important synthesis of pre-Islamic Iranian literature for a volume improperly named *La letteratura persiana* (“Persian literature”), which he wrote together with Alessandro Bausani, who was responsible for the Islamic section (cf. Belardi, 1992).

Among Pagliaro’s students, it was Walter Belardi who took up the task of continuing Iranian studies in Rome. A specialist in historical and general linguistics, like his teacher, Belardi always considered Iranian, and more particularly Middle Iranian, as one of his favorite fields of research. Among his main contributions to the study of the Pahlavi texts we may instance his significant edition of the first two chapters of the *Ardā Wirāz nāmag* (1979). Two years earlier he had published the important, but not sufficiently well-known volume which goes under the title of *Studi mithraici e mazdei*, in which he discussed problems related to the figure of Mithra, theology and astronomy in the Zoroastrian calendar, the *corpus* of the Avestan *Yašts*, and the manuscript tradition of the *Bundahišn*. Not least among his merits was his ability to transmit his passion for Iranian studies to a number of his former students. Walter Belardi shares with Giancarlo Bolognesi, a pupil of Vittore Pisani, an enthusiasm for the Armenian language. Both have published important articles on Iranian loanwords in Armenian, but Bolognesi’s book on the dialectology of Iranian loans in Armenian (1960) is especially significant for this field. Among the earlier studies on pre-Islamic Iran, the contribution by the Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938) is particularly stimulating. He profoundly studied the translation movement in the caliphate period and the character of Ebn al-Moqaffa’ (q.v.), and while engaged in this he wrote a seminal work on the role played by Middle Persian in transmitting a number of Greek texts to the Arabs (1922).

Father Giuseppe Messina (1893-1951) belonged to the same generation as Pagliaro. He studied under Josef Markwart (Marquart) and edited posthumously a few of his mentor’s works (*inter alia* Markwart, 1930, 1931). Active at the Pontificio Istituto Biblico in Rome, he bestowed his private library—containing many of Markwart’s books—on the Institute, where they are still preserved. In the field of pre-Islamic Iran he dedicated many efforts to the understanding of Zoroastrian eschatology, publishing an important essay



on the *Saošiānt-* (1932) and editing the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg*, thus naming the text which he had obtained by collating a number of Middle Persian, New Persian and Pāzand texts belonging to the *Jāmāspi* tradition previously studied by Jivanji Jamshedji Modi, among others. He also studied with useful results the tradition relative to the Zoroastrian Magi and their connection with the Christian tradition (1930, 1933). In his later years Father Messina devoted himself to the study of a New Persian *Diatesseron* and was able to prove that this Harmony of the Gospels was translated from a Syriac original.

Though principally an Assyriologist, Giuseppe Furlani (1885-1963) also wrote extensively on the Elamite and Parthian civilizations, as well as on the Mandaean religion and the modern Yazidis, the latter a subject also touched upon by the Islamist Michelangelo Guidi (1886-1946; cf. Piemontese, 1982, pp. 792-804 and *passim*). Another scholar of Islamic studies, Mario Grignaschi, has discovered and accurately described Arabic translations of important Sasanian-based texts such as the *Kār-nāmag of Anōšīravān* and the *Testament of Ardašīr* (1966). Moreover, he has studied the administrative reform of Kōsrow I and the influence of Sasanian statecraft on Islamic practice (1970, 1976).

More at home in the field of art history, the orientalist Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881-1954) shared Messina's interest in the Magi and keenly studied the various Oriental legends which contributed to the art of the establishing of the traditional image of the gospel Magi (1952). He also devoted his time to Manichean art, particularly to that religion in eastern areas. Though capable of making innovative contributions to the topics he tackled, his main field of interest remained art, and he wrote an interesting introduction to history of Iranian art of both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods (1954). Another art historian deeply interested in history was Mario Bussagli (1917-88), who worked at the school of Oriental studies of the University of Rome, specializing in Indian and Central Asian art and culture (1963, 1970). Though Italian scholars have not actively participated in the systematic investigation of Iranian numismatics, Alberto M. Simonetta and Bono Simonetta have produced a number of interesting studies mainly focused on the Parthian period.

The contribution of the school of religious studies of the University of Rome was also particularly important, both in volume and quality. Among the various scholars who wrote on Iranian and related subjects, several are particularly noteworthy. The first to take an active interest in Iranian religions



was Uberto Pestalozza (1872-1966), who wrote mainly on Manicheism (1964), soon followed by Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883-1963), who was to analyze both Zoroastrianism and the Mithraic cult, publishing an informed and innovative volume on Zoroaster's religion (1920). He was followed by Ugo Bianchi (1922-95), who studied Gnosticism and dualism with particular attention to the Iranian world (1958a, 1978). Mithraism, both in the Roman and in the Eastern world, was likewise central to his interests (1979). He also contributed greatly to our understanding of the question of Zurvanism. In fact, he devoted many articles and a thought-provoking volume to the question of Time in Iranian religion (1958b).

Alessandro Bausani (1921-88) is no doubt the most important Italian scholar of Islamic Iran. From 1957 he taught at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples from where he moved to the University "La Sapienza" of Rome in 1971. It is fair to state that every Italian Iranist has been his student, either directly or indirectly. Less well known is his contribution to the understanding of pre-Islamic Iran. His most important contribution to Iranian studies is the volume *Persia Religiosa* (1959) recently translated into English (2000), a seminal work in which he sets out to prove the trends of continuity in the discontinuity that characterize the Iranian religious world of both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods without surrendering to the then current nationalistic interpretation of religious history. He further underlined the contribution of Mesopotamian and Near Eastern thought to Iranian religion, a contribution which he understood as complementary to the Indo-European heritage. In the field of pre-Islamic Iran he also published an interesting booklet containing a complete translation of the *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī xrad* (q.v.) and *Čēdag andarz ī pōryōtkēšān* (see ANDARZ) and excerpts from the *Bundahišn* and *Dēnkard* (qq.v.).

One of Italy's more prominent orientalists, Giuseppe Tucci (1894-84) began his scholarly career with pre-Islamic Iran. His earliest publications concerned the second *fargard* of the *Vidēvdād* (1913-14) and the funerary customs of the ancient Persians (1914). Later he pursued interests in other fields of Oriental studies, but as President of IsMEO (now IsIAO), the Institute he led from 1947 to 1978, he returned to the Iranian world and launched major archeological and restoration programs in Iran. The IsMEO first sent an archeological mission to Ghazni in 1957, and then carried out substantial investigations and conservation works in Sistān (1959), at Persepolis and Isfahan (1964). (See below, vii and viii.)



Prof. Gherardo Gnoli (1937-), President of IsIAO, who at present holds a chair of Iranian Studies at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” is the undisputed founder of contemporary pre-Islamic studies in Italy; he sponsored this field first as professor and rector of the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples and subsequently in his present responsibilities.

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