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ITALY VII. IRANIAN STUDIES, ISLAMIC PERIOD
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The earliest known references to Persia by Italian writers are gleaned from numerous notes in the oldest medieval travel accounts, dating from the 13th century onwards. Marco Polo's *Il Milione* (comp. 1298), which is a great inventory of literary traditions (see Gabriel, pp. 35-39), contains interesting observations on Persia, particularly on the cities Tabriz, Solṭāniya, Sāva, Kāšān, Yazd, and Kerman). So does the *Itinerarium* of the Dominican monk Ricoldo da Monte Croce (1243-1320). The first scientific study of the Persian language began in the context of Franciscan and Dominican missionaries in Iran, Armenia, and the Crimea, from which originated the so-called *Codex Cumanicus* (Cod. Mar. Lat. DXLIX, Biblioteca Marciana, Venice). This is a Persian-Latin-Cuman Turkish dictionary, which was probably redacted around 1330 (it may have belonged to the personal library of Francesco Petrarca, 1304-74). The first attempt to render a formal transcription system of Persian in Latin characters, and with diacritic signs, has been found on the margins of a manuscript of a Persian translation of the Four Gospels dated 738/1338 (Vatican Apostolic Library, MS Borg. Pers. 19). The glosses, especially those inserted in St. John's Gospel, reveal a deep knowledge of Persian lexicon and syntax, and show an advanced method of transliteration. The author of

the glosses may possibly be identified as Giovanni of Florence (d. 1347), a Dominican priest who served as the bishop of Tiflis and was active for many years in the monastery of Kirnë in Azarbaijan (Piemontese, 2000, p. 125).

Outside of these restricted circles, knowledge of Persian long remained superficial. In cultivated European milieus, the existence of another literary language of the Islamic Orient distinct from Arabic was not really clear. A new process of conscious political observation and of the cultural discovery of Persia emerged with the accession of Uzun Ḥasan (r. 1457-78). The interest, particularly of the Republic of Venice and the Papacy, in the possibility of establishing a common alliance with Persia against the Ottomans, led to an active exchange of embassies (see above, ii). A secondary result of this activity on the Italian side was the publication of numerous accounts of Persia, mainly geopolitical in character. The travel diaries of the Venetian envoys Giosafat Barbaro (1413-94, q.v.) and Ambrogio Contarini (1429-99, q.v.), although mainly concerned with the figure of Uzun Ḥasan and his reign, also recount the general situation of the country and contain detailed descriptions of the towns they visited (Lockhart et al, 1973). The documents and considerations collected in the *Diarii* of Marin Sanudo il Giovane deal with the rise to power of Shah Esmāʿil (see Scarcia Amoretti, 1979), and Michele Membré's *Relazione di Persia* (1542) is a most objective source on Safavid power under Shah Ṭahmāsp I. The period between the rise of Uzun Ḥasan and the death of Shah Esmāʿil is also treated in an interesting, firsthand chronicle ascribed to Giovanni Maria Angiolello (d. 1525, q.v.), a Venetian merchant enslaved by the Ottomans and then sent twice on missions to Persia. The accession of Shah Esmāʿil, the "Sofi," was widely noticed in Italy, where he was even popularly seen (as a recently discovered note by Leonardo da Vinci indicates) as a "new prophet" (Ponte, 1977). (For bibliography of the travelers and their works, see above, iii.)

From the middle of the 16th century, the acquisition of an increasing number of Persian manuscripts laid the basis for direct research on Persian language and literature as distinct from Arabic and Turkish, and thereby for penetration into the heart of Persian culture. A first step was taken in 1548 when Stefan V, patriarch of the Christian province of Greater Armenia, whose capital was at the time Tabriz, presented Pope Paul III with a rare Persian Gospel, now conserved in Florence. Of greater impact was the introduction inside an erudite Venetian circle, via a certain Christoforo Armeno, of the reworked translation of some Persian text that was based, it appears,

primarily on the poem *Hašt behešt* (comp. 700/1301) by Amir Ḵosrow Dehlavi (q.v.). The translation was published as *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del re di Serendippo* (Pilgrimage of the three princes of Serendip; Venezia 1557). This, the first Persian literary text to be published in a European language, was an enormous success and was translated elsewhere in Europe (Cerulli, 1975), contributing to the birth of the genre of the detective novel and occasioning the coinage (by Horace Walpole in 1754) of the new word “serendipity.”

Also in the 16th century, some Oriental works were published, for the first time in Europe, in several Italian towns. In 1584 Giovan Battista Raimondi (ca. 1536-1614), professor of mathematics and philosophy, founded in Rome the Medici Oriental Press (Stamperia orientale Medicea), which printed several Arabic and Persian texts; these included the first printing of Avicenna’s (q.v.) medical Canon (*al-Qānun fe’l-ṭebb*) in 1593. Raimondi, the “greatest Italian Orientalist of the age defined the Persian language as the most beautiful in the world, divinely endowed with the spirit of expression of concepts in poetry” (Piemontese, 1988, p. 101). Yet the majority of Raimondi’s editions and translations of Persian texts and lexicons, as well as his studies, including a noteworthy Persian grammar, remained in draft form. His print sample of a *ḡazal* by Šāhi Sabzavāri (d. 857/1453) survives in Florence, even though not published, and represents the first Persian text ever printed. Between 1591 and 1607, Giovan Battista Vecchietti and his brother, Gerolamo, traveled to Egypt, Persia, and India and collected Arabic and Persian manuscripts, they collaborated with Raimondi. Giovan Battista had a good knowledge of Persian, and he laid the foundations for the study of Judeo-Persian literature (q.v.). Gerolamo brought to Italy from Cairo a codex (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Fondo Magliabechi, MS C1. III.24) which is the oldest extant manuscript of the (first half of the) *Šāh-nāma* of Ferdowsi, dated 614/1217 (Piemontese, 1980). The pioneering works of these three scientists and philosophers-turned-orientalists had a great impact on “the European scientific and Orientalist circles” (Piemontese, p. 101).

In the 17th century, with the decline in Venetian power, Italian Oriental studies tended to return to the dominion of ecclesiastical institutions, such as the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, whose main attention continued to be devoted to practical linguistic matters, and which in 1654 printed the first Persian grammar by an Italian scholar. The work was written by the Carmelite Ignazio di Gesù, a missionary and author of a Latin-Persian lexicon and of another interesting transliteration system for Arabic script (on him, see also

MANDAEANS i. HISTORY at *iranica.com*). Another Christian missionary, Maurizio Garzoni, published the first European grammar of the Kurdish language in 1787. The other field of ecclesiastical engagement was the Islamic-Christian controversy, in which the Roman traveler and scholar Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652, q.v.) also took part. Yet Della Valle's activity went further. Besides writing valuable accounts of his stay at the court of Shah ʿAbbas I in Isfahan, he collected and studied several Persian manuscripts. He was among the first Europeans to write Persian in Arabic script, and probably the first to spread Hafez's fame through European literary circles (Bertotti, 1990). Thereafter, to the end of the 18th century, Iranian studies in Italy on the whole waned, although some important manuscript collections were acquired, such as those of the scientist, L. F. Marsili (1658-1730), of Bologna and of the antiquarian, J. Nani (1725-1797), in Venice.

A renewed interest in Iran followed the rise to political ascendancy of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia (from the 1830s on), and the expansion of its political aim to encompass unification of the Italian states. To the Sardinian diplomat and orientalist, Romualdo Tecco, we owe the formation of the collection of Persian manuscripts in the Royal Library in Turin. The Italian diplomatic mission to Persia in 1862 had important implications for scholarship. For the occasion G. Berchet was commissioned to produce his book *La repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* (Torino, 1865), which documented the relations between the Republic of Venice and Persia, from Uzun Ḥasan's time onward. Moreover, one of the embassy's members, Giacomo Lignana (1827-91), on his return laid the foundation for teaching Persian at the Naples Oriental Institute [Istituto Universitario Orientale] (1863-65), a task later continued by G. de Vincentiis (1845-1907), and Luigi Bonelli (1865-1947). The chair for teaching Iranian languages at Rome University was established in 1871. In Turin, Italo Pizzi (1849-1920), a scholar of classical Persian literature, completed his verse translation of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma*. Among his students were V. Rugarli (1860-1900) and C. A. Nallino, who both contributed in different fields of Iranian studies. Until the middle of the 20th century, however, Iranian studies in Italy were not conducted by specialists, but by scholars of other fields associated in varying degrees with the Iranian world and culture: islamists, arabists, turcologists, historians of religion, linguists, and others. During this period contributions to the study of Islamic Iran were made by Leone Caetani (1896-1935), U. Monneret de Villard (1881-1954), Ettore Rossi (1894-1955), E. Cerulli (1898-1988), and F. Gabrieli (1904-96). Caetani collected the Persian manuscripts now in the Lincei Academy in Rome. Cerulli

brought to Italy a collection of 1,055 manuscripts and some lithographed books concerned with the passion plays (*taʿzia*); housed in the Vatican Library (Rossi and Bombaci), these have constituted the basis for specialized contributions on the subject by Italian scholars. In addition to the above collections, thirty Italian libraries in fifteen different towns at present count over 400 other Persian manuscripts (Piemontese, 1989, pp. XV-XX).

After World War II, the transformation of Italy from a prevalently agricultural into an industrial country had consequences also on university structure. In the area of Iranian studies, study groups and single researchers have developed increasingly specialized fields and methodologies, at a pace with the contemporary world's scientific tendencies. In 1957, for the first time a chair of Persian language and literature was set up at the Naples Oriental Institute (now L'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"), first held by A. Bausani (1921-88). Since the middle of the 20th century, all aspects of Persia in the Islamic period—language, literature, history, religious history, law, etc.—have been subjects of study in Italy, and many classical and less renowned literary texts have been translated from Persian into Italian. At present four Italian universities (Naples, Rome, Venice, Bologna) house chairs devoted to different fields of studies on Islamic Iran, and since 1984 a specialized Ph.D. program in Iranian studies has treated subjects related to both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods. A scholarly association, Societas Iranologica Europaea (see www. societasiranologicaeu.org), was founded in 1983 in Rome, at the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente [IsMEO] (now Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente [IsIAO]; for these, see below, vii.a and b), to promote Iranian studies with the participation of scholars worldwide. Its first congress was held in Turin in 1987.

See also below, xvi. CURRENT CENTERS OF IRANIAN STUDIES IN ITALY.

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