



ITALY VIII. PERSIAN MANUSCRIPTS

ITALY

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Italy houses 439 Persian manuscripts in two public archives and thirty public libraries located in fifteen different cities. All of them have been catalogued by Angelo Michele Piemontese (1989). Three more manuscripts are preserved at the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Villa “I Tatti” in Florence, which, besides the three bound codices, possesses some loose folios from Persian manuscripts as well. Paintings in Persian manuscripts from the Harvard University Center (the Berenson collection) have been studied by Richard Ettinghausen (q.v.) in 1962, and their description is given by Piemontese (1984a). Additionally, within Vatican City, 189 Persian manuscripts are preserved at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (hereinafter the Vatican Library): 158 are part of the Vatican collection, 23 of the Borgia collection, 6 of Barberini collection, and 2 of Rossi collection. These manuscripts were catalogued by Ettore Rossi (1948). The Vatican Library also owns an important collection of Persian religious dramas (*ta'zia*). This collection was acquired by Enrico Cerulli (q.v.) during one of his sojourns in Iran in 1950-54 as the Italian ambassador. It was catalogued by Ettore Rossi and Alessio Bombaci (1961) and includes 1055 manuscripts, of which 15 are in Turkish, and a few others are written in both Turkish and Persian. Finally, 13



Persian manuscripts are part of a collection, mostly Arabic, purchased by the Vatican in 1927 and known as the Sbath collection, so called after the Syrian priest, Paul Sbath (1887-1945), whose original name was Bulos Sbāṭ al-Soryāni al-Ḥalabi, and who himself was a collector of manuscripts. Persian manuscripts of the Sbath collection were described by Piemontese (1978).

Apart from the Vatican Library, other Italian libraries that own the larger number of Persian manuscripts are: the Medicean-Laurentian Library in Florence (83 MSS); the Library of the University of Bologna and the Library of the National Academy of the Lincei in Rome (60 MSS each); the Marciana National Library in Venice (46 MSS); and the Ambrosiana Library in Milan (37 MSS). In fact, Persian manuscripts preserved in Italy are parts of larger collections of Oriental codices which, starting in the Renaissance period, were acquired for different reasons by various Italian courts, or through the initiative of noble families, religious institutions, and important members of the Catholic church, as well as individual scholars and travelers. The geographical dispersion of the manuscripts, which had been usually kept in Oriental funds without any linguistic distinction (except for the funds of the Vatican Library), has been a major obstacle for identifying and cataloguing them (for an updated report on the localization of Islamic manuscripts with references to the published and unpublished catalogues see Heine for the Vatican; and Orsatti, Pirone, and Gallotta for Italy).

Italy was the first European country to collect Oriental manuscripts. The history of acquiring Persian manuscripts for Italian collections is discussed in the studies of Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1939), Ettore Rossi (1948, pp. 11-16), Angelo Michele Piemontese (1979a, 1982, 1989), Stephan Roman (pp. 140-65), and Paola Orsatti (1996b, pp. 168-73). The first Persian manuscript in an Italian library appears to have been a copy of the Gospel of Matthew in Persian dated 712/1312 (MS Vat. Pers. 4), acquired by the Vatican Library before 1570 (Levi Della Vida, pp. 167-69; Rossi, 1948, pp. 29-30; for the Persian copies of the Gospels preserved in Italy and in the Vatican see Rossi, 1948, index; Piemontese, 1989, esp. pp. 228-29; Gulbenkian).

It was also in Rome, during the late 16th and early 17th century, that an important initiative led to an interest in collecting Oriental manuscripts in general, including the Persian ones. Under Pope Gregory XIII (1572-85), the printing house ‘Stamperia Orientale Medicea’ was founded by Cardinal Ferdinando I de’ Medici (1549-1609, Grand Duke of Tuscany from 1587) in order to print texts that could be used in promoting Catholicism among



Muslims, and for refuting the rites of Eastern Christians. In 1586 Ferdinando I de' Medici acquired a collection of more than 100 Oriental manuscripts, including some Persian, from the Jacobite Patriarch Ignazio Ne'mat-Allāh Aşfar of Mardin. Other Persian manuscripts were purchased for the 'Stamperia Orientale Medicea' by the brothers Giovan Battista Vecchietti (1552-1619), and Gerolamo Vecchietti (1557-ca. 1640), during their several missions to the East commissioned by the papacy. Furthermore, Giovan Battista reached Persia and India during one of his Oriental journeys (1598-1608) and became particularly excited by the Persian translations of Biblical texts and by the Judaeo-Persian texts which he collected (Almagià, pp. 321-23, 339). The manuscripts, either specially acquired by the Vecchietti brothers for the 'Stamperia Orientale Medicea' or collected on their own, are at present scattered among different libraries: the Medicean-Laurentian Library and the National Library in Florence, the Vatican Library, the National Libraries in Naples and Venice, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (Richard, 1980).

Gerolamo Vecchietti purchased in Cairo the most remarkable Persian manuscript preserved in Italy—a copy of the *Šāh-nāma* dated 30 Moḥarram 614/9 May 1217 (Florence, National Library, MS Magl. III.24; Piemontese, 1989, no. 145), which contains the first part of the epic only. The manuscript, identified and described by Piemontese (1980), is the earliest known dated manuscript of Ferdowsi's poem, and it was used as the basis for the critical edition of the *Šāh-nāma* by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh (8 vols., New York, 1988-2007; see also idem, 1985-86, I, pp. 380-81; II, pp. 31 ff.). The manuscript has been reproduced in Tehran both in facsimile (Ferdowsi, 1369 Š./1990) and as a typeset edition (Ferdowsi, 1996-98, 2 vols., publication still continues at the time of writing this article).

Among the manuscripts brought to Italy by Giovan Battista Vecchietti, mention should be made of a copy of the Judaeo-Persian Pentateuch, preserved at the Vatican Library as MS Vat. Pers. 61 (Rossi, 1948, p. 87). Ignazio Guidi (q.v.) made a preliminary study of it, and Herbert Paper published the text in Latin transliteration (1965-68). The National Library in Naples possesses a copy of the Persian version of the Book of Psalms (MS III.G.34; Piemontese, 1989, no. 233), which was made in Lār in 1601 under the supervision of Giovan Battista Vecchietti (an identical 'twin' manuscript is preserved in Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris as MS Supplément persan 1; see Richard, 1980, pp. 295-96). In 1602 Vecchietti brought from Hormuz a copy of Asadi-Ṭusi's (ca.



1000-1072/73, q.v.) Persian lexicon entitled *Loḡat-e fors*, which is dated to 733/1332-33 and is preserved in the Vatican Library as MS Vat. Pers. 22 (Rossi, 1948, pp. 49-51). This manuscript was used as the main copy in Paul Horn's edition of the text published in Berlin in 1897 (Horn).

The collection of manuscripts that once belonged to the Patriarch Ignazio Ne'mat-Allāh Aşfar includes a 16th-century copy (dated 8 Šawwāl 954/21 November 1547) of a 13th-century Persian *Diatessaron*, that is a compilation in which the four Gospels are 'harmonized' in a single work. At present, it is preserved as MS Or. 81 in the Medicean-Laurentian Library in Florence (Piemontese, 1989, no. 140; studied and edited by Messina in 1943 and 1951).

The superintendent of the 'Stamperia Orientale Medicea', Giovan Battista Raimondi (d. 1614), left behind numerous texts on Persian linguistics in manuscript form, which are at present dispersed as separate manuscripts between libraries in Florence and Venice (Piemontese, 1979b). Based on Raimondi's studies and translations of Persian lexicons and grammars, Flaminio Clementino Amerino—one of Raimondi's collaborators, who worked in the convent of the Chierici Regolari Minori in Rome and is otherwise unknown—compiled a grammatical text in 1614 that is considered the earliest unpublished Persian grammar written in Europe. It is preserved as MS Vat. Pers. 24 in the Vatican Library (Kromov; Piemontese, 1989, p. 93; Orsatti, 1996a, pp. 559-61).

In the 17th-century Italy, the interest towards Persian studies and towards collecting Persian manuscripts became mainly the prerogative of the religious and missionary circles. The Borgia collection, which the Vatican Library acquired in 1902 from Propaganda Fide (founded in 1622), perfectly represents this type of interest, mostly religious and linguistic, that the missionary community had in Oriental cultures (Orsatti, 1996b). Among the 23 Persian manuscripts of the Borgia collection, particularly important are some lexicographical works (MSS Borg. Pers. 2, Borg. Pers. 11, Borg. Pers. 12, Borg. Pers. 14, Borg. Pers. 15, and Borg. Pers. 17), and two copies of Persian versions of the Gospels (MSS Borg. Pers. 18 and Borg. Pers. 19; for the latter see Piemontese, 2000 and 2001).

An important group of Persian manuscripts in the Vatican library comprises 29 codices brought from the East by Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652, q.v.). These manuscripts have been preserved in the Vatican since 1718 and were identified as part of the Vatican collection by Rossi (1948, pp. 12-13). This



group of manuscripts includes copies of the works of Persian classical poets, such as Neẓāmi Ganjavi, Sa‘di, Ḥāfeẓ (Della Valle was the first who introduced Ḥāfeẓ in Europe; see Bertotti), Jāmi, and Hātefi; works of religious disputes, including a treatise written in Persian by Della Valle himself during his stay in Isfahan in 1621 (for works on Islamic-Christian disputes in Persian see Piemontese, 1989, esp. pp. 201-2; Orsatti, 1992); works that document Persian linguistic studies at the Carmelite (see CARMELITES IN PERSIA) mission in Isfahan where Della Valle himself studied Persian; and a copy of Persian lexicographical work *Majma‘ al-fors* of Soruri, transcribed for Della Valle under the supervision of the author (MS Vat. Pers. 69; Rossi, 1948, pp. 91-92). Finally, Pietro Della Valle brought to Italy two apparently unique manuscripts—two historical poems composed by Qadri Širāzi (first half of the 17th century) that describe historical events of Della Valle’s time, like the fights between the Portuguese and Safavid forces in 1622 for gaining control over islands in the Persian Gulf. These texts are the *Jang-nāma-ye Kešm* (MS Vat. Pers. 30; Rossi, 1948, pp. 56-57; published by Bonelli), and the *Fath-nāma* (Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS γ.F.6.22; Piemontese, 1989, no. 216; Pudoli, 1985; Pistoso; published by Pudioli in 1987-88). Another poem by Qadri Širāzi entitled *Jarun-nāma* speaks about the Safavids taking the island of Hormuz (Jarun) back from the Portuguese; it is preserved in the British Library in London as MS Add. 7801 (Rieu, II, p. 681).

Most of the Persian manuscripts preserved in the Bologna University Library come from the collection of Oriental manuscripts (mainly Arabic and Turkish) acquired by the scientist, Luigi Ferdinando Marsili (or Marsigli, 1658-1730), during his participation in the wars against the Ottomans in Europe (surrender of Buda in 1686 and the siege of Belgrade in 1688). Besides scientific works, which must have been the primary interest of the collector, this group of manuscripts also includes literary texts (mainly copies of the *Pand-nāma* attributed to Farid-al-Din ‘Aṭṭār), an interesting poetic anthology (MS 3283; Piemontese, 1989, no. 3), several lexicographical texts, and a beautiful album of calligraphy (*moraqqa*) datable to the late 15th or early 16th century (MS 3574PP; Piemontese, 1989, no. 37).

Persian manuscripts in the Marciana National Library in Venice are of different provenance. Some of them come from the Dominican convent of St. John and St. Paul in Venice, others are from the collection of philologist and Orientalist Emilio Teza (1831-1912), but the greater part (36 MSS) originate from the collection of the Oriental codices of the Venetian aristocrat, Jacopo



Nani (1725-97), who acquired them during his journeys to the East and through the expeditions of the Venetian fleet. Among the Persian manuscripts preserved in Venice, the following bear larger importance: several scientific works (mainly medical); works of classical Persian literature (the *Pand-nāma*, the *Golestān* of Sa'di, *divān* of Hāfez, and poems of Jāmi); an early copy (allegedly dated to early 14th century) of Bal'ami's (q.v.) translation of the history of Ṭabari (MS Or. CXXVIII; Piemontese, 1989, no. 380; more details in Piemontese, 1977); lexicographical works; religious treatises of missionaries and Christian apologetics. The Marciana Library also possesses the famous *Codex Cumanicus* (MS Lat. DXLIX; for bibliography and history of the studies on the manuscript see Piemontese, 1989, no. 393; Stojanow), whose first part contains a Latin-Persian-Comanian dictionary compiled in Solgat in the Crimea within the years 1324-25. The copy in the Marciana Library is dated to 1330 and was probably transcribed in the convent of St. John in Sarāy (Ligeti; Richard, 1981, pp. 227, 244-45).

A small but valuable collection of 15 Persian manuscripts is preserved at the Royal Library of Turin. They mainly come from the collection of Oriental manuscripts, which was owned by Carlo Alberto di Savoia (1798-1849, king of Sardinia from 1831). One of them—a beautiful illuminated manuscript of the *Manteq al-teyr* of 'Aṭṭār, dated to Ṣafar 857/February-March 1453 (MS Or. 40; Piemontese, 1984b; Idem, 1989, no. 338)—has been reproduced in facsimile in Tehran in 1994 ('Aṭṭār).

In Rome, the Library of the National Academy of the Lincei and Corsiniana has only four Persian manuscripts which derive from an early collection of the Corsini Library. A beautiful manuscript containing three poems of Hātefi, which once belonged to Federico Cesi (1585-1630), the founder of the Academy of Lincei, had been owned by the Barberini Library which in 1902 became the core part of the Vatican Library (MS Barb. Orient. 104; Rossi, 1948, pp. 159-60). Nearly all (56 out of 60) Persian manuscripts preserved in the Library of the Academy of the Lincei come from the collection of Prince Leone Caetani (1869-1935), a distinguished Orientalist who in 1921 established the Caetani Foundation for Islamic Studies housed at the Library of Academy of Lincei, to which he donated his private collection of manuscripts. Particularly important among this group of Persian manuscripts are those containing works of Persian historiography and classical literature, such as a copy of the collected works (*kolliāt*) of Amir Ḳosrow Dehlavi dated 908/1503 (MS Caetani 38-39; Piemontese, 1989, no. 296; codicological study in Orsatti, 1993, pp. 322-23); two



beautiful illustrated copies of the *Ḳamsa* of Neẓāmi, namely MS Caetani 36 (15th century; Piemontese, 1989, no. 286) and MS Caetani 58 (2nd half of the 16th century; Piemontese, 1989, no. 287); a copy of the *Negārestān-e Moʿini* (MS Caetani 62; Piemontese, 1989, no. 315; see also Tornesello) composed by Moʿin-al-Din Joveyni (q.v.) in 735/1335 in imitation of Saʿdi's *Golestān*.

The Italian collections of Persian manuscripts, scattered in various cities and distributed between many libraries, are a mirror of the different types of interest that brought forth in the establishment of Persian studies in Italy. Besides, they form a valuable part of the multifaceted Italian cultural history.

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