



ITALY XI. TRANSLATIONS OF PERSIAN WORKS INTO ITALIAN

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With a few rare exceptions, Persian literature has never been widely circulated or made commercially available in Italy—a fact that is more visible in this country than in other European countries with more uninterrupted political, economic, and cultural ties with Persia. The approach adopted toward Persian texts in Italy has been almost exclusively academic, with the consequence that many important works of Persian literature have never been translated into Italian, as they are accessible to scholars in other European languages. On the other hand, the highly erudite level of certain individuals of the Italian Orientalist tradition, which dates back to Renaissance times, has guaranteed the production of some translations of significant historical value and of very high literary and academic quality.

The first Persian work translated into Italian was actually also the first to be translated into any European language. It was the poem *Hašt behešt* by Amir ʔosrow Dehlavi (q.v.) written in 1300, which was translated by Cristoforo Armeno (16th century) as the *Peregrinaggio di tre giovani figliuoli del Re di*



Serendippo, and published in Venice in 1557. In accordance with the custom of the time, it is not a literal translation but rather a re-casting, probably the result of the collective work of a group of Venetian scholars through comparison with two other kindred Persian texts: Neẓāmi's *Haft peykar* and Hātefi's *Haft manẓar* (qq.v.). Since these three Persian texts are different variants of the 'Romance of Bahrām,' the first Persian text in Italian (and in any other European language) thus represents the genre of the 'mirror for princes' (Cerulli; Amir Ҡosrow, 1996).

In Papal Rome—the other center of Oriental Studies in Italy—the efforts of Giovan Battista Raimondi (d. 1614) would have offered further rare and early Persian texts, and from less frequented areas such as those of the sciences and religious literature, but his project for translations and publications through the 'Stamperia Orientale Medicea' printing house encountered a series of obstacles of both personal and logistic nature. The contribution of the erudite Roman scholar Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652, q.v.) to the field of translations from Persian to Italian was also to remain only potential. From what can be determined from his papers at present, his love for Ḥāfeẓ, whose fame he was the first to bring to Europe, produced translations of only a few poems, read at a gathering after his return from Persia, of which no written trace has remained (Bertotti, 1990).

Such outstanding scholars as Cristoforo Armeno, Raimondi, and Della Valle had planted the seeds of the culture of translation that would only bear fruit on a regular basis when the seats of Iranian studies were officially established in the Italian university system. With the establishment of a continuous tradition of academic activity dedicated to Persia, the production of translations of Persian texts into Italian gradually became more necessary and frequent (an overview in Piemontese, 1982, pp. 575-654).

The first significant translations of pre-Islamic Persian literary texts are the works of Francesco Adolfo Cannizzaro (1867-1914, q.v.) and Italo Pizzi (1849-1920), written in the period between the last two decades of the 19th and the early 20th century. They both concentrated almost exclusively on translating passages from the Avesta (q.v.), which culminated in a broad anthology by Pizzi (1916). Moreover, the Avesta has been particularly fortunate among the pre-Islamic Persian texts, for reasons independent of its Persian origins, being republished partially or entirely in 1943-44 and later in translations from European languages with an accent on its universal spiritual teachings. Since Pizzi was primarily a specialist in Islamic Persian literature,



the real initiator of a period of systematic translations from pre-Islamic literature was Antonino Pagliaro (1898-1973). Pagliaro translated excerpts from the Avesta and passages of Old Persian inscriptions from the Achaemenid era, mainly for his compendium of literary history (Pagliaro and Bausani). He also devoted much of his time to the translation of passages and entire works of Pahlavi literature, in particular the *Ayādgār ī Zarērān*, the *Kār-nāmag ī Artaxšēr ī Pāpakān* (qq.v.; Pagliaro, 1927), and the *Vičārišn ī čatrang* (1951). Besides Pagliaro's works, few other Italian translations of such comprehensiveness were produced in this field until recent times, and these were made by non-specialists in the field. Some examples are the translation of the *Ayādgār ī Jāmāspīg* (q.v.) by Giuseppe Messina (1939), a series of passages from Zoroastrian Pahlavi religious texts (*Pand-nāmag ī Zarduxšt*, *Bunda-hišn*, *Dādestān ī mēnog ī xrad*, *Dēnkard* [qq.v.]) translated by Alessandro Bausani (1957), and a later, isolated version of the *Gathas* (q.v.) translated by Marcello Meli (1996). The lack of a greater output of Italian translations in this field is due to three factors: the above-mentioned tendency towards an almost exclusively academic approach to the texts, which is particularly true for pre-Islamic studies; the availability of translations of most of the works in question into other European languages; and, finally, the spread of the use of English for scientific publications, even among Italian scholars. Nevertheless, in recent times there have been some additions to the list, such as a new translation of the *Vičārišn ī čatrang* by Antonio Panaino (1999), an anthology of Pahlavi texts for the compendium of literary history by Carlo Cereti (2001), and a completely new translation of the Avesta carried out by Arnaldo Alberti from the original texts (2004).

The period of Italian translations of Persian literary works from the Islamic era began, and not by accident, in the post-Risorgimento (Italian unification) age (1880s) with epic poetry. In fact, apart from the appearance of occasional literary passages (lyrical, didactic, a travel diary, a treatise on falconry), the first truly representative translation is the monumental version of the *Šāh-nāma* by Italo Pizzi (1886-88). Rendered in eight-line stanzas of non-rhyming hendeca syllables, which has often been subject of criticism, Pizzi's *Libro dei Re* ('Book of Kings') is one of the greatest efforts of translating a Persian text in the history of Iranian studies worldwide (PLATE I). Pizzi has also translated numerous other works which were published either separately or as parts of his handbooks on the history of Persian prose and poetry (lyric poems by many poets, excerpts from narrative poems by Neẓāmi and 'Aṭṭār, historical texts, didactic pieces, a version of the *Golestān* of Sa'di made in 1917; see Pizzi,



1887 and 1894). Nevertheless, his translation of Ferdowsi's *Šāh-nāma* remains his most important contribution, arousing interest and admiration in Italy even among non-Orientalists (Carducci, 1886). Two other, incomplete, Italian translations of the *Šāh-nāma* (1989 and 2003) do nothing more than paraphrase, and often summarize, Pizzi's work. Vittorio Rugarli (1860-1900), Pizzi's disciple and brother-in-law, also worked on the epic narratives, producing valuable, well-written translations of the *Šāh-nāma*, the *Barzūnāma*, the *Kuk-nāma*, and long sections from the *Garšāsp-nāma* of Asadi Ṭusi (qq.v.).

A large hiatus separates this initial phase of Italian academic translations from the second cycle initiated by the following generation, in particular Francesco Gabrieli (1904-96, q.v.) and Alessandro Bausani (1921-88 q.v. at www.iranica.com), who focused on narrative, epic, and romantic literature with a short series of partial translations of the *Marzbān-nāma*, Gorgāni's *Vis o Rāmin*, and Neẓāmi's *Haft Peykar* (q.v.). Bausani's complete translation of the *Haft Peykar* in 1967 (incorporating passages translated by Gabrieli) marked an important point from which two different paths opened up. One was a specific interest in the works of Neẓāmi, whose *Leyli o Majnun* and *Eqbāl-nāma* were also translated into Italian and published commercially in 1985 and 1997, respectively. The other was a line of study that concentrated on the structural form of the book, which led to the Italian translation of the answers (*jawāb*) to *Haft Peykar* in *maṭnawī* form by Hātefi and Amir Ḳosrow, which came out in 1995 and 1996. Thus, considering also the section of Pizzi's *Libro dei Re* related to Bahrām, Italy can boast of four complete versions of the 'Romance of Bahrām.' The attention paid to this narrative model is clearly related to the first Venetian translation of the *Peregrinaggio* in 1557. With Angelo Michele Piemontese's translation of a second poem by Amir Ḳosrow, *Ā'ena-ye Eskandari (Lo Specchio Alessandrino, 1999)*, Italy consolidated a pioneering role in the field, as the works of this important Indo-Persian poet had not yet been translated into any other European language. Along with this line of work, and besides the translations of excerpts published as individual studies or in volumes on literary history, such as those of Alessandro Bausani (Pagliaro and Bausani, 1960), Gianroberto Scarcia (1969), and Angelo Michele Piemontese (1970), only a few other complete translations of works of this genre appeared in Italian, notably the translation of Ebn Ḥosām's (see [EBN ḤOSĀM ḲĀFI](#)) version of the *Ḳāvar-nāma*, published in 1979.

To date, Persian historiography has received insufficient attention in Italy.



Translations of brief fragments can be found in individual studies or in the usual general handbooks, beginning with the work on universal literature by Angelo De Gubernatis and in some anthologies (Piemontese and Scarcia, 1973). Lengthier versions in commercial editions, translated from intermediary languages, include: *Tārīḳ-e Jahāngošā* by Joveyni (q.v.; 1962, translated from English), some excerpts of *Tārīḳ-e Ṭabari* by Bal'ami (q.v.; 1985 and 1993, from French), and a long excerpt from *Rowzat al-ṣafā'* by Mirḳvānd (1996, from French). In 2000, the *Homāyun-nāma* by Golbadan Bēgom (q.v.) was translated from the Persian original by Anna Vanzan.

In the field of didactic literature, mention should be made of complete translations of some masterpieces of Persian prose: Sa'di's *Golestān* (four complete versions: 1917, 1965, 1979, and 1991), *Čahār Maqāla* by Neẓāmi 'Aruzi Samarqandi (1977), *Qābus-nāma* (1981), *Safar-nāma* of Nāṣer-e Ḳosrow (1991), and *Siāsat-nāma* of Neẓām-al-Molk (1999). At the same time, academic circles showed a growing interest in the satiric works of 'Obeyd-e Zākāni, which appear to be quite well suited to the Italian sense of humor: examples are translations by Bausani (1964), Piemontese (1973), and D'Erme (1979, reprinted in 2005).

Due largely to a deep-rooted tendency in Italian culture to favor a generally aesthetic approach to literary history, the greatest number of translations from Persian have been those of lyric poetry. The first examples of the translated poetry appeared in the beginning of the 19th century in the context of academic research: odes of Jāmi, Sa'di, Ḥāfeẓ, and Ḳāqāni were translated by scholars such as, among others, Romualdo Tecco (1802-67), and Angelo De Gubernatis (1840-1913). However, in this area too, truly representative translations began with Italo Pizzi and Vittorio Rugarli. Besides translations of various classical Persian authors, often published as celebratory books for the weddings of noble Italian families, Pizzi and Rugarli were the first to introduce the works of 'Omar Khayyam (Ḳayyām) to Italy. Following the European success of Edward FitzGerald's (q.v.) translations, in Italy Khayyam represented the rare exception of a Persian author whose poetry appealed not only to academics but also to a vast and heterogeneous public, especially within the 'decadent' movement. There are over thirty publications containing selections of Khayyam's quatrains translated into Italian, ranging from small excerpts in booklets edited by Rugarli to various complete editions that were published throughout the 20th century. The latter include translations based on the original texts and accompanied by scholarly introductions (especially



Gabrieli, 1944 and Bausani, 1956, both of which have been re-edited and printed many times), as well as those made from intermediate languages, particularly FitzGerald's English version. Khayyam is certainly the most widely known Persian poet in Italy and is recognized as a classic of world literature (Piemontese, 1974).

Once again, it was A. Bausani who began a new round of translations of lyric poetry, increasing the number of poets represented, even if by a single poem. To the anthology of classical poets (Rudaki, Farroki, 'Onşori, Manučehri, Sanā'i, 'Aṭṭār, Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān, Azraqi, Mo'ezzi, Anwari, Kāqāni, Sa'di, Rumi, 'Erāqi, Ḥāfez, 'Obeyd-e Zākāni, Jāmi, Şā'eb, and Qā'āni, who constitute more or less the classical framework of all subsequent literary histories and anthologies) presented in his history of Persian literature (Pagliaro and Bausani, 1960), which also provides a review of the main motifs of Persian lyrics, Bausani added some of his own personal favorites, such as a translation of the Persian work of Avicenna and an ample selection of Rumi's mystical poems. Important translations of lyric poetry were also produced by Gianroberto Scarcia, who similarly included excerpts in literary histories (Scarcia, 1969; Piemontese, 1970), individual studies, and collections; his personal favorites included poets from the later Indian style such as Şā'eb and Bidel (Zipoli and Scarcia). So far, monographs have been quite rare; Ḥāfez was treated in 1966 (a small volume edited by Eva Giardina), in 1998 (edited by Carlo Saccone), and two complete editions appeared in the early 2000s—one by Giovanni D'Erme (2004, so far first volume only), and the other by Stefano Pellò and Gianroberto Scarcia (2005). Other monographs concern Bābā Ṭāher (1988), Bidel (1995), and Mahsati Ganjavi (1999).

Anthologies for the commercial market have been published more frequently since the 1970s: the most comprehensive editions date to 1973 (edited by A. M. Piemontese and G. Scarcia, including Turkish poetry), 1986 (*Divano Occidentale* by G. Scarcia), 1995 (*Antologia della pleiade ghaznavide* by Rita Bargigli), 2003 (*Ti amo di due amori*, together with Arabic, Turkish, and Hebrew poems, Persian section edited by Mario Casari), and 2004 (*Poesia dell'Islam* by G. Scarcia).

The collection of Rumi's poems edited by Bausani also marks another area of translation of Persian works into Italian: that of philosophical-religious literature, especially of mystical nature. The approach to this subject, sometimes carried out in an academic context, as in the case of the translation of religious texts by Nāşer-e Kōsrow (1959 and 1990), the *Omm al-Ketāb* (1966),



and the *Ḥosn o del* by Fattāḥi (1974), has more often been driven by the choice of texts that might attract interest among a broader, more general audience seeking a less familiar spirituality. This trend also includes the many Sufi anthologies containing Persian material (1951, 1964, 1991, and 1999), the publications dedicated to ‘Aṭṭār (*Tadkerat al-awliā’*, 1964; *Manteq al-teyr*, 1986; *Elāhi-nāma*, 1990; and the dubiously attributed *Gol o bolbol*, 2003), Sanā’i (1992 and 1993), Sohravardi (1990 and 2000), and the numerous anthologies inspired by Rumi’s *maṭnawi* or *divān*, most of which were translated from French or English versions. The first complete translation of Rumi’s *maṭnawi* was made by Gabriele Mandel Khan and published in 2006. Other publications, which were the result of a political-religious approach, include those concerning Bahai (q.v.) literature and, more recently, the works of thinkers and ideologues of the Islamic Republic such as M. Moṭahhari and R. Khomeini.

There have also been some cautious attempts to make contemporary Persian literature better known to a wider public than strictly academic. While theatrical works (a handful of comedies from the Akhundov (1812-78, see [ĀḲUNDZĀDA](#)) school and a few passages from *ta’zias* and poetry (the Indo-Persian poet Moḥammad Eqbāl, introduced by A. Bausani, and poems by modern Persian poets such as Sohrāb Sepehri and Foruḡ Farroḳzād, q.v.) have appeared only sporadically, certain prose writers have fared better, particularly Ṣādeq Hedāyat (q.v.), whose works came in the 1960s and 1970s via French, and in 2007 a new revised edition of his works was published on the basis of the original Persian texts. Besides a few novellas by authors like Čubak, Jamālzāda, and Behrangi, translated and published within some academic articles, the best attempt to introduce modern Persian literature to the Italian public was through an anthology of 20th-century Persian literature edited by Filippo Bertotti (1989), followed by an anthology of works by Ġolām-Ḥosayn Sā’edi (1990). Recently, some attention has been paid to contemporary Persian female writers, particularly Šahrnuš Pārsipur, who were presented by stressing a sociological approach to the status of women in Persia (1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004).

Following a similar pattern, which reveals the persistent methodological barriers to the diffusion of knowledge of Persian literature in Italy, an anthropological and ethnological, rather than literary, approach has favored the publication of many volumes of Persian fables, presented in popular ‘exotic’ editions that most often derive from anthologies in other European languages.



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