



# ITALY XII. TRANSLATIONS OF ITALIAN WORKS INTO PERSIAN

---

## ITALY

### xii. TRANSLATIONS OF ITALIAN WORKS INTO PERSIAN

Two texts by Italian authors appear to be the first known translations of European literary works into Persian carried out in the modern age. They are the *Idea del giardino del mondo*, a treatise on natural medicine by Tommaso Tomai (d. 1593), and the *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (in Latin), a report about China by the Jesuit missionary (see [JESUITS IN SAFAVID PERSIA](#)), Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). The translator of both texts was Moḥammad Zamān (b. 1618), known as *Farangiḳvān* ('reader of the Frankish language')—an Iranian who converted to Catholicism in Isfahan in 1641 and subsequently emigrated to India. The excellent Persian translations of the Italian (*Ḥadiqa-ye 'ālam*, ca. 1642-50) and Latin (*Tāriḳ-e Ćīn*, ca. 1650-65) texts exist in two unique manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Persan 158; and Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, MS Curson I.124). It seems highly probable that a missionary (in the second case, probably, the Jesuit father Enrico Uvens who was stationed in India and died in Delhi in 1667) may have aided Moḥammad Zamān in his translation. Nonetheless, whether or not he was helped by others, if these works were personally translated by Moḥammad



Zamān, he should be recognized not only as the first Persian translator from Italian, but also as the first and, to date, the only known translator from Latin (Blochet, II, pp. 108-9; Richard, pp. 287-88; Piemontese, pp. 28-35).

Though both significant and praiseworthy, Moḥammad Zamān's works were neither distributed in Persia nor were they followed by any similar endeavor and should therefore be considered unique and apparently occasional. It was not until the first half of the 19th century when Persian culture turned its attention to the languages and literatures of Europe once again, although it tended to concentrate primarily on French and, to a lesser extent, on English. These two languages were also to become the main intermediary channels for the subsequent approach towards Italian literature which, however, remained sporadic and discontinuous.

Indeed, it was with the translation from French of Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-75) *Decameron* by Aḥmad Khan Daryābeygi (governor of Bušehr and then of other ports in the Persian Gulf), that Italian literature stepped back into Persia at the beginning of the 20th century (Boccaccio, 1905). In this case, however, the work was recast rather than simply translated. It was stripped of its textual and contextual complexity, and the stories were presented in a simplified narrative sequence. This illustrated lithographic volume stemmed from a growing interest in literature of libertine character under the Qajars, which was not well received by the Shi'ite religious authorities. As Boccaccio's work was at the center of such a substantial divergence from the norm, it did not circulate regularly in Persia, and, despite the occasional appearance of a few individual novellas, two new translations from French made by Ḥabib Šonuqi (1966) and by Moḥammad Qāzi (1986) were censored and have never been printed.

In much the same vein, Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938) was presented as a hero and poet capable of both military and erotic achievements, rather than solely as a literary artist. His name and fragments of his writings appeared mostly during the decade of fervent publishing between the abdication of Reżā Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41) and the fall of the Moṣaddeq government (1943-53). D'Annunzio was mentioned in various journals (particularly in the widely distributed *Eṭṭelā'āt-e haftegi*), in which other important Italian poets and writers, such as Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and Galileo, began to appear more frequently.

Among these newly introduced writers, Nicolò Machiavelli (1469-1527)



represented an important step forward in presenting the Italian culture, and his ideas left a distinct mark. The translation of his *Il principe* from English by Maḥmud Maḥmud (1882-1965; a publisher of historical and political writings who also held various political posts) was printed in 1945. The translator presented Machiavelli's masterpiece, emphasizing the cynical element in the Italian writer's reflections in an updated, anti-British light. The book was well received and was reprinted several times until 1968, along with Persian translations of Machiavelli's two other works: *Belfagor* (1963) and *Mandragola* (1966). Machiavelli's theories in the history of political thought were also discussed (Piemontese, pp. 101-8). Iranian scholar and linguist Dāryuš Āšuri compared one German and two English translations to produce an admirable new Persian translation of *Il Principe*, accompanied by a thorough critical analysis (1987, rev. ed. 1996). This led to the translation of another important work of Machiavelli, the *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (1998).

The works of Tomai, Boccaccio, and Machiavelli represent three landmarks, albeit isolated and motivated by different factors, in the approach of Persian intelligentsia toward Italian literature. It was, however, not until after World War II that Italian literature really took hold in Persia as a result of the strengthening of political and economic relations with Europe and the United States, the increase in travel to and from Persia, and the foundation of libraries and cultural institutions that made international literature available more easily. Nonetheless, Italian literature continued to be mediated mostly by French and English translations. Various cultural reviews began to publish Persian translations, often fragmentary, of 20th-century Italian authors and of critical reflections on their works. These were chosen according to the criteria that suited the elements and predispositions of Persian taste: the surreal compassion of Luigi Pirandello's novels (in *Soḵan*, 1948, 1955; *Eṭṭelā'āt-e māhāna*, 1948, 1950; *Mehregān*, 1952, 1955; *Ferdowsi*, 1955-56), the crude realism of Alberto Moravia (*Mehregān*, 1953, 1955; *Kāviān*, 1954; *Ferdowsi*, 1956; *Soḵan*, 1957; *Tehrān-e moṣawwar*, 1957-59), the bitter lyrical naturalism of Grazia Deledda (*Eṭṭelā'āt-e māhāna*, 1952; *Soḵan*, 1954), and the magic and alienation of Dino Buzzati (*Soḵan*, 1955).

A name that often appears in association with some of these translations is that of Šojā'-al-Din Šafā' (b. 1918), who was one of the first to translate directly from Italian, although he amply complemented this with a constant comparison of French, English, and German versions. The most substantial undertaking in Šafā's vast output was his translation of the masterpiece of



Italian literature, Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Divina Commedia* (1956). Despite the abundant criticism directed against him, especially regarding the lack of any attempt to use poetic expression in the Persian language, Šafā's translation should be regarded as highly successful because it corresponds meticulously to the original and is often annotated, either directly in the text or within explanatory notes. This translation enjoyed great popular success and was reprinted four times up to 1978. With the advent of the Islamic Republic, Dante's work was removed from circulation (Bertotti and Orsatti, pp. 257-69). This situation has recently been reversed with a reprint of Šafā's translation (1999) and, more importantly, with the publication of a new full translation of the work (based on French and English translations) by Farida Mahdavi-Dāmḡāni (2000, repr. 2001). Although this translation has brought important new contributions, there is still room for improvement. The same translator also published *La Vita Nuova* (1997), Dante's only other work to be translated into Persian in full.

The translation of the *Divina Commedia* can also be regarded as a milestone in the Persian awareness of Italian poetry. Previously, Italian poetry had lacked broad and thoughtful attention and had been treated in a fragmentary manner, mainly through short extracts and comments translated from English and French, which were published in reviews and anthologies. Until then, except for Dante, publishers have only briefly touched on the great Italian authors of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, and Metastasio, preferring instead collections of a wide range of 19th- and 20th-century authors, whose appeal is more immediate as Persians discover more of European culture. Moreover, if one leaves aside some significant exceptions (the translation of Giacomo Leopardi's *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* in the review *Bahār* of 1922, the curiosity about Salvatore Quasimodo in some of the reviews published after he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1959, some interest in the poetry of Cesare Pavese in reviews and collections from the 1970s onwards, and a volume dedicated to the poetry of Giuseppe Ungaretti in 1991), the main examples of Italian poetry in Persian can be found in two anthologies edited by the Cultural Institute of the Italian Embassy in Tehran. One of them was edited by Nāder Nāderpur in collaboration with Gina Labriola Caruso (*Haft čehra*, 1974), and concentrated on the 20th-century works, while the other, by A. Mohājer Irvāni (*Bargozidegān-e še'r-e Itāliā*, 1991), focused on the 19th-century authors.

Beginning in the 1960s, the popular success of some Italian authors, although



limited almost exclusively to those of the 20th century, took a firmer hold. Writers such as Grazia Deledda, Alba De Céspedes, Carlo Cassola, Giovanni Guareschi, Curzio Malaparte, and Elio Vittorini appeared sporadically on the cultural scene in reviews and in the occasional volume, while others were introduced more systematically and, consequently, greater attention was paid to their literary development. The translation and publication of Pirandello's short stories in reviews and magazines went on without interruption, accompanied by the appearance of volumes containing tales, novels, and plays: *Bist dāstān* (1956), *Enrico IV* and *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1967 and 1969), *Non si sa come* (1970), *Uno, nessuno e centomila* and *Il turno* (1993), and *L'esclusa* (1995), although the latter work was censored before it was distributed. Similarly, the fame of Moravia continued to spread, and his stories appeared frequently in literary reviews. His works also appeared in volumes with substantial print runs, although they were almost exclusively translated from English: there are four different translations of *La ciociara* (in installments in *Tehrān-e moṣawwar* in 1960, then in separate volumes in 1964, 1985, and 1990); translations were also published of *Gli indifferenti* (1967), *Racconti romani* (1985), and *Il conformista* (1995). Buzzati's works continued to appear too: some of his short stories in reviews and collections (1972, 1995, 2000, and 2003), and some of his novels, in particular the well-known *Il deserto dei Tartari*, which has seen three translations (1970, 1986, and 2000; see Vanzan, 2000; Ebrāhim, 2002).

To these three authors, who were already quite well known, other significant names may be added, each having a specific appeal for the Persian audience. Ignazio Silone, whose collection of essays *Testimonianze sul comunismo* had already been published in 1950, gained renown with the publication of his novel *Pane e vino*, translated from French by Moḥammad Qāzi (1966), which reached its twelfth printing in 1995. Critical reflections and radio readings accompanied the publication of numerous other writings by Silone, at times carried out by some of the most outstanding translators of Italian: *Fontamara* (1968, by Manučehr Ātaši, from English), *Una manciata di more* (1971, by Bahman Farzāna), *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* (1973, by Moḥammad Qāzi, from French), *La volpe e le camelie* (1977, by Bahman Farzāna), *Il seme sotto la neve* (1982), *Uscita di sicurezza* (1983), and *La scuola dei dittatori* (1984, the latter three by Mehdi Saḥābi).

The many aspects of Cesare Pavese's works, including his poetry, received great attention, especially his short stories and several novels (two translations



of *La luna e i falò* in 1967 and 1991, *Paesi tuoi* in 1974, and *Il compagno* in 1975). Some of Natalia Ginzburg's best-known novels have been translated (*Caro Michele*, 1978 and *Lessico familiare*, 1985), along with her many articles on culture and customs (*Le piccole virtù*, in installments in various reviews, and collected together in 1997).

Great attention was paid to Italo Calvino, already internationally celebrated, through the publication of articles and essays regarding him, and translations of his better-known works: *Il visconte dimezzato* (1967), *Il barone rampante*, *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, *Sei lezioni americane* (1984, 1990, and 1996, in each case from French by Leyli Golestān), *Le città invisibili* (1988), *Marcovaldo* (1991), *Palomar* (1998), and even an anthology from his collection of tales entitled *Fiabe italiane* (1999).

The most striking publishing phenomenon regarding an Italian writer, however, is that of Oriana Fallaci, whose journalistic writing became the best known of all Italian voices in terms of both the number of copies sold and editions printed. After *Niente e così sia* (1971) and *Se il sole muore* (1973), the great success of *Lettera a un bambino mai nato* (four different translations between 1976 and 1977) and *Intervista con la storia*, which contained the interview with Moḥammad-Rezā Shah Pahlavi (four translations between 1977 and 1978), earned her the honor of being the most important foreign writer in Persia during the 1970s.

During the period in which these writers gained reputation in Persia, the names of a few prolific translators from Italian became familiar (Piemontese, pp. 126-44): Bahman Moḥaṣṣeṣ (b. 1931; translated works of Pirandello, Pavese, and also *La pelle* by Curzio Malaparte, which in 1964 created a certain scandal), Bahman Farzāna (b. 1938, translated works of Deledda, D'Annunzio, Ginzburg, De Céspedes, Pirandello, Buzzati, Silone, and also Vasco Pratolini's *Cronaca Familiare* in 1975), Rezā Qeyṣariya (b. 1941, translated works of Moravia, Buzzati, Pirandello, Pavese, Calvino, and Leonardo Sciascia, as well as *Il giorno della civetta* in 1979), Mehdi Saḥābi (b. 1944, translated works of Silone, Calvino, Pavese, Sciascia, together with Gavino Ledda's *Padre padrone* in 1987), and Moḥsen Ṭāher Nowkanda (b. 1947, translated works of Quasimodo, Pavese, Fenoglio, and Baricco).

A particularly influential factor in the awareness of Italian culture in general was the international success of Italian cinema and, in particular, the neorealist genre of the 1950s and 1960s. Numerous articles and essays on the



subject were not, however, accompanied by an equivalent degree of effort in translating the screenplays (with the exception of a few by Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, and Michelangelo Antonioni). Italian playwriting has received slightly more attention. Translated plays were sometimes printed, but mostly performed either in theaters or as radio readings: above all, works of Pirandello (in particular translations by the director and translator Pari Šāberi), although other playwrights attracted attention too, like Goldoni (*La locandiera*, 1957) and, from the 1990s, the Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo (*Morte accidentale di un anarchico* in 1992).

An exceptional case is the introduction of the wooden puppet Pinocchio into the Persian cultural scene, with a mixture of cinematographic, theatrical, and literary influences at its roots. Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* is, moreover, a worldwide 'steady-seller' and one of the books that can boast the highest number of translations around the world. The first translation into Persian was made by the writer Šādeq Čubak (1916-88). It was published in 1955 and has continuously stayed in print. Besides this incomparable version, four other unabridged translations have appeared to date (1977-95), along with innumerable reduced versions, all pointing to the literary success with a degree of influence on the development of Persian literature for children in the second half of the 20th century (Casari, pp. 57-91). In this specific area of literature, which is very important in Persian publishing, another noteworthy Italian writer is Gianni Rodari, two of whose works have enjoyed good print runs: *La torta in cielo*, translated by Piruz Maleki (1985), and *Tante storie per giocare*, translated by Čengiz Dāvarpanāh (1992).

In the last years of the 20th century, besides the attention paid to contemporary authors particularly in vogue in Italy and Europe such as Umberto Eco, Susanna Tamaro, and Alessandro Baricco, the appreciation of the 20th-century Italian prose has been increased by two systematic anthologies: *Gozida-ye dāstānhā-ye kutāh az nevisandegān-e mo'āšer-e Itāliā*, compiled by Firuza Mohājer and Kāmran Širdel (1989), and *Adabiyāt wa nevisandegān-e mo'āšer-e Itāliā* (1997)—a wide-ranging collection assembled by the translator Moḥsen Ebrāhim, who also translated some of the works of Buzzati, Ginzburg, and Calvino. The latter anthology also contains a long introductory essay which is the first history of Italian literature to be written in Persian originally.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

- M. Afšār, *Ketābšenāsi-e romān wa majmu'ehā-ye dāstāni-e motarjam*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1998.
- Dante Alighieri, *Komedi-e elāhi. Duzaq. Barzaq. Behešt*, tr. Š. Šafā', 3 vols., Tehran, 1956; tr. F. Mahdavi-Dāmḡāni, 3 vols., Tehran, 2000.
- F. Bertotti and P. Orsatti, "Dante in Iran," in *L'opera di Dante nel mondo. Edizioni e traduzioni del Novecento. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Roma, 27-29 aprile 1989*, ed. E. Esposito, Ravenna, 1992, pp. 257-69.
- E. Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 4 vols., Paris, 1905-34.
- G. Boccaccio, *Ketāb-e Dekāmeron*, tr. A. K. Daryābeygi, Bushehr, 1905.
- D. Buzzati, *Biābān-e Tātārhā*, tr. S. Ḥabibi, Tehran, 1970.
- Idem, *Šahrā-ye Tātārhā*, tr. M. Ebrāhim, Tehran, 2000.
- I. Calvino, *Viskont-e šakkesoda*, tr. B. Moḥaššeš, Tehran, 1967.
- Idem, *Agar šab-i az šabhā-ye zemestān mosāfer-i*, tr. L. Golestān, Tehran, 1990.
- M. Casari, "Pinocchio persiano," *Oriente Moderno*, N.S. 22 (83), 2003, pp. 57-91.
- C. Collodi, *Pinokio. Ādamak-e čubi*, tr. Š. Čubak, Tehran, 1955.
- M. Ebrāhim, *Adabiyāt wa nevisandegān-e mo'ašer-e Itāliā*, 2 vols., Tehran, 1997.
- Idem, "Riflessioni su alcuni aspetti della ricezione di Buzzati in Iran," *Studi buzzatiani* 7, 2002, pp. 83-94.
- O. Fallaci, *Nāma be kudak-i ke hargez motawalled našod*, tr. V. Mošfeq, Tehran, 1985.
- N. Ginzburg, *Alefbā-ye kanevāda*, tr. F. Mohājer, Tehran, 1985.
- N. Machiavelli, *Šahryār*, tr. M. Maḥmud, Tehran, 1945; tr. D. Āšuri, Tehran,



1987, rev. ed. Tehran, 1996.

F. Mohājer and K. Širdel, *Gozida-ye dāstānhā-ye kutāh az nevisandegān-e mo'āšer-e Itāliā*, Tehran, 1989.

A. Mohājer Irvāni, *Bargozidegān-e še'r-e Itāliā*, Tehran, 1991.

A. Moravia, *Dāstānhā-ye romi*, tr. R. Qeşşariya, Tehran, 1985.

Ḳ. Mošār, *Fehrest-e ketābhā-ye čāpi-e fārsi az āgāz tā ākar-e sāl-e 1345*, 3 vols., Tehran, 1971-73.

N. Nāderpur and G. Lābriolā Kāruso, *Haft čehra az šā'erān-e mo'āšer-e Itāliā*, Tehran, 1974.

A. M. Piemontese, "La letteratura italiana in Persia," *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, Memorie*, Series 9, vol. 17/1, 2003, pp. 1-251.

L. Pirandello, *Henri-e čahārom*, tr. B. Moḡaşşes, Tehran, 1967. Idem, *Yek-i hičkas, šadhezār*, tr. B. Farzāna, Tehran, 1971.

F. Richard, "Une traduction persane d'un ouvrage italien au XVIIe siècle," *Stud. Ir.* 7, 1978, pp. 287-88.

Š. Šafā', *Montakab-i az zibātarin šāhkārhā-ye še'r-e jahān*, Tehran, 1952.

I. Silone, *Nān wa šarāb*, tr. M. Qāzi, Tehran, 1966.

A. Vanzan, "Sahra-ye Tatarha: traduzione in lingua persiana de *Il deserto dei Tartari* di Dino Buzzati, a cura di Mohsen Ebrahim, Teheran, 1379/2000; *Shast dastan*, traduzione in lingua persiana de *I sessanta racconti* di Dino Buzzati, a cura di M. Ebrahim, Teheran, 1379/2000," *Studi buzzatiani* 5, 2000, pp. 187-91.