



# ITALY XIV. CURRENT CENTERS OF IRANIAN STUDIES IN ITALY

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Studies on subjects related to the Iranian cultural world can boast an ancient tradition in Italy, but not as an independent field of study at academic level. The earliest scholar to hold a chair whose main focus was Persian language and literature, to which he later added the teaching of Iranian philology, was Italo Pizzi in Turin, whose main claim to fame was a verse translation of the *Šāh-nāma* in eight volumes (Pizzi, 1886-88). But things have considerably changed in recent times. The last forty-five years have witnessed the growth of the scholarly tradition investigating Persian language and literature, as well as the birth of a school focusing on the study of Iranian philology, history, and religion.

The beginning of contemporary Iranian studies may be set in 1957. In that year Alessandro Bausani won the chair of Persian Language and Literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples (IUO, now Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”), and Giuseppe Tucci, President of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO, now Istituto per l’Africa e l’Oriente; see xvii, below), inaugurated the first archeological expedition at Ghazni, which was to be followed by expeditions in Sistān (1959), and at Isfahan and



Persepolis (1964). In 1967 Gianroberto Scarcia was appointed chair of Persian Language and Literature at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Venice “Ca’ Foscari,” and in 1968 Gherardo Gnoli was called to cover the newly established chair of Iranian Philology at the IUO, Bausani left Naples in 1971 for the “Scuola Orientale” of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” where he taught Islamic studies, with particular attention to Iran, until his retirement in 1987. In 1975 Angelo M. Piemontese, previously in Naples, was appointed chair of Persian Language and Literature in Rome. Thus by 1975 all three historical seats of Oriental research in Italy saw the presence of at least one chair focusing on one or other aspect of Iranian culture and civilization. Today this field of study is fortunately present also in universities with a weaker tradition in Middle Eastern and Asian studies. Giovanni M. D’Erme, who was elected in 1980 as chair of Persian language and literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, had inaugurated Persian studies at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Bologna as early as 1973. Iranian studies were pursued from the start in the newly founded Faculty of Cultural Heritage, located in the Ravenna branch of the University of Bologna. In 1996 Antonio Panaino moved from Bologna to Ravenna, where he obtained the full chair of Iranian Philology in 2000. Since 1986 Iranian studies have also been pursued at the University of Pisa, in the Faculty of Humanities, where Elio Provasi, previously at the Orientale in Naples, teaches Iranian philology and linguistics. This scholar, a specialist of different fields of Middle and New Iranian linguistics, is now actively preparing a comprehensive dictionary of the Sogdian language. In 2002, the University of the Tuscia in Viterbo, through the effort of its Rector, Marco Mancini, himself a student of Walter Belardi, opened a new position and appointed Elina Filippone chair of Iranian Studies. A collaborator and former student of Adriano Rossi, she is mainly interested in modern Iranian linguistics. Iranian studies are also pursued, though marginally, at the Catholic University in Milan, where Giancarlo Bolognesi and Valeria Fiorani-Piacentini teach. The former is a linguist, the latter principally a modern historian.

Many scholars belonging to the older generation had studied in Rome, but in more recent times this University was joined by Naples and Venice in preparing a significant number of prospective scholars in the field of Iranian studies. The most significant recent development was the establishment in 1984 of a doctoral course in Iranian Studies at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, with a curriculum covering both pre-Islamic and Islamic studies. A number of students have completed the program, and in fact all scholars who



have been able to pursue an academic career in Iranian studies in recent years are graduates of it. A second doctoral course, which covers pre-Islamic Iran as part of Ancient Near Eastern studies, is active in Rome.

Iranian studies in Italy are divided academically into two broad divisions. The first goes under the name of Persian Language and Literature, a field inaugurated by Italo Pizzi, mastered by Alessandro Bausani, and continued by Angelo Michele Piemontese, Giovanni Maria D'Erme, Riccardo Zipoli (Chair, 1987), Maurizio Pistoso (Chair, 1987), Rahim Raza, Daniela Meneghini, Michele Bernardini, Paola Orsatti, and Carlo Sacconi. It specializes in literary and linguistic studies of the Persian language, but also covers literary and linguistic studies concerning other modern Iranian languages. The second is more concerned with philological, historical, religious, and linguistic studies and has its roots in historical linguistics, history of religions, and ancient history; it now encompasses Islamic Iran as well. Although many scholars have turned their attention to problems in these subjects since the birth of Iranian studies, the collective field of studies only gained independent status in the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the impressive works of such giant Iranists as Walter Bruno Henning (q.v.), Sir Harold Bailey (q.v.), and Georg Morgenstierne (q.v. at *iranica.com*). In Italy it was introduced by Gherardo Gnoli and later continued by Adriano Rossi (Chair, 1980) and more recently by Antonio Panaino (Chair, 2000), Carlo G. Cereti (Chair, 2001), Elina Filippone (Chair, 2002), Elio Provasi, Mauro Maggi, and Andrea Piras.

The number of international congresses hosted in Italy covering both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods is evidence of the the strong interest in Iran. Particularly noteworthy are four conferences organized jointly by the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO, ex IsMEO) and the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Persia and the Graeco-Roman World, 1966; Persia in the Middle Ages, 1971; Persia and Central Asia from Alexander the Great to the 10th Century, 1994; and Persia and Byzantium, 2002. In 1983 (18-20 June) the First European Colloquium of Iranology met in Rome. On that occasion, the participating scholars came together in the evening of the 19th to found the Societas Iranologica Europaea (SIE), which still has its legal seat at the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente in Rome. A few years later IsMEO and the Piedmontese Centro per gli Studi Medio ed Estremo Orientali (CeSMEO) jointly hosted the first Europaean Conference of Iranian Studies in Turin (7-11 September 1987); the fifth met in Ravenna (6-11 October 2003). During April 9-11, 2003, the IsIAO, the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Rome "La



Sapienza,” and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche jointly organized an international conference under the title “Middle Iranian Lexicography. The Vocabulary of the Middle Iranian Languages.” The IsMEO has further organized in Venice, in collaboration with that city’s Fondazione Giorgio Cini, three conferences on various aspects of Iranian culture. The first (Incontro di religioni in Asia tra il III ed il X secolo d.C., 1981) was devoted to selected problems in the study of religions in Asia between the 3rd and the 10th century C.E. The second (Turfan and Tun-Huang. The Texts, 1990) and the third (Cina e Iran. Da Alessandro Magno alla dinastia Tang, 1994), were organized together with the IUO and UNESCO, and in both the discussion focused on the vast region of Central Asia linking Iran to China. Luigi Cirillo has organized four conferences on Manichean studies, though only the last two had relevance for Iranian studies. The first two were held at the University of Calabria in 1984 and 1988, both on the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis* (see [COLOGNE MANI CODEX](#)). The third, held at the same place in 1993, was entitled Manicheismo e Oriente Cristiano Antico. The latest was held at the IUO in 2001, under the title The Fifth International Conference of Manichaeic Studies. In the 1970s, the Caetani Foundation, closely linked to the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, organized a number of symposia on classical Persian poetry: in 1974 on Rumi, in 1975 on Neẓāmi, in 1976 on Ḥāfez, and in 1977 on ‘Aṭṭār, and in 1978 on Sanā’i. Italy has also hosted a few exhibitions of Iranian art. The first was held in Rome in 1956, followed by a second and more elaborate one in Milan in 1963 (called 7000 Anni d’Arte Iranica-). The third exhibition was hosted many years later at the Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale in Rome (Antica Persia, 2000).

At present Iranian studies in Italy represent a fairly thriving field of research, encompassing all its different branches. The main centers of research are the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” the Department of Asian Studies of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” (formerly Istituto Universitario Orientale), the Department of Eurasian Studies at the University of Venice. The University of Bologna presents a peculiar situation, with Iranian studies divided between three different faculties: the Faculty of Cultural Heritage in Ravenna, and those of Humanities and Foreign Languages and Literatures in its historical seat of Bologna.

In Rome, Persian language and literature as well as Iranian studies are taught, the first subject by Angelo Michele Piemontese, Paola Orsatti, and Simone



Cristoforetti, the second by Gherardo Gnoli and Carlo G. Cereti. The main focuses of teaching are Persian literature, codicology, and history of Iranian studies in Italy (taught by A. Piemontese, Paola Orsatti, and Mario Casari), history of Zoroastrianism, both ancient and modern, history of Manicheism and Iranian philology and linguistics (G. Gnoli and C.G. Cereti), and also studies on the Iranian calendars and other anthropological subjects (S. Cristoforetti). Umberto Scerrato, Bianca Maria Alfieri, and Francesco Noci teach Islamic archaeology and art history with particular attention to the Iranian world. Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, Professor of Islamic Studies, in her youth devoted time and energy to the history of Islamic Iran. The Roman school of linguistics traditionally shows a particular interest in Iranian languages, and still today Walter Belardi, Palmira Cipriano, Paolo Di Giovine, and Claudia Ciancaglini are active in the study of Iranian lexicography and historical linguistics. An international research project aimed at the compilation of a Middle Persian Dictionary has recently been started in collaboration with the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. This project, coordinated at an international level by Shaul Shaked, enjoys the participation of the Faculty of Humanities in Rome, IsIAO, and the University of Naples “L’Orientale.”

The University “L’Orientale,” in Naples, has chairs for Persian language and literature (Persian linguistics and literature, taught by G. M. D’Erme; Persian literature in India, taught by R. Raza; Persian and Turkish literature and history, taught by M. Bernardini; Modern Persian literature, taught by L. Tornesello) and for Iranian Studies, which are the fields of A.V. Rossi (Iranian philology and linguistics) and M. Maggi (Khotanese, Buddhist studies, and comparative Indo-Iranian grammar). Mario Vitalone studies the contemporary Zoroastrian communities in Iran and India, while Felicetta Ferraro concerns herself with modern Iranian history seen from an anthropologist’s point of view. Maria Vittoria Fontana teaches Islamic art and archaeology with specialization in the Iranian world, and Bruno Genito holds the chair of Iranian archaeology and actively participates in a number of archeological excavations in Iranian lands. Another art historian, Giovanna Ventrone Vassallo, who had worked in Isfahan, was until very recently at the Orientale of Naples. Among the scholars of Islamic studies, both Alberto Ventura and Claudio Lo Iacono are interested in Iran. A major research project run by the Orientale and the IsIAO is the Baluchi Etymological Dictionary (see BALUCHISTAN at *iranica.com*).



Ca' Foscari in Venice is a third important center for the teaching of Iranian subjects, although there is no chair specified as such. Persian language and literature, and New Persian linguistics and prosody, are taught by R. Zipoli and D. Meneghini. However, the chair of Islamic studies in Venice is held by one of Bausani's former disciples, G. Scarcia, who is principally an Iranist, although, like his teacher, quite adept in a wide range of subjects. G. Vercellin, an expert in modern Iranian history, formerly held the chair for Afghan language and literature but now teaches History and Institutions of Asia. A very important research project run in this university is *Lirica Persica*, aimed at creating a vast electronic database of Persian poetry (see xii, above).

Two specialists of pre-Islamic Iran are teaching at the relatively new Faculty of Cultural Heritage of Ravenna: Antonio Panaino (Avestan, history of Zoroastrianism, and intercultural relations in antiquity and late antiquity), and Andrea Piras (Avestan and Zoroastrian religion). They collaborate with a group of Byzantinists and ancient historians. New Persian is taught in Bologna, at the Faculty of Humanities by Maurizio Pistoso and at the Faculty of Foreign Languages by Carlo Saccone. Pierfrancesco Callieri and Maurizio Tosi, both archeologists and experts in the Iranian area, also teach at the Faculty of Cultural Heritage in Ravenna. The Melammu research project, studying the continuity of Mesopotamian cultural heritage in different historical contexts, is run by the Department of History and Methods for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage in collaboration with the Department of Oriental Studies of Rome, the Department of Asian Studies of Naples, and the Department of Ancient History of Padua.

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