

PREFACE

Gherardo Gnoli was born in Rome on 6th December 1937. He was a pupil of a great generation of orientalist which included among others Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Sabatino Moscati, Antonino Pagliaro, Alessandro Bausani and Giuseppe Tucci and he himself was to have an extraordinarily rapid academic career: on 1st November 1968 he was appointed professor of Iranian studies (*Iranistica*, later *Filologia iranica*) at the Istituto Universitario Orientale (IUO) of Naples, in 1970 he became Rector of the IUO and in 1979 he was elected President of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO), the big public research institution founded by Giuseppe Tucci in 1933, that had formerly been chaired by Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Tucci himself and Sabatino Moscati.

As Rector of the IUO (in which post he served till 1978) he was the main promoter of a reform which was bound to transform a highly specialised university-level institution of a 19th-century stamp, that was devoted to Asian and African studies, into a modern university which now counts four distinct faculties, some hundreds of courses and more than 9,000 students. As President of the IsMEO he contributed notably towards the expansion of Italian research work in Asia by increasing both the disciplines and the geographical areas involved, and he was a major solicitor for the unification of the Institute with the Istituto Italo-africano that resulted in the formation in 1995 of the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente (IsIAO), which he has chaired ever since.

In 1993, after more than 25 years of distinguished service, he left his appointment in Naples and took up the chair of *Storia religiosa dell’Iran e dell’Asia Centrale* at the University of Rome La Sapienza, where he teaches to the present day.

It was mainly due to Gherardo Gnoli’s work and teaching that Iranian philology in Italy was able to grow into a distinct field of studies parallel to that of Persian studies, and is currently represented by as many as seven chairs in different universities (five of which of full professorship level).

His scientific career has seen him engaged mainly in the study of the religious and secular history of the Iranian world as against the general background of studies on Late Antiquity. In this field he has written extensively on Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, the origin of the idea of Iran and the relationship between throne and Zoroastrian church in pre-Islamic Iran. He did not, however, ever forget his early interests for the Semitic world and from 1986 onwards published a number of Early South Arabian inscriptions. More than three hundred titles due to Professor Gnoli have been published so far, including several monographs in different domains of Iranian and Near Eastern studies.

Mention should also be made of Professor Gnoli’s commitment to the field of Iranian studies on an international level, e.g. of his active role in the founding of the *Societas Iranologica Europaea* (Rome, June 1983) and his contribution to the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* both as a member of its Advisory Committee and as the author of a number of articles. The high esteem he enjoys on the part of colleagues all over the world is confirmed by the numerous Italian and foreign honours which have been bestowed on him. He is *Socio Corrispondente* of the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* and of the

Accademia delle Scienze of Turin, Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Associé Étranger of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres of Paris, and Membre de l'Institut, Membre d'Honneur of the Société Asiatique.

It was in the spring of 2000 that, on the initiative of Mauro Maggi, a number of his pupils and friends decided to offer to Gherardo Gnoli a volume on the occasion of his 65th birthday. Seven of his senior students and friends, Carlo G. Cereti, Mauro Maggi, Enrico Morano, Antonio C. Panaino, Andrea Piras, Elio Provasi and Adriano V. Rossi, met on 26th April 2000 in the pleasant setting of the Società Geografica Italiana at Villa Celimontana in Rome to draw up plans for this volume.

Since, due to editorial constraints, a limit had to be set to the number of contributors – a difficult task when editing a volume in honour of one of the leading figures of Oriental studies in Europe – it proved necessary to restrict the scope of the volume to studies in Iranian philology and more specifically to the main interests of the dedicatee, viz. pre-Islamic Iranian religions approached from a historical and philological point of view. Hence (in full agreement with the Publisher) the chosen title *Religious themes and texts of pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia*. We should like to express our gratitude to Professor Nicholas Sims-Williams for accepting the volume for publication in the series “Beiträge zur Iranistik” of which he is editor. It was further decided that an international editorial board with thirteen leading Iranianists should be set up, that Antonio C. Panaino and Adriano V. Rossi should sit on this board, and that the volume should be edited by three of the original project group, whose university positions at the time did not involve particularly time-consuming administrative tasks. Enrico Morano further volunteered to edit Gherardo Gnoli's bibliography together with Mauro Maggi.

This volume benefited from the collaboration and support of many people and institutions. First of all, we are grateful to all the colleagues who have contributed articles. Other colleagues, among whom we should like to mention Professors Mary Boyce and Ehsan Yarshater, though unable to comply with our request for a contribution, expressed their appreciation of the initiative. Unfortunately, the Late Professor Jes P. Asmussen was prevented from contributing for reasons of poor health.

We are also deeply indebted to the colleagues and friends who readily accepted the invitation to join the editorial board of this volume. Unfortunately, the passing away of Ilya Gershevitch, Ronald E. Emmerick and David N. MacKenzie in 2001 deprived the editorial board of three of its more authoritative members and all of us of three dear friends.

It is a pleasure to thank the Fondazione Giorgio Cini of Venice, the Dipartimento di Storia e Metodi per la Conservazione dei Beni Culturali of the University of Bologna,¹ the University of Naples L'Orientale (formerly IUO), and the Dipartimento di Studi Orientali of the University of Rome La Sapienza that, by their generous grants, have made the publication of this book possible. Thanks are also due to Barbara Goss for revising the English of some of the articles.

¹ Project “Interculturalità e interazione culturale, storico-politica e religiosa tra Oriente e Occidente dall'Antichità all'Alto Medioevo” directed by A. C. Panaino and funded by the MIUR.

Since the production of the volume took a little more time than was planned, the volume was presented to Professor Gnoli, on 6th December 2002, in the form of a bound camera-ready copy during a small ceremony that was held in Rome at the seat of the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana. We take the opportunity here to thank its authorities for their generous hospitality.

Carlo G. Cereti
Mauro Maggi
Elio Provasi

