

**THE ITALIAN PERSPECTIVE AND CONTRIBUTION
TO ISLAMIC STUDIES.
FROM ‘ORIENTAL STUDIES’ TO ‘ISLAMIC STUDIES’**

by Valeria Piacentini

1. *From “Oriental Studies” to “Linguistics”. Relations with Islamic Studies. Michele Amari*

History of Oriental Studies in Italy is a long development, which began in the first half of the 19th century as a focal branch of linguistics. That was the time of great Italian commercial exchanges and business in Europe: the *Regno di Napoli* with its *Collegio dei Cinesi*¹, the *Regno di Sardegna-Piemonte* and Egypt, the Near Eastern countries and the Persian Qajari empire, in search of silk worms, spices and papyruses; Tuscany in search of markets for its cotton and wool fabrics. At the time, Oriental Studies’ connotations were essentially geographic, that is exploration and investigation about physical features, natural and political forms, climate, population, peopling and patterns of settlement, costumes and local traditions, official and spoken languages, markets and goods to be bargained, sold and/or bought, currency et alia referring to regions of economic and commercial interest. Such studies– which included research in Islamic countries – were mainly promoted and financed by the

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano.

¹ Naples’ University “*l’Orientale*” was founded in 1724 by Matteo Ripa, a secular priest and missionary, who from 1711 to 1723 worked at the court of the Chinese Manchu Emperor Kangxi, as painter and engraver on polished copper plates. When back to Naples, Matteo Ripa founded a monastery with a “College” (*il Collegio dei Cinesi*) for young scholars and missionaries to China and other “Asian Oriental Countries”. Later, the “*Collegio dei Cinesi*” was reorganized as “*Real Collegio Asiatico*”. Following the Italian Unity, in 1869 the *Collegio* was restructured by Francesco De Sanctis as a secular Institution: The *Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, present Naples’ *Università “l’Orientale*”.

*Società Geografica Italiana*². Academic subjects like linguistics, or literary, Religious and Philosophical studies, were part of Oriental Studies and restricted to few elected and selected scholars.

Islamic Studies as such disentangled themselves from the general branch of Oriental Studies around the end of the 19th/beginning of the 20th century, affirming their essence as an autonomous discipline and science. Spur to this development were the Italian colonial experience in Asia Minor, Libya and Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the commercial trends towards the Islamic and Arab world, on the other. Commercial intercourses and trade dealings opened Academies and Colleges to new subjects: in-depth knowledge about local civilizations, research into their history, literary and artistic forms, and studies on their religious systems including Islamic Law. Among the countries that had a major impact on the Italian conscience, it is imperative to list Persia, which always had a special flavour and emotional effect for the Italian learned élites, fascinated by its history, monuments and literary production. No less important were Egypt, Libya and Tunisia along the southern waters of the Mediterranean Sea for their past intercourses with Rome and Italy as a whole. Furthermore, the Horn of Africa and Yemen must be mentioned in this context. Syria, Turkey and some Central Asian regions represented an ambitious destination... for hunting purposes. These latter brought to the discovery of bewildering ancient civilizations and their vestiges, like Gandhara's majestic ruins, Tibetan religious temples, ancient Christian Churches and Buddhist temples, and, with them, the relics of a glorious Islamic past and a no less glorious present. Without neglecting Linguistics, the language with its critical translations and comments (Arabic, Persian, Turkic and other) was no longer the only object of Islamic Studies, but the key to understanding 'from inside' Islamic culture and its civilizations.

Michele Amari (Palermo, 1806-Firenze, 1889), famous Arabist of his times, played a prominent part in separating Linguistics from the generic Oriental Studies. He used Arabic as a distinct entity, the instrument for reading texts and manuscripts in Arabic (essentially chronicles and travelogues), evaluating and recording dynasties, chronologies and events,

² The Italian Geographical Society was founded in Florence in 1867. Its institutional objective was "promotion and dissemination of geographical sciences and discoveries". In 1869 started its "Bulletin".

and disclosing their essence amongst cultured peoples of his time. His life was a coherent practice of this scientific approach to Arabic and Islamic studies. Due to his anti-Borbonic spirit, he was forced to leave his beloved Sicily (1842). He went to Paris, where he attended courses of Arabic, aimed at reading textual sources in their original language, allowing an inside approach to events and their causes. This brought Amari to investigate Sicily's history under Arab and Muslim rulers, and to study Southern Italy's relationships with the Mediterranean countries of the Middle Ages. His masterpiece is still considered the *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (1854-1872). Back to Italy, Amari held the chair of Arab Language and history at Pisa University. However, his scientific activities were far from being concluded. After Italy's Unity, appointed Minister of Education, Amari gave new impetus to Oriental Studies, privileging Arab-Islamic studies and his beloved mother-land, Sicily³. Amari's heritage would be revitalized by the capable hands of Umberto Rizzitano in Palermo's University, and kept alive by his scholarship⁴.

2. *Linguistics vis-à-vis Islamic Studies. Arab Past Domination and Cultural Connections*

This was a time when scholars studying Islam began to open up their *hortus clausus* or 'closed garden', to new perspectives and approaches⁵. It was also a time when travelogues and seducing narratives

³ As mentioned above, Amari's masterpiece is considered his *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, translated in 2004 into Arabic by a group of Egyptian scholars. His are the *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (1857-1887) and *Le epigrafi arabiche in Sicilia, trascritte, tradotte e illustrate* (1875-1885). As also stated above, Amari's historical approach is an inward approach. He aimed at shaping Sicily's national identity and character to the end of Byzantium's rule, after three centuries of Byzantine military occupation, heavy taxation and resources' over-exploitation. He is very critical of Byzantium; conversely, he enhances the Arab phase and dominion, which would leave its imprint until his own age. Amari left his collection of books and manuscripts to the library of the *Accademia dei Lincei* in Rome.

⁴ See below § 5.

⁵ The definition of *hortus clausus*, i.e. Linguistics (the closed garden) *vis-à-vis* Islamic Studies, was forged by Levi Della Vida (then one of Caetani's scholars working at the *Annali*). No less meaningful is Levi Della Vida's portrait of Caetani: proud aristocrat, engaged politician and man of culture: G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Fantasma ritrovati*, Roma, Neri Pozza, 1966, p. 40 *et infra*.

of explorations (like the Geographical Society's Bulletin or the no less suggestive lectures held at Italian institutions) led to a renewed interest in the Islamic world. A cultural melting-pot, where the Arab conquest and the political control of Damascus and Baghdad caliphs, exercised through their Arab governors, had gradually loosened and the institutional management had slipped into the hands of local leaders. It was a process that ultimately had brought to symbioses between religious-inspired Arab-Islamic cultures and ancient deeply rooted political-cultural traditions. A variegated reality to be investigated anew. Yet, Linguistics and textual sources represented the access-key to investigating events, chronologies and dynastic courses; however, local 'peoples' that had adopted a Arab-Islamic heritage became a no less focal object of research with their cultural pre-Islamic identities.

Catalyst of the new trend was Leone Caetani and a circle of young Arabists collaborating with him to his *opus magnum* "*Gli Annali dell'Islam*" (translated into English and Arabic as *Annals of Islam* and *Tārīkh Islām*). The base to this development would be three great personalities: Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Francesco Gabrieli, and their schools⁶. The supporting framework was represented by three Institutions: the *Istituto per l'Oriente*, the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* and the *Istituto Italiano per l'Africa*⁷.

2.1 Leone Caetani and *Gli Annali dell'Islam*

Leone Caetani (1869-1935) was from a prominent Roman aristocratic family, an outstanding personality both as politician and scholar. He loved hunting and, when it was the right season, he used to pack and go to the steep Near Eastern mountains for hunting leopards (sic) or to Central Asia for moufflons. But he also loved to go and visit territories where "history had marked its passage". He used to affirm that it was impossible to write of history without sensing the smell of the battlefields where history had signed the future. From Central Asia to Iran, from Iran to the Near East and Arabia...he visited and inquired.

⁶ See following sections.

⁷ See following § 3.

Then he conceived his *Annali dell' Islam*, directly from textual sources in Arabic and manuscripts, a precious *ensemble* that he had patiently collected during his visits abroad⁸. Classical sources, however, needed to be rationally decoded by tying together events with their causes. He selected the best scholars in Arabic and organized in his palace in Rome, in the famous *soffitta di via delle Botteghe Oscure* (attic in Caetani's Palace), a positive *fucina* (forgery) of specialists to study and translate from his rich collection of literary sources the parts referring to the first years of Islam⁹. Then, with the collaboration of his scholars, the evinced parts were organized following the annal-writing system. This specialists' group moved beyond the linguistic-philological approach to a more 'global' vision, which included the studying of *hawadith* (traditions – sayings of the Prophet) and their rigorous analysis, on the one hand, and a geographical and cultural approach, which sought beneath the surface of the classical sources the causes of events and the gears that made them move, on the other. Caetani himself supervised, commented and argued the logic of facts and circumstances that had catapulted Islam out of Arabia, eastwards and westwards. Amongst these young and enthusiastic scholars, can be named Francesco Gabrieli, Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Michelangelo Guidi, Carlo Alfonso Nallino and others¹⁰.

⁸ Leone Caetani's archives and his precious collection of books can be still consulted in Rome, at Palazzo Corsini, in Via della Lungara 7, seat of the *Accademia dei Lincei*. In 1924, Caetani donated his Library to the Academy, where it is still lodged in the Oriental Section of the Lincei's Library with Michele Amari's rich fund. An intimate and sincere friendship tied Caetani with Giuseppe Gabrieli, father of his more celebrated son Francesco, Arabist himself. During Caetani's last period in Rome, Giuseppe was particularly close to him, reorganized the fund, listed books and manuscripts before their donation to the Lincei, and supervised the whole operation.

⁹ A lovely description of this period can be found in G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Fantasmii ritrovati*, cit.: "La soffitta delle Botteghe Oscure", pp. 21-72.

¹⁰ Michelangelo Guidi (1886-1946), son of his famous father Ignazio (see the following note) and Arabist himself, in 1919 had the chair of Arabic in Rome "La Sapienza". He taught Arab Philology from 1926 to 1929 in the Egyptian University of Cairo; Director of the *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, in 1938 inherited Nallino's chair at Rome "La Sapienza". Among his major studies, can be recalled M. GUIDI, *Storia della Religione Islamica*, in P. TACCHI VENTURI (ed.), *Storia delle Religioni*, Torino, UTET, 1937, pp. 227-359; *Aspetti e problemi del mondo Islamico*, Roma, Quaderni dell'Istituto Nazionale di Cultura fascista, 1937; *Islam e Arabismo*, Roma, Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1941; *Caratteri della Cultura Araba*, Roma, Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1943.

The *Annali* were never completed. However, they are a milestone for all scholars in Islamic Studies. They signed the disengagement of Islamic Studies from Linguistics, now a discipline *per se*, and extended them to other subjects, like history and the interplay of human powers; geography, the map where human events took and still take place; profits, that is ‘the wealth’ that always moved human greed, ambitions... and wars; religion, philosophy and Islamic law, perceived as the very architecture of Islamic political and/or ‘informal’ systems. Amongst these latter, came literary heritages, epics and oral traditions.

2.2 *Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Francesco Gabrieli*

These three personalities deserve special attention for their solid contribution to Islamic Studies, and not only in Italy. It was a critical historic stage punctuated by great political-institutional changes, when Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Carlo Alfonso Nallino and Francesco Gabrieli met at Caetani’s palace. Together they worked on the Annals, and since that experience became close friends. Mussolini’s regime, racial laws and the Second World War brought upon different choices, but events did not break their independent way of thinking, neither shattered their friendship nor their mutual scientific respect and collaboration.

Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886-1967) was from a prominent non-observant Jewish family of bankers. In 1903, his father was appointed to Rome, where Giorgio attended university and graduated discussing his doctorate on a Syriac papyrus from Cairo’s archives. In Cairo, he met Ignazio Guidi, who introduced him to Islamic studies¹¹. For two years he collaborated with Caetani to the *Annali dell’Islam*, and there he made his acquaintance with the two Gabrielis, Giuseppe and his son Francesco. In 1913, he was awarded the chair of Arabic at Naples’ Institute of Oriental Studies, thence he was called to Turin for semitic

¹¹ Ignazio Guidi (1844-1935) can be considered the forefather of “Semitic Studies” in Italy (which included Arabic, Amharic, and other ‘semitic’ languages). After an experience at the Vatican Library, he held the chair at Rome’s University of *Ebraico e Lingue Semitiche Compare* (1876-1919). His scientific activity essentially focused on Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopic studies (still prized are his translations and editions of Arab texts, like part of Ṭabarī’s chronicle, and the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*’s table of contents).

languages, and in 1920 he substituted in Rome Ignazio Guidi in his chair of *Ebraico e Lingue Semitiche Comparate*. The advent of Fascism inevitably upset his and his family's life. He was openly hostile to the system, its doctrine and ideology, which he never spared from a sour criticism. In 1931, having refused oath to Mussolini's regime, he was dismissed from his University. At that juncture, the Vatican City opened his Library for him, offered Levi Della Vida hospitality and a little wage for his work. He was committed to catalogue the Library's Arab manuscripts. The family could survive, but, in 1938, discriminations against Jewish people became increasingly violent and, for the sake of his children and wife's security, he took the decision to leave his country and go into exile to the USA¹². They came back in 1945. In 1948, Levi Della Vida resumed teaching at Rome "La Sapienza" where he held the chair of Muslim History and Institutions. He retired in 1956, dedicating his life to research and the publication of his latest writings and memoirs.

Levi Della Vida undoubtedly had a complex, restless personality. However, he was an honorable man, coherent as regards his political and cultural positions. He firmly rejected all forms of discrimination and racism (a "free thinker" as he used to say) and was not afraid to follow and proclaim his moral and political ideas, clearly echoed by his scientific attitude (well-known are his *elzeviri* in the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*). His literary contributions mirror his passionate personality and his fervid scientific interests, which ranged far beyond Islam and Islamic studies. For him, "history" and "religion" represented a sphere of continuity; the Roman-Greek worlds often surface in his writings intertwining with the Arabs, a multifaceted Islam and a "Semitic" Past. The cultural symbiosis of these worlds is well portrayed in one of his first publications, *Storia e Religione nell'Oriente Semitico*, written and published when he was in Rome. In 1938 he held three 'historic' lectures (*Les Sémites dans l'Historire Religieuse*) at the *Collège de France*. It was an epic event, the lectures' text was immediately published, and later re-published and edited with

¹² About Levi Della Vida's American experience, peoples and scholars he met, see V. PIACENTINI, *Reminiscences from the Past: Giorgio Levi Della Vida and Samuel Miklos Stern: The Islamic City*, in "Journal of Modern Jewish Studies", 20, 2021, 4, § 1 (in collaboration with F. Morissey).

an introduction by Gabrieli and Fulvio Tessitore. His numerous studies and essays on the Arab and Muslim world (contemporary and past) have been published in different editions. Outstanding for his still updated, erudite theses and evocative reminiscences is *Aneddoti e Svaghi Arabi e non Arabi*¹³.

Carlo Alfonso Nallino. “Prince of Islamic studies...hard, authoritative, uncompromising when his duties were committed, direct and honorable, he hated anything done *extempore*...Outstanding scholar and not only prominent in Oriental studies, his culture had no limits”. This is how Levi Della Vida, during a lecture, described his Master in Islamic studies. A few words and a realistic picture. They met in Cairo. Levi Della Vida always had deep respect and admiration for Nallino, despite this latter’s political beliefs.

Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938). As a young boy, Carlo Alfonso’s aspiration was to become a great explorer and geographer. A few years later, he opted for mathematics and astronomy. Then, when his father was posted to Udine, he met an old lady who had spent several years in Egypt and spoke basic Arabic. Fascinated by her accounts, Carlo decided to start learning Arabic and astronomy. Completed his first educational studies at Udine, he opted for academic education in mathematics and geography, and opted for Turin University. There, he met the great Iran scholar and Arabist Italo Pizzi, who became his Professor in Oriental studies and beloved Master and friend in life. Carlo Alfonso’s first steps in Islamic studies were dedicated to Arab sciences and astronomy between the 9th and 10th Century CE. He was only twenty

¹³ G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Aneddoti e svaghi arabi e non arabi*, Milano – Napoli, Ricciardi, 1959. G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Storia e Religione nell’Oriente Semitico*, Roma, Scienze e Lettere, 1924. See also G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Vaticana*, Città del Vaticano 1935; *Ricerche sulla formazione del più antico fondo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana*, Città del Vaticano, 1939; *Secondo elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Vaticana*, Città del Vaticano, 1965; G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Les Sémites dans l’Histoire Religieuse*, Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1938; repr. M.G. AMADASI GUZZO (ed.), Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2017. A picture of Islamic Studies since Caetani’s *fučina*, enlivened with personal reminiscences of personages and scholarly ambiances, is in G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Fantasma ritrovati*, cit.. Post-mortem reprints of essays and studies are: M.G. AMADASI GUZZO and F. MICHELIN TOCCI (ed.), *Visita a Tamerlano. Saggi di Storia e Letteratura*, Napoli, Morano, 1988. Cfr. also T. MUNARI (ed.), *Scritti sull’Islam*, Pisa, Edizioni della Normale, 2019.

years old, and his reputation in this field was already global. His following life and scientific steps mirror his passionate interests in mathematics, geography and sciences. He was 22 years old when called to Naples University as Professor of Arabic (1894-1902) and soon later to Palermo (1902-1913). In 1914, he had the chair of Muslim History and Institutions in Rome. He collaborated in the setting up of the *Istituto per l'Oriente* and its Journal *Oriente Moderno* (see below §3).

Nallino's major contributions to Islamic studies still are his translation of the Astronomical Tables by al-Battani and other researches on astronomical sciences in the Arab and Muslim world. Yet notable and well-grounded is his research on Islamic philosophy, religious doctrines and Islamic law. He thoroughly investigated some historic crucial phases and collaborated with Leone Caetani to the *Annali dell'Islam*. His solid knowledge of Arabic and modern Egyptian brought him to Cairo, where he was invited by el-Azhar to lecture on Arab-Islamic theoretical issues. His lectures and studies have been collected and reprinted by his beloved daughter, Maria¹⁴.

All in all, Nallino's life mirrors the formative impact of his first interests. With Levi Della Vida's words, "*nei primi saggi di Nallino si trova già completamente sviluppato...quel senso della concretezza dei fenomeni storici che lo ha reso sempre diffidente dalle costruzioni fantastiche, se pur seducenti, e gli ha fatto evitare, in ogni suo lavoro posteriore, le formule troppo generiche e comprensive*"¹⁵. He undoubtedly opened the "closed garden" of linguistics to other subjects. He repeatedly asserted that to investigate and "understand" Islam and its present social standing, it was necessary to refer to its Arab-Islamic Past and ruling classes, institutions, religious characters, external manifestations... the "geographic asset" of a vast world, that could not be absorbed into a common fabric of Arab-Islamic civilization; it had its local cultural traditions that, more than once, came to the forefront with their autonomous stances. Nallino's love for geography brought him to travel. He travelled and visited vast transient empires and pres-

¹⁴ C.A. NALLINO, *Raccolta di scritti editi e inediti*, care of M. NALLINO, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 6 voll., 1938-1948.

¹⁵ About Nallino's bewildering personality, his cultural inclinations since a young boy, and following steps in Islamic studies see G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Aneddoti e svaghi arabi e non arabi*, cit., pp. 250-277.

ent political entities “feeling” local realities and atmospheres, which, when at home, he reported to textual sources and analyzed in all their pointers with his erudite ‘scientific’ learning. *Maria Nallino* (1908-1974) always followed his father when abroad and with him, visited Arabia arriving (disguised in Arab male cloths) to the Holy Sanctuary in Mecca. She followed her father also on his scientific interests and activities. Her excellent knowledge of Arabic and Arab literature and poetry brought her to translations, comments and notes; her scientific production ranges from classical to modern-contemporary subjects. She shared Carlo Alfonso’s political choice and, later, as Scientific Director at the *Istituto per l’Oriente*, actively promoted its institutional activities.

Francesco Gabrieli (1904-1996). Son of Giuseppe, Arabist himself and Caetani’s close fiend, Francesco Gabrieli has signed an important chapter in classical and mediaeval Islamic Studies, that is the passage from Arab and Semitic studies to Islamic Studies. He graduated in classical literary studies and educated by his father to Arabic, he studied Turkish and Middle-Persian which he considered the “essential basis for any Islamic studies”. On the trail of Michelangelo Guidi, he soon opened his ‘classical’ interests to the eastern Islamic world and its ancient crossroads, of which Iran had undeniably signed ages of cultural and religious brilliance. After a short period at Palermo and Naples Universities, he held the chair of Arab Language and Literature at Rome “La Sapienza”, held until his retirement (1939-1976). He dedicated time, energies and scientific involvement in the *Istituto per l’Oriente* and the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*. “Foreign member” of Arab Academies (Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Amman), he was also honorary member of numerous Italian, European and American Academies, and received prestigious prizes for his contributions vis-a-vis the development of Oriental Studies. Although a prominent Arabist, he did not confine his linguistic talent to philological and ‘glossary’ virtuosity. He used his familiarity with Arabic, Turkish and Persian as a basis for reading textual sources, which, carefully evaluated, became the only way for studying and writing of Islamic history and its civilizations’ variegated aspects (philosophical, religious, literary) and, at the same time, they were an indispensable tool to appraise modern events and Islamic relationships with European societies and culture. Emblematic of this scientific approach are two books: *Gli Arabi* (1957)

and *Il Risorgimento Arabo* (1958), two monographic studies translated into French, English and German, focusing on Arabia and the origin and expansion of Islam, the former, and on modern-contemporary revolts of the “Arab peoples”, the latter; both, updated, have been reprinted in 1975. Other focal studies are *Storici arabi delle Crociate* (1957, 1963, 1969, translated into English and German); *Maometto e le grandi conquiste Arabe* (1967, translated into German), which brought him to research of Persian and Turkish texts, too. Among Gabrieli’s literary studies, noteworthy is his *Storia della letteratura Araba* (1951, updated ed. 1967). This book broke a “philological” tradition, first volume of a series following the same methodological line. In other words: although a linguist himself, Gabrieli dismissed critical philological-linguistic translations and related erudite comments on texts and authors; conversely, he conceived his *Letteratura Araba* as a “literary history” of the Arabs and their world; a picture of the historical and cultural panorama of the writers’ epoch, its shapes and how and in which way it might have influenced authors and literary productions¹⁶. Following this methodological approach, he dedicated several monographic studies to poets (Omar Khayyam, *Le quartine di Omar Khayyam, le Rubaiyyât*), travelers (*Poesia e avventura nel Medioevo arabo: Shànfara-Sindibàd-Ibn Battuta*, 1988), epics (Ferdowsi, *Il libro dei Re – Shahnamah*) and others; the subjects are merged with the historical, political and cultural atmosphere of their time, flashes illustrated by Gabrieli’s translations from the original Arab texts. A milestone is also his translation and comment of “One Thousand Nights and One” (*Le Mille e una notte*, 2 vols. 1964). As Levi Della Vida, he opened the specialists’ “closed garden” to a non-specialist public: a “focused divulgation” via radio’s lessons, articles in newspapers, “pocket books” and essays’ collections. Francesco Gabrieli indulged on pages referring to personal experiences and emotions, like *Dal Mondo dell’Islàm - Nuovi saggi di storia e civiltà musulmana* (1954, dedicated to his Master, M. Guidi) and *Testimonianze arabe ed europee* (1976)¹⁷.

¹⁶ See also below, Alessandro Bausani and Gianroberto Scarcia, ns. 20 and 24.

¹⁷ Gabrieli’s scientific production is very rich. In this text, we have selected some studies coherent with this discourse. For a catalogue, see: *A Francesco Gabrieli. Studi in onore di Francesco Gabrieli nel suo ottantesimo compleanno*, Roma, 1984, pp. ix-xix.

3. *Islamic Studies vis-à-vis History as Independent Subject and Discipline. The Istituto per l'Oriente, the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa*

Nallino, Levi Della Vida and Gabrieli left a cultural legacy, inherited by the Institute for Oriental Studies (*Istituto per l'Oriente* - ISPO), the Institute for Middle and Oriental Studies (*Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* - ISMEO) and the Italian Institute for Africa (*Istituto Italiano per l'Africa* - ISIA). All of them are still playing a central role within Islamic Studies. All of them were (and still are) based in Rome, all of them collaborated with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Italian Africa¹⁸. All of them were (and still are) a solid institutional support to Islamic studies' intellectual development, when writing of history and historical research began to play a major role within the historiographical evolution of the time.

3.1 *The Istituto per l'Oriente*

The *Istituto per l'Oriente* is one of the most ancient Italian institutions for studies on modern and contemporary Arab and Muslim worlds. It was established in March 1921 by a group of Italian ambassadors, senior civil servants and Italian academics. In 1982 the Institute added to its name the name of one of its most important founders, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, who was for a long time the Institute's Scientific Director and Director of its journal *Oriente Moderno* until his death in 1938¹⁹. Amongst its Directors, can be named some of the most renowned Italian Arabists and Islamists, like Levi Della Vida, Gabrieli, Ettore Rossi (1894-1955, who left his books and documents to the Institute), Maria Nallino (the brave daughter of Carlo Alfonso), Paolo Minganti and, later, Claudio Lo Jacono, Director of *Oriente Moderno* since 1995. ISPO's institutional activity was – and still is – to inquire the complex political, institutional, economic and social events occurring in the Muslim and Arab worlds. A geographically very extensive world, crossroads of ancient civilizations,

¹⁸ Founded as Ministry of the Italian Kingdom's Colonies in 1912; it was renamed as Ministry of Italian Africa in 1937 and abolished in 1953.

¹⁹ C.A. Nallino: see previous paragraph, section 2.2.

cultural and religious core of modern realities. ISPO's activity has taken place without interruption for 123 years through the publication of monographs, scientific journals (first of all *Oriente Moderno*), the organization of conferences and lectures, courses of Arabic – Persian – Turkish languages and culture, presentation of books, and promotion of research-works on modern contemporary history of the Muslim and Arab worlds. Its library has more than 35.000 volumes and 300 periodicals. Today, it owns the largest Italian collection of historical, political, socio-economic and literary texts on Middle East, mostly contemporary and modern. Special mention deserves *Oriente Moderno*. This journal was born as a monthly journal, dedicated to the study of the Muslim and Arab world, with specific attention to modern and contemporary events. Since its foundation, it adopted and retained the “concrete” attention to history and its cultural phenomena of Carlo Alfonso Nallino, its creator and organizer, receptive to outside influences and adept to absorbing them into a pragmatic stock of a minute textual investigation and events' evaluation in terms of causes and effects, devoid of emotional comments. During its nearly one hundred years of life, *Oriente Moderno* has focused on a wide range of issues: 1) scientific articles regarding political, social, literary, artistic and cultural life in Near and Middle East; 2) official documents and a thorough documentation in translation from the native languages about political, diplomatic, economic, social and institutional initiatives taken by Arab and Muslim Governments; 3) photographic and other documentation; 4) news and reviews of the main Italian and International specialized materials on Near and Middle East. Moreover, for a number of decades, *Oriente Moderno* has published a review from Islamic countries, providing unique records on contemporary events. I was in charge of “Persia” and some Arab countries of the Gulf. I recall how daily newspapers, posted by air mail from different Arab and Islamic countries, in the Institute were read by scholars; news of political and institutional significance were translated into Italian, and published in a special section of the Journal. When events of political/cultural importance or economic relevance occurred, these were evaluated and commented by ‘experts’ in a special rubric of the same Journal. All these made *Oriente Moderno* a mine of precious, updated monthly information about contemporary situations in sensitive regions²⁰. In the seventies of

²⁰ For some years, *Oriente Moderno* was published also in semestral issues. Since 1996,

the previous century, ISPO was a formative school for our generation, young ambitious researchers who, under the strict *ferula* and scientific direction of Maria Nallino, during the coffee-break used to sit in her little parlour and discuss together facts, events, personages and local politics... first steps towards a new historiographical approach²¹. When Maria Nallino won her chair of Arab language and Islamic studies in Venice Ca' Foscari, Paolo Minganti succeeded her as director of *Oriente Moderno*...the golden days of Arab and Islamic studies in Italy! Lively debates between us took place about “human sciences” and “social sciences”, creeping into the Italian cultural *milieu* with their suggestions...Islamic Studies were not immune to their seductive inputs. However, *Oriente Moderno* and the *Istituto per l'Oriente*, which had always focused on social, economic and “human” issues and related affairs, never gave up to a rigorous linguistic inside-approach for assessments and evaluations about events, wars and revolutions making it onto the stage.

3.2 *The Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente*

The *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* was established in 1933 by Giovanni Gentile and Giuseppe Tucci. Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) used to state that to perceive the culture of a remote and geographically very extensive world as Middle, Central and Oriental Asia and its outliers with their cultural cataclysms and invasions, first of all it was necessary to relate to and investigate their geography (human and geomorphological), how it might have conditioned human settlements, or might have been conditioned at the time. Then, it was necessary to investigate what textual sources of the past might have to say about their past and its historical context. Thence, the linguistic direct approach became a major key to any realistic studying. Last but not least, it was compelling to travel there, and sense the smell of the dust and the noise of markets and urban settlements. It was necessary to cross the salty deserts, the arid vast central-Asian steppes and forest lands, the steep passages of moun-

with a new graphic outlook and dimension, it was published 2-3 times a year and a series (*Quaderni di Oriente Moderno*) was added. In these last years the journal appears with two yearly issues: one with articles and reviews, and the other featuring monographic subjects.

²¹ See § 5: *Les Annales* and their impact on Italian research and history writing.

tains and rocky plateaux. It was compelling to personally perceive the smell and the slow process of foreign ethnos and their religious creeds and traditions. Pragmatically, he followed his own teaching, and travelled, travelled through steppes and deserts, narrow mountainous gorges and immense plains where astounding monuments marked the incredible vestiges of a glorious past. A past often recalling the heritage of our same past. He met many personages, like Ahmad Hasan Dani and Mother Theresa of Calcutta, befriended with local scholars, gave life to friendships still alive and celebrated by local institutions. Tucci's legacy is still very much alive today. Tangible and pragmatic, it gave life to a positive school of scholars (archaeologists, linguists, historians, ethno-anthropologists...) and solid international cultural *liaisons*. Amongst its last presidents, Sabatino Moscati and Gherardo Gnoli can be mentioned. The ISMEO's institutional objects were: the promotion of cultural, political and economic relationships between Italy and Asiatic countries. In 1995 it was annexed to the Italo-African Institute in Rome, giving life to the Italian Institute for Africa and Orient (ISI AO). In 2012 the ISI AO, too, was closed. However, institutional activities, events, lectures have been re-organized, and are giving new verve and dynamism to a cultural and political Italian tradition under the firm direction of Valerio Adriano Rossi, eminent scholar of Iran and Indo-Iranian Linguistics. During its long existence, the ISMEO has given life to institutes for Study and research based in Italy and in several Asian countries. Among its cultural areas of interest can be listed Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Central Asia, Tibet, Nepal, China, Korea, Japan and – after the disintegration of Soviet Union – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Exhibitions were also organized, lectures, conferences, schools of “Oriental studies” (language and culture). Prominent has been (and still is) its archaeological activity, a collaboration with local Institutions, which includes training, museography and restauration/preservation of monumental vestiges.

Publications were (and still are) among ISMEO's institutional activities, major was the journal “East and West”. The Library has a wonderful collection of books, most of them referring to pre-Islamic times, and Journals. Its contributions to Islamic studies are institutionally limited, because of the institute's interests in pre-Islamic Asiatic civilizations. However, either through archaeological excavations (like those in Iraq, Iran, Oman, Pakistan and other), or through Language and Culture courses, its contribution was and still is remarkable: ‘geography,

history *and* archaeology’, as conceived and wanted by the ISMEO’s Founding-Father Giuseppe Tucci, forefather of new Italian cultural and methodological research-lines.

3.3 *The Istituto Italiano per l’Africa*

As mentioned above, the *Istituto Italiano per l’Africa* (Italian Institute for Africa) was established in Rome in order to foster Italian cultural and political relations with African countries, promote research on political, institutional, social and religious forces active in Africa (special focus also on traditions and traditional costumes), implement studies on modern-contemporary religious forces (with specific regard to Islamic studies, special focus on the Senusiyya, Ibadism and the Horn of Africa), carry out research-work in collaboration with African institutions, experts and scholars. Courses and conferences on specific cultural subjects, political phenomena, and languages were also organized. Archaeological surveys and excavations, ethnographic surveys, anthropological and ethnological researches were promoted and fostered in Ethiopia, Somalia, Erythraea and Libya. Training was actively given to promote the territory’s development (communications and infrastructures, agriculture, trade, tourism and other). The institute had a lively publishing activity (books and journals). Renowned were its library and its outstanding collection of African journals, its precious funds of local documentation and no less precious museum-assets. In 2012 the Institute was closed and merged with ISMEO, giving life to the ISIAO. However, a short life for both Institutions (see above). Presently, it still is under re-organization.

4. *The Aftermath of the Second World War: Giving New Vigour to Islamic Studies*

4.1 *Academies and Universities*

The Second World War deprived Italy from all its colonial territories, the only exception being Somalia under a special statute until the country’s independence. The Second World War, however, did not de-

prive Italy from its scholarly competence. Universities and institutes welcomed the ‘old’ generation and Islamic studies had a new impetus. Naples’ Institute for Oriental Studies was reorganized. Its new plan included a Department of Arab and Islamic Studies, which comprised the basic disciplines for ‘studies and research on the Muslim world and its systems’. To traditional disciplines, other Islamic subjects were aggregated with their historical and cultural backgrounds. For example: the Turks or *Turcologia*. It included the Turkic peoples in general, textual sources and inscriptions (Orkhon runic inscriptions), arts, history, Islamization, development in differentiated cultural groups and political-institutional entities until the Ottoman empire and modern Turkey. Coordinator of this sector was Alessio Bombaci (1914-1979), who took the chair of Turkic Languages and History (*Turcologia*). The Arabs: these latter were part of a generic Department of *Islamistica* (Islamic studies), essentially focused on Arab groupings and their cultural characters. This sector included languages (classical and modern), history (past – Middle Ages – modern and contemporary), Islamic arts, Islamic law, philosophy and religious and cultic specifics. Coordinator of this sector was Roberto Rubinacci (1915-1992), who held the chair of Islamic Law. To this Department were annexed Ethiopic studies (*Etiopistica*) headed by Lanfranco Ricci (1916-2007). Islamic Arts were in the hands and competence of Umberto Scerrato (1928-2011). In 2012, in Naples was opened the “Oriental Museum ‘Umberto Scerrato’ of the University l’Orientale”, which houses specimens from bequests of private citizens or acquired by the University for didactic use, allowing to cast a special eye on Islamic arts and their historical and cultural contexts. Clelia Sarnelli Cerqua (1924-2009), loyal spouse to an Italian medical officer in Egypt, had the chair of Arabic and Islamic History (*Arabistica*). Later, Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), prominent Orientalist, superbly competent in Indo-Iranian languages, gave to Islamic studies his highly qualified contribution in *Iranistica* (1957-1971); his personality and scientific curiosity covered several branches of Iranian and Islamic studies, from Persian literature to Iranian religious and philosophical thought; extraordinary are his scientific ‘discoveries’ about mathematics and astronomy in the Middle Islamic Ages; no less remarkable are his evocative translations; his edition and translation into Italian of the Qur’an is still a landmark for Islamic studies. Yet Bausani’s publications stand as the starting point for any investigation

about the Indo-Iranian Islamic world²². Side by side to this department, there was the Department of Asian studies (*Asiaticistica*), which included pre-Islamic historical and cultural subjects, archaeology, linguistics, and History of Iran and Central Asia (chair of this author). In these two departments, academic curricula included two non-European languages; direct access to textual sources was a standing point.

In Rome (Roma “La Sapienza”), Oriental Studies have a long tradition, back to the sixteenth century with *Arabic* and *Semitic Studies*. At the start of the twentieth century, other “oriental” subjects were introduced, systematized in specific Institutes: *Vicino Oriente Antico*, *Studi dell’India e Asia Orientale*, and *Studi Islamici* or Islamic Studies. Within this latter, excelled Arabic, Ethiopic and Semitic studies held by prominent Italian Scholars, already met at Caetani’s circle of the *Annali dell’Islam*: the two Guidi (Ignazio and Michelangelo), Levi Della Vida, Gabrieli, Carlo Alfonso Nallino and, later, Maria Nallino, Paolo Minganti and others. After the Second World War, the institutes had been organized in specific Departments of Oriental Studies, assembled together as “School of Oriental Studies”. In 2001, the “School” evolved into a Faculty of Oriental Studies, structured in distinct cultural areas: linguistics, philology, archaeology and arts, philosophy and religious studies, history. Islamic studies preserved their character and traditional scholarship, legacy of a Master to his Disciple. Organ of this assemblage was the authoritative voice of the *Rivista di Studi Orientali* (Journal of Oriental Studies). Centre of excellence was Palermo’s University, revitalized by the strong personality of Umberto Rizzitano (1913-1980). Rizzitano, born in Alexandria where he spent his youth, had an excellent command of Egyptian Arabic, and was appointed as Lecturer in Italian at Cairo’s University. He received his PhD. in Arabic Studies at Rome “La Sapienza”; soon after, the Italian government appointed him as lecturer of Arabic in Italian schools

²² Converted to the Islamic Faith (*Baha’ism*), Bausani had an exceptional sensitivity as regards translations and the perception of poetic and philosophical issues. See A. BAUSANI, *Persia Religiosa*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1959; A. PAGLIARO, A.A. BAUSANI, *Storia della letteratura persiana*, Milano, Nuova Accademia, 1960 (repr. 1968); A. BAUSANI, *Storia delle letterature del Pakistan e dell’Afghanistan*, Milano, Nuova Accademia, 1968. Still unparalleled are his translations, for example A. BAUSANI, *Omar Khayyam: Quartine*, Torino, Einaudi, 1956; A. BAUSANI, *Avicenna: Poemi*, Roma, Carocci, 1956.

in Egypt. During the war, due to his qualifications, he was appointed as high officer in Libya; taken prisoner by the British forces, he was held interned in a camp. He managed to escape and reached Cairo; thence, he managed to come back to Rome, where he completed his academic curriculum and joined as assistant professor the chair of Arab Language and Literature. Renowned for his competence in Arab history and culture, Rizzitano was appointed to the Cultural Italian Institute in Cairo. In 1959, he won the chair of Arab Language and History at Palermo's University, where he gave life to a prestigious Institute of Islamic studies *and* Africa, reviving Michele Amari's tradition²³. In Turin, the University gave new vigour to its ancient Department of Arab studies and Archaeology. Other academic Institutions revived or developed Islamic studies, like Pavia (under the 'ferula' of Carlo Giglio) and Florence.

4.2 *The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Cultural Institutes and Initiatives: the "Inside Approach"*

During the sixties-early seventies of the previous century, the aforementioned institutes became a 'bridge' with the Arab and Muslim world, giving new life to old links and scholarly collaboration. They acted under the sponsorship and financial contribution of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - General Directorate for Cultural Affairs. A Memorandum of Understanding and Cultural Agreements between Universities and Islamic Institutions were signed, scholarships were granted, common events were organized; Italian archaeological, anthropological and ethnographic research was encouraged to resume field-work and close collaboration with local scholars and institutions. Italian Cultural Institutes in Turkey, Iran, Baghdad, Amman, Damascus, Egypt and Libya were excellent structures for improving and supporting research, surveys and studies 'in situ' also on Islam and its vestiges, sharing knowledge and discoveries with local scholars. Literary data were collected; significant archaeological and monumental evidence was documented and, when possible, restored.

²³ See above, § 1.

During this phase, international relationships were strained due to the Cold War. However, the Italian cultural-political line was carried out without interruption under the banner that: when political relationships are at odds and the international situation becomes tense, cultural relations represent a bridge beyond conflicts and political-social tensions, a precious frail bridge that can allow a silent dialogue and new understandings out of war (Ambassador Mario Mondello). At the same time, the Italian Cultural Missions abroad became central for renewed commercial links and a peaceful technological presence aimed at a constructive collaboration (training) and support for a local sustainable development. In this respect, it is interesting to point out the contribution to Islamic studies by Italian diplomats, civil servants and officers. A few names: *Enrico Cerulli* (Naples 1898-Rome 1988), General Director at the Ministry for Italian Africa (1936), in 1936 was appointed Vice-Governor of the Italian Institute for Africa; after the II World War, was assigned to Teheran as Italian Ambassador from 1950 to 1955²⁴. Another important representative of this class was *Amedeo Guillet* (1909-2010), High Officer in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and later Italian diplomat in Yemen, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan²⁵. *Claudio Pacifico* (1947-), adventurous diplomat and literary man, General Consul in Iran

²⁴ During his experience in Iran and during his journeys and explorations in Somalia, Harar and western Ethiopia, Cerulli pulled together an important collection of manuscripts, liberal donation to the Vatican Library. Cerulli was also a reputed scholar; he is still renowned for his scientific activities and lines of enquiry, which signed an important landmark in African studies (E. CERULLI, *The folk-literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia*, Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1922; *Studi Etiopici*, 4 vols., Roma, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1936-1951; *Somalia. Scritti vari editi e inediti*, 3 vols., Roma, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1957-64, and other). No less significant are his Islamic studies (like E. CERULLI, *Il "Libro della Scala" e La Questione delle Fonti Arabo-Spagnole della Divina Commedia*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949; E. CERULLI, *Nuove Ricerche sul "Libro della Scala" e la conoscenza dell'Islam in Occidente*, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1972).

²⁵ Gallant, Knight of the Savoia Regiment, during the Second World War, after Asmara and the Italian surrender to the British Command, Guillet organized a tribal guerrilla. Dressed like an Arab, having perfect confidence with the local dialects and tribal costumes, he gained local respect and support harshly hampering the British army. Later, he had to seek refuge at Massaua, thence he sailed to Yemen. After the War, he chose to join the Italian administration as Italian Representative to Islamic Countries. About this remarkable personality there is a suggestive memoir by V.D. SEGRE, *La guerra privata del Tenente Guillet. La resistenza Italiana in Eritrea durante la seconda guerra mondiale*, Milano, Corbaccio, 1993.

before and after the Islamic Revolution, then posted to Somalia, Egypt and other Islamic countries. He has published interesting books on his experience and direct contacts with local systemic realities and political factions. All of them are significant representatives of this diplomatic class that merged personal cultural interests with a deep insight into local social systems and political-religious affairs. The impact of this ‘diplomatic’ collaboration was remarkable. It brought to an “inside approach” to know more about the Muslim world and its political-institutional and social forms. At the same time, it opened the gate to new methodological lines of research... and new Schools of Islamic Studies. Noteworthy is Venice’ Ca’ Foscari; the University had introduced Arab-Islamic studies with Maria Nallino and the Institute of Arab-Islamic Studies. During the 1980s it opened the Islamic sector to Iranian studies, and Gianroberto Scarcia – eminent Iranologist, Bausani’s scholar and then one of his closest friends – had the chair of *Iranistica* (Iranian Language and Literature, 1967-1998) and History of Religions in Iran and Central Asia²⁶. In Milano’s Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, a School of Oriental Studies under the direction of Giancarlo Bolognesi (1923-2006) was set up. At Bologna University the Department of History and Oriental Sciences was revived – with a focus on Africa. In Florence, the Department of Linguistics and Oriental Studies was re-organized, with Arab and Islamic studies at the centre.

²⁶ Gianroberto Scarcia (1933-2018) had a ‘personal’ approach to Iranic studies. He graduated at Rome “La Sapienza” in Law. At the same time, he got a diploma of Islamic-Iranic studies at the ISMEO’s school. Given his linguistic familiarity with Persian, the ISPO employed him for the rubric “Persia” in *Oriente Moderno*. His scholarly education allowed him specific analyses and evaluations of political and institutional events. Remarkable are Scarcia’s articles on the Agrarian Reform in Persia and on Persian political parties (in *Oriente Moderno*). During his academic life, he travelled through Persia and adjoining regions, often with Bausani. It was a vivid experience, that left a deep mark on his intellectual inclination to investigate the “other side of the moon”, that is the deep cultural roots of the Iranian essence through landscapes, images, artistic symbols, monumental features, oral and written literary production, philosophical manifestations and symbolic expressions. It was a long course, and Scarcia’s scientific production is very rich, echoing the various stages of his Islamic self-education. An overview has been published in: R. FAVARO, S. CRISTOFORETTI, M. COMPARETI (ed.), *L’Onagro Maestro. Miscellanea di fuochi accesi per Gianroberto Scarcia in occasione del suo LXX sadé*, Venice, Cafoscarina, 2004. Additional record of Scarcia’s publications, until 2012, can be accessed at <https://independent.academia.edu/GianrobertoScarciaJuly1st2018>

5. *The French School of Les Annales and Islamic Studies. A Turning Point*

Les Annales were a turning point for Islamic studies in Italy. The Second World War was harshly fought on the territory of more than one Islamic country. The price was very high for all the fighting parts. Discriminations, devastations, ethnic complications, hunger and lack of food and water, epidemics and miseries of all kinds laid flat towns and villages. Then, after the war, “the reconstruction”. But it soon brought new political and social unhappiness: the Western model of democracy *vis-à-vis* Islam with its deeply rooted laws, rules and traditions. And within the Islamic world, soon revolts and revolutions upset the new political architecture and its organization. A general panorama that brought to a new dialectic, which had a strong impact on Islamic studies, too.

In France, the French School of the *Annales* had elaborated a new approach to studying and writing of history. The *Annales* school was initiated in 1929 by Marc Bloch (1886-1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) with the founding of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* – later simply *Annales d'histoire sociale*. Subsequently, the school was led by Ferdinand Braudel (1902-1985), historian of the Mediterranean Sea. A key objective of the journal and the school of historiography named after it was to introduce social sciences into the studying of history, in order to build a “global history” distanced from the traditional *histoire événementielle* (mere events’ narration), a history focusing on the causes that moved the gears of events and policy-making. Italian scholarship was not immune to this cultural movement, which soon involved Islamic studies, too. As the Italian philosopher of history Pietro Rossi has recently written, “today, the intellectual panorama is certainly changed: our historical horizon has widened thanks to an increasing integration between historiography and social sciences. An integration to which the *Annales* have largely contributed, as it is well-known. Historiography has largely drawn from conceptions and theories in disciplines like economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, political science and others. And it has increasingly converged on the ‘material’ aspects of human life, too”²⁷. It followed that the

²⁷ P. ROSSI, *La lotta di specie*, in “Mondoperaio”, n. 3-4, 2020, p. 8.

studying of Islamic countries, too, could no longer be based on mere events, dynasties and chronologies, labelled as “palatial dynastic history” essentially based on chronicles. It did not take into account ‘peoples’ and the ‘social components’ of a region, no less crucial protagonists of its history and cultural factors. At this point, two basic elements entered the studying of Islamic countries: the social factor and its mechanisms, and the economic factor and its organization.

Leone Caetani had already broken the “closed garden” of the *histoire événementielle*, the school of *Les Annales* gave birth to a new cultural vision of Islamic studies²⁸. The *Istituto per l’Oriente* was the core of debates about this new approach, which, though without ignoring linguistics, relegated this discipline to a subsidiary function, an auxiliary instrument to studying and writing of Islam.

New trends and new methodological approaches were introduced that, without erasing the traditional disciplines, divided the Italian scholarly milieu into two diverging currents. On the one hand, Islamic studies where an autonomous discipline even without a specific linguistic competence of local languages; good textual translations were available and could be used with the same function giving a wider platform to related subjects. On the other hand, it was argued that languages were still required: they were “the key” to a thorough studying and understanding of life, traditions, customs and political-institutional events (past *and* present) with their ethnic complications and cultural melting-pots. Undoubtedly, the new times required to associate other disciplines to the traditional platform, and new methodological approaches. Sociology, ethnography and ethno-linguistics, anthropology/cultural anthropology and economics entered Islamic studies. Field-work and a linguistic competence were required to understand ‘from inside’ the variegated cultural aspects of a given region, the only gear to going beyond any theoretical approach. It followed that the first current of thought shifted to a socio-political approach (*Politologia*), receptive to outside influence and essentially interested to contemporary events. The second followed a different pathway, coherent with the traditional school. Herewith, it will be taken into consideration the second current, its development and contributions.

²⁸ See above § 2.

6. *At the Turn of the Third Millennium. Social Sciences and New Methodological Approaches*

Thus, on the spur of socialist movements, sociology and its package of Social Sciences had become central disciplines within writing and studying of Arab and Islamic countries, too. The 'inside approach' had put 'society' and its 'territory' as central issues to be investigated, the great protagonists during the last two decades or so of the second millennium. What radically changed was the methodological approach. All in all, Islamic studies were now largely concerned with modern-contemporary issues and 'global' systemic configurations. The cataclysm of the Second World War and the decolonisation process, which had affected almost the entire span of the Old World imposing a new order, soon shifted into a fresh confrontation (the Cold War), which ended up with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the emergence of new political actors and global balances. The Islamic world was once again at the crossroads of this order and its equilibriums and economic interests, with Iran as its cultural and religious core. However, the borders now extended far to the north and east beyond the Mediterranean Sea, including different ethnic, political and cultural heritages. Asian and African countries had adopted something of the modern social and political milieu, but, at the same time, had retained and were also able to extend their particular linguistic and cultural identity. Where the political control of former colonial powers was still exercised through a westernized political class, soon this control decreased, and then it often slipped from its hands into the grip of indigenous military leaders and their soldiery, sometimes a transient phenomenon, others a rooted one. This process gave life to renewed disorders, revolts, civil wars and generous interventions from outsiders that played hardly and noticeably the role of protectors and defenders of submerged peoples' freedom. Islamic and Arab studies were once again confronted with political roles asserted by local leaders in regions where the geographical features of steep mountains, vast steppes, arid plateaux, deserted empty sands frequently played the part of prime players. Especially where inhospitable geographical features were rich dispensers of new booties in terms of oil and gas, and mineral resources much required by the new technologies of an impending future.

6.1 *Multidisciplinary and Field-Work. Science and Technology*

Undoubtedly, the first two to three decades of this millennium have seen new stage in Islamic studies and a radical development in their approach²⁹. A discipline *per se* within Oriental studies, they were required to investigate the present. Yet, to investigate the present also meant to investigate the past, its legacy and consequences. Such an investigation should not disregard the peoples, the social milieu with its traditional tenets, *de facto* and *de jure* powers sometimes (but not always) receptive and adept at absorbing outside influences and “modernity”. A scenario, where new different protagonists, differing social bodies and foreign cultures, ancestral hatreds and ancestral alliances and balances were creating new political forms. This panorama induced Italian scholarship either to produce monographic super-specialized studies, or to open to a *multidisciplinary research-line* and a *team-work*, where each discipline used its own methodological approach, the final result being a thorough image of the historical (dynastic) and cultural (social, institutional, economic, artistic and literary, too) essence of the region under study. Following a deeply rooted Italian tradition, which implied that only by merging into a more or less remote past might be possible to find the very causes of present situations, textual sources (chronicles, geographies, travelogues, epics and poetry, archives) were re-examined in their original language. Carefully sifted, they were still the key to evaluating present affairs’ development. Moreover, when literary sources were scarce – like for early-Islamic Inner and Central Asia – field work and material evidence in the shape of archaeological discovery, numismatic and epigraphic evidence (field-work) became precious tools³⁰. However, shortly such research would be labelled as “old-fashioned” *vis-à-vis* the advancing technologies of an imperative present: *the Digital Dimension*. Media with their digital information and divulgation entered the stage of Islamic studies, too, giving life to a dimension of their own and to renewed debates on objects, research, writing of history and regional facets. “Field work”

²⁹ About the Academic response to the new challenges, see above § 4, and here below section 6.2.

³⁰ See above § 2: Leone Caetani and *Gli Annali dell’Islam*, and § 3.2: the *Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* and Giuseppe Tucci.

(why?) and “languages” (why? Excellent translations are available) well-known arguments. Analyses of the present, scenarios about the future, evaluation of social realities through Western parameters of democracy and democratic values were once again centre stage, giving life to animated quarrels. Newspapers, broadcasting, social networks and other were (and still are) one of the main arenas, forging a present and a future of their own.

Territory and History. Islamic and Oriental studies in Italy took their distance, arguing that the new dynamism of the present would be largely veiled without the support by an inside approach to the past and its bequest, field-work and the assistance by dawning technologies, like satellite photos, GPS and other. Since the end of the Cold War, media, plane and train easy connections had given life to a “global space” where people could easily move out of traditional confines. Italian scholars who used to go abroad on scholarships, or give lectures and attend international symposia sensed a void in their education. Networks and literary material could certainly provide statistics and detailed information about a region and its socio-political asset. Satellite photos could certainly provide detailed images of a territory. Yet, little scraps of information evinced through an accurate evaluation of textual sources and archaeological discoveries with their subsidiary sciences allowed to shape a differing atmosphere. This suggested a different methodological approach. Thus, *field work renewed itself*. As pointed out in the preceding paragraphs, direct contact with the territory where historic events had taken place moulding new political-institutional and cultural situations, was an ancient tradition for Italian Islamic studies. It was Caetani’s legacy, Nallino’s standing pillar with geography and mathematics, Levi Della Vida’s passionate objective, and Tucci’s masterly lesson. Thus, ‘field work’ and a through multidisciplinary approach to the social-institutional components of given political and cultural realities became the scientific methodological approach up today. Linguistics, with epigraphy and numismatics, are once again on the forefront as auxiliary instrument to any literary material (written and oral), that might offer precious information on the local population and its traditional culture, arts and crafts, tenets, cults and rituals. Where literary sources are sparse, archaeology and its subsidiary disciplines may provide precious material evidence and chronological sequences.

Archaeology and Territory. Within this panorama, the territory becomes an authoritative protagonist, too, with its geomorphological features and ecological niches. The investigation of its evolution over the centuries, either for natural causes or for anthropic impact or both, becomes a priority. Geographical and human landscapes take life, and with them the ‘natural habitat’; geology, botany/paleo-botany, zoology/paleo-zoology and other enter the framework, integral part of the picture, its peopling and developments. Science and Technology are today completing the general framework. They can provide scientific certainties where once we had only theoretical hypotheses (drone’s orthophotogrammetric relief, for example, laboratory’s archaeometric analyses, and other). In sum, the results so far achieved give new precious information on ancient phenomena and their dynamics, on historical phases, urban plans and defensive techniques, on arts, crafts, markets, trades... a past heritage still alive in more than one Islamic corner, distinctive self-expression conditioning present logics... all in all, a not-unworthy research³¹.

Territory and history. A long-lasting tradition³², and the favourite methodological approach of some Italian ‘adventurous’ diplomatic personages, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation’s last statement (Rome, May 2023).

6.2 *The Academic and Institutional Response*

Academic and institutional bodies endorsed these trends, signing a significant mark on the development of Islamic studies³³. However, to write about it would lead to a new article. Therefore, I will restrict myself to few notes on some major institutional contributors. In Naples

³¹ Archaeometry deserves a brief comment. Today it represents the discipline of the future: chemical and physic analyses of archaeological evidence. A discipline destined to change all traditional approaches providing scientific certainties instead of theoretical hypotheses. Labs are today active in Milan (Bicocca and Catholic University), Bologna, Pisa, Rome “La Sapienza” and Naples.

³² See above, about Michele Amari, Leone Caetani and the *Annali’s fucina* of Arabists and Islamists (§1 and §2). See specifically §3: *Islamic Studies vis-à-vis History as Independent Subject and Discipline*.

³³ See above § 4.

“L’Orientale”, Rubinacci’s school was particularly sensitive to the new methodologies, and implemented the Department of Arab and Islamic Studies with social sciences, philosophy, economics and other. No less active was the Department of *Iranistica*, with ethno-linguistics, history and archaeology; this latter has recently given life to the Museum “Umberto Scherrato”³⁴. At *Palermo’s University*, Rizzitano’s disciples, deeply involved with claims and aspirations of contemporary Arab and Islamic revolts, while investigating their causes often rooted them in a more or less remote past. And, while paying special attention to this past, they opened up to the new methodological approaches. They do not disregard Sicily’s glorious past either and with it, Byzantium’s dominion, which left notable markers and its judicial legacy to the following Arab rulers. Mediterranean Africa has been revisited with a special focus on the Berbers with their sophisticated techniques in land utilization. The 9th Century’s Arab conquerors and their stock of Islamic ideas, arts and customs are core of excellent comments and translations. Frederick of Swabia, the II of the Hohenstaufen dynasty (1194-1250), his extraordinary culture, deep interest and involvement in Arab sciences and arts has been re-examined, as re-assessed are Frederick’s relationships with Islamic rulers and his ‘peaceful’ Crusade to Jerusalem...which costed him three excommunications from the Papacy. Amari’s legacy, merged in the new scientific research lines, is presently the basis to investigate Arabia and its Emirates. In Rome - coherently with the new course, but without disregarding Gabrieli’s scholarly legacy - Islamic studies are articulated in different rfield of research, empowering old or giving life to new subjects and new modus operandi: Islamic Law; Philosophy; Arabic and its rich literary production; Islamic arts *and* Archaeology, whose curricula follow the new trend and its multidisciplinary approach³⁵. In Venice Ca Foscari’s Faculty of *Lingue e Letterature Orientali*, the Islamic sector has been implemented, and archaeology has made it possible to introduce the new research-lines. In Turin, archaeology – after Giorgio Gullini (1923-2004) passed away – it has been restructured as an autonomous ethno-archaeological Institution (the CRAFT). In Pavia’s University Islamic

³⁴ See above § 4.

³⁵ See also above § 4.

studies were revived, special focus on Africa and the Near East. In Milan, in the Catholic University, the undersigned reorganized her chair of History and Institutions of the Muslim World giving institutional life to a Research Centre on the Southern System and the Wider Mediterranean, which followed (and still follows) this *modus operandi*, focus on Mediterranean Africa, Arabia, Near and Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. The ISMEO – without neglecting Tucci’s legacy - has renewed its activity often collaborating with or financing academic archaeological initiatives. Once again, the *Istituto per l’Oriente* in Rome is hub of constructive meetings and debates.

And to conclude

Islamic studies in Italy during these last two decades or so have taken an independent course from Oriental Studies, evolving since the 1980s of the previous century, when *Les Annales*, social sciences and socialist movements of the time brought to a drastic revolution in subjects and methodological approach. However, they have never neglected a traditional line of their own. Today, the features are: *multi-disciplinarity* and *inter-disciplinarity*, supported and complemented with *direct experience* and *field work*.

Multi-interdisciplinarity. One of the main assumptions is that any research-work on Islam or Islamic subjects cannot neglect the historic course and its ‘cultural’ dimensions. In other words: historic research (a “multifaceted feature”) is intrinsic part of any Islamic ‘cultural’ frame, and, as already discusses at some length, a sound Italian tradition³⁶. The present cannot be investigated without going to the roots of its past; be that a dynasty and/or a people/*ethnos*, we are always confronted with an Arab-Islamic amalgam made up of different components, overlapping different civilizations, which must be analysed in all their vital aspects: political and dynastic, as well as institutional, social, economic, religious and any other speculative manifestation. Textual *and* literary evidence still are the first and foremost source of

³⁶ See above Caetani and the *Annals of Islam* (§ 2.1), Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Nallini and Francesco Gabrieli (§ 2.2).

information, otherwise...with Levi Della Vida's words "...*la filologia trascurata finisce sempre col vendicarsi*"³⁷. However, when textual data are scarce, unreliable or totally absent, other criteria can direct the research through contributions by other disciplines (*i.e.* multi-interdisciplinarity), such as anthropology, ethnology, ethnolinguistics, geomorphology, archaeology, archaeometry and other. Each discipline follows its methodological line, the final result should be a comprehensive framework.

Direct experience and field work ("inward approach to the topic under study"). This latter has entered the Italian tradition, too, and implies human life's studying into its ecological habitat, complementing a history of human settlements with a proper investigation on the environment, its dynamics and impacts in the course of centuries. Not only this. Field work allows inward direct approaches to costumes, oral and written traditions and religious perceptions; architectural evidence, monuments and relics of the past enter the frame, too, precious markers of the deep humus of local *de facto* powers seldom recorded by textual sources, sometimes they may find space in epigraphics or numismatics; yet, they cannot be erased by foreign ideologies (past and present). *De facto* power and *de jure* power, their interactions and fragile equilibriums, which may have moulded a local history, whose cultural forms and forces often are still alive today, imposing their rules, enduring protest against "tyrannical demands" or foreign doctrines. It is a line of research that vividly recalls Leone Caetani's school at *Via delle Botteghe Oscure*, and his passionate love for travelling to sense the smell of battlefields and royal palaces. His school was attended by young scholars; these gave renewed life to Linguistics and Islamic Studies out of the "closed garden" of Oriental Studies. Their scholarships enlivened facts and events, going to the roots and to the causes of past and present affairs. Through the words of annal-writings and literary sources, they animated personages, rulers, governors, officers and humble peoples too.

In conclusion, I would like to recall here the song of a group of Arab soldiers before the battle of al-Qadisiyya as reported in Ṭabarī's Annals (*Kitāb al-Muluk wa al-Rusūl*), a Persian from Istakhr, member

³⁷ G. LEVI DELLA VIDA, *Fantasmî ritrovati*, cit., p.40.

of an important family of the Sasanian bureaucracy, and high officer himself within the Caliphal Arab institutional structure. He vividly describes the battle of Qadisiyya, the decisive clash that opened Iran to the Arabs and their new religion. He also dedicates some evocative flashes to the night preceding the fight and the Arab soldiery waiting for it. A maniple sat around the fire singing a rhythmical Arab traditional song, nostalgic remembrance of their families and earnest anxiety before the fight. Then, when the sun will rise behind the mountains...to win or to dye in the name of Allah. The Arab world in a few sentences, used to comment my Master. I had to learn it by heart when I was Gabrieli's scholar, my students had to learn it by heart, too, when I was lecturing Arabic at the Catholic University.

Riassunto - Questo articolo intende soffermarsi sul contributo della ricerca Italiana alla conoscenza del mondo Islamico, sottolineandone il percorso e l'evoluzione fino ai giorni d'oggi nei contenuti, obiettivi e metodologia. Il percorso italiano affonda le radici in una tradizione che risale al secolo XVI. Qui ci si riporta alla fine del secolo XIX, quando gli studi sull'Islam erano parte di una generica disciplina di Studi Orientali e Linguistica. Più che su nomi e bibliografie (sarebbero troppi e troppe – per cui si rinvia all'Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani), ci si sofferma sulle 'tappe' più significative, partendo dalla configurazione istituzionale di Studi sull'Islam e Islamistica come discipline autonome: Michele Amari e la Società Geografica Italiana, e quindi Leone Caetani e *Gli Annali dell'Islam*, questi ultimi "fucina" a cui si formarono i grandi Islamisti del secolo XX: M. Guidi, C. A. Nallino, G. Levi Della Vida, F. Gabrieli. All'accademia e a nuovi campi di ricerca (Turcologia, Iranistica, Arabistica *et alia*) si affiancarono tre grandi Istituzioni – appoggiate dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri: l'Istituto per l'Oriente (poi ISPO), l'Istituto per il

Medio ed Estremo Oriente e l'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa (tuttora attivi). La II Guerra Mondiale segnò una cesura importante anche in Italia, portando gli Studi sul mondo arabo e islamico all'utilizzo di nuove discipline. Determinante furono l'influenza della scuola francese degli *Annales* e l'ingresso delle 'scienze sociali' nei nuovi percorsi metodologici. Gli studi sull'Islam non ne furono immuni, ma presero le distanze dalla politologia e dal fascino mediatico di 'analisi' e 'scenari', per attenersi rigorosamente alla conoscenza linguistica come strumento indispensabile di studio e valutazione anche storica di realtà politiche, sociali e culturali attuali, in regioni su cui si erano incontrate, talvolta scontrate, e sovrapposte civiltà e tradizioni fra loro molto diverse. La multidisciplinarietà e il 'fieldwork' furono in Italia lo strumento di questa svolta. Nei primi anni del Terzo Millennio si sono venute affiancando 'scienze' e nuove 'tecnologie' di ricerca (archeometria, fisica, il drone *et alia*) che, appoggiando fonti testuali e fonti non testuali, consentono la 'conferma' di quelle che erano rimaste a lungo ipotesi di lavoro.