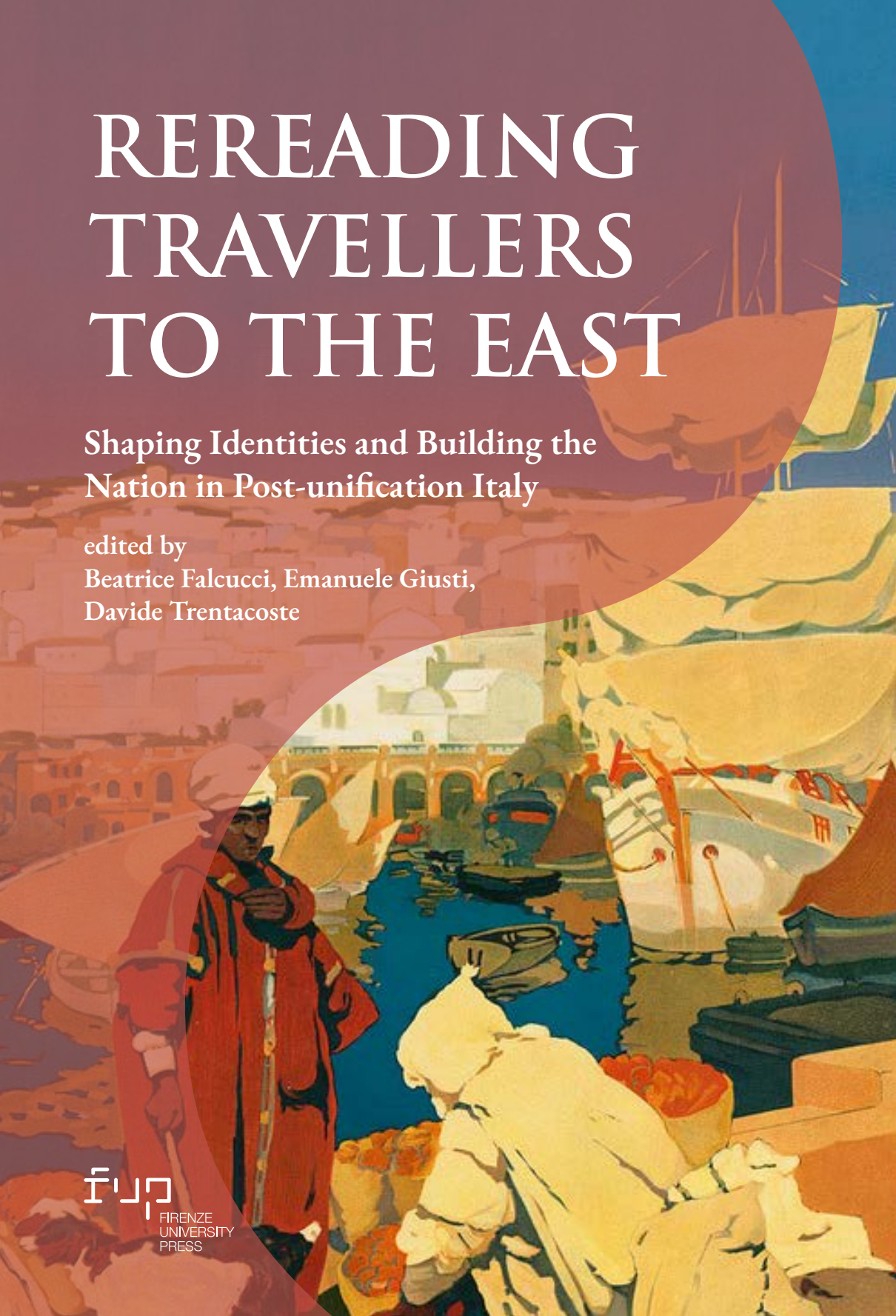
REREADING TRAVELLERS TO THE EAST

Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy

edited by
Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti,
Davide Trentacoste



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CONNESSIONI. STUDIES IN TRANSCULTURAL HISTORY

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FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS
2022

Rereading Travellers to the East : shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy / edited by Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste. – Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2022.
(Connessioni. Studies in Transcultural History ; 1)

https://books.fupress.com/isbn/9788855185790

ISBN 978-88-5518-578-3 (Print)
ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0 (PDF)
ISBN 978-88-5518-580-6 (ePUB)
ISBN 978-88-5518-581-3 (XML)
DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Graphic design: Alberto Pizarro Fernández, Lettera Meccanica SRLs
Front cover: Cauvy Hivernage Train Plm Algerie by estampemoderne.fr – licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/)

This volume is based on work undertaken as part of the research project 'People in motion: Entangled histories of displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923)' (COST Action 18140), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

The publication of this volume was also made possible thanks to the financial support of the Université Franco-Italienne (UFI) – Label Scientifique Programme (Project n. L20B_24), and of the Italian National Project (Progetti di Ricerca di Interesse Nazionale [PRIN] 2017) "Global Europeanness: toward a differentiated approach to global history (1450-1900)".

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FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI: 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

The online digital edition is published in Open Access on www.fupress.com.

Published by Firenze University Press
Firenze University Press
Università degli Studi di Firenze
via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Firenze, Italy
www.fupress.com

This book is printed on acid-free paper
Printed in Italy

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FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, © 2022 Author(s), CC BY 4.0, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Acknowledgements

Since we started working on this project in 2019, we have accumulated debts of gratitude to many people and institutions, concerning both the organization of the international workshop that took place on 20 and 21 May 2021 and the publication of this volume.

We would like to thank professor Rolando Minuti, who provided assistance in securing the institutional support of the SAGAS Department of the University of Florence and of the Florence-based Centro Interuniversitario per la Storia Globale (GLOBHIS), and professor Giovanni Tarantino, chair of the COST Action 'People in motion: Entangled histories of displacement across the Mediterranean, 1492–1923' (CA 18140), for their interest in the project and support from the very start. We also would like to thank professor Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn at the École Normale Supérieure de Paris and Maria Szuppe at the Centre de Recherche sur le Monde Iranien (CeRMI) at the Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle University who have helped securing the institutional support of CeRMI and of the École Doctorale Lettres, Arts, Sciences humaines et sociales (ED540) for the workshop. We would like to thank all the members of the Scientific Committee—Mario Casari, Bernard Heyberger, Rolando Minuti, Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn, Antonella Romano, Francesca Tacchi and Giovanni Tarantino, for their support to the project. We would also like to thank Francesco Surdich, for the enthusiasm he has shown towards our ideas and for his constant encouragement. Thanks are due to Karen Whittle for her competent work of proofreading and linguistic review for this volume.

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, © 2022 Author(s), CC BY 4.0, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Finally, we would like to thank the authors of the essays that make up this collection, for their interest in the project, their rich and timely work and their generosity.

Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti and Davide Trentacoste

The publication of this volume was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Cost Action 18140 PIMo – People In Motion, of the Université Franco-Italienne (UFI) – Label Scientifique Programme (Project N. L20B_24), and of the Italian National Project (Progetti di Ricerca di Interesse Nazionale [PRIN] 2017) "Global Europeanness: toward a differentiated approach to global history (1450-1900)".

New Perspectives on Nation-building and Orientalism in Italy from the Risorgimento to the Republic

Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste

Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy stands at the crossroads of different research fields. Its main goal is to offer a new historiographical perspective on travel literature, the question of nation-building in post-unification Italy and the history of orientalism and oriental studies. In this introductory essay, we will discuss the angles from which we have tackled these three large areas and how we propose to join them together. Before we do so, however, it may be useful to make some preliminary remarks on the scope of this volume.

Traditionally, travel literature calls for a discussion of its role as a source for the times and spaces in which it was produced, in terms of both its authors and readers and its usually multi-layered content, whether it concerns geography, peoples or ideas. The aim of this volume is to focus on the rereadings to which early modern travel literature, spanning from the late Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, has been subjected by different actors involved in the political, economic, cultural and intellectual life of post-unification Italy. This specific focus has allowed us to highlight how early modern travel literature has been mobilized, reinterpreted and reused for political and ideological purposes in the context of the formation and reformation of collective identities.

While this approach to travel literature implies a careful appreciation of the specific contexts and periods in which these sources originated, the main time

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
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Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste, *New Perspectives on Nation-building and Orientalism in Italy from the Risorgimento to the Republic*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.03, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 9-28, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

frame of our analysis of rereadings includes broadly speaking the first century of existence of Italy as a unitary state: from the period of the political unification of the Italian peninsula—the Risorgimento—to the so-called liberal age of the Kingdom of Italy and from the Fascist regime to the first decades of the republic. Such a long-term perspective, often split into different time frames, spanning very different political and cultural periods, allows us to discuss ruptures and changes as well as continuity and persistence as characterizing features of the patterns of rereadings.

Travel inevitably connects different communities and polities. Trite though it may be, this point implies that any study of travel literature, and its rereadings even more so, should consider the relations between the different human spaces touched by the travellers' experience. This volume focuses on the relations between the polities of the Italian peninsula and those of Asia, or the lands that early modern Europe called the Orient, the Indies or the Levant. As we will discuss in more detail below, this perspective provides new insights into the history of orientalism in Italy: a topic that, if understood in the all-encompassing sense fashioned by Edward Said's works, has only recently started to draw considerable scholarly attention. However, it is impossible to disentangle this set of relations from the larger context of intra-European contacts and the connections between Europe and Asia. This is especially relevant for post-unification Italy, when intense exchanges and conflicts took place between Italy and other European countries, both within Europe and on the stage of European expansionism in Asia. A case in point, which is worth mentioning even though it is not discussed in this volume, is the construction of the Suez Canal, which was marked by intense international competition (Surdich 1982; 1992). In this sense, on the European side of the problem, this volume can offer an outline of a shared but conflicting history of the political and cultural legacy of travel literature. Before we discuss these issues in detail, however, it is necessary to present a methodological frame of the foundational notion of "rereading".

1. Rereading

From a methodological point of view, we have adopted an open approach to rereading, in the sense that we are eager to show that this kind of analysis is applicable to different fields of expertise and scholarly traditions. In our understanding, rereading can be thought of in such ample terms that it can be deployed even by drawing on the most traditional of theoretical approaches to history and history writing. In fact, if rereading is a process through which pre-existing texts acquire new forms and new meaning according to the present reader's needs and positions, that is to say, it is a process of actualization, then even the time-honoured and much-cited adage by neo-idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) that all history is contemporary history can be used to methodologically inform analysis of the rereadings. This, at least, is the position taken by one of our authors, Alessandro Tripepi. In fact, such methodological openness also reflects the different disciplinary backgrounds of the

authors of this volume: from sinology to the history of architecture, from the intellectual history of orientalism to the history of early modern diplomacy, from colonial museology to Italian studies. In this context, the most important tools to analyse rereadings are also the most basic of the historian's craft: a philological approach to the texts and their successive iterations, studied and discussed in their respective historical context.

However, it is useful to discuss some of the methodological tools that can be used both to interpret rereading as a cultural practice and to underpin its study in a historical perspective. It is also important to say that, in actual fact, this distinction has a merely operational value, since we understand our own analysis of rereadings as rereadings in their own right. From this point of view, the toolkit provided by constructivist approaches is most useful. While the study of travel literature can aim to discuss the historical reality embedded in these texts, by distinguishing what is fact from what is fiction or interpretation, focusing on rereadings implies that everything surrounding, contained and circulated in the text—prefaces, footnotes, reviews, excerpts, paraphrases, the material aspects of editions and reeditions, and so on—contributes in a decisive way to what meanings it is given. In other words, the historical meaning of each piece of travel literature is culturally and socially constructed by readers through a large array of tools, one of which is the practice of reading itself. In this perspective, it should come as no surprise that one of our authors, Aglaia De Angeli, has drawn upon the critical and theoretical contributions provided by Jacques Derrida in *De la grammatologie* (1967) and by Roland Barthes in *S/Z* (1970) in order to grasp rereading as a multi-layered process of interpretation and appropriation of travel literature.

Another reference that may be particularly useful in our case is the concept of *réemploi* as defined by Michel de Certeau throughout his work, first published in 1980, *L'invention du quotidien* (Certeau 1990). Certeau wrote about uses, appropriations and re-employment as the "tactiques" utilized by ordinary people while interacting with objects, products, texts and ideas. Certeau emphasized the subversive potential of such "tactiques" vis-à-vis the "strategies" deployed by the dominant classes, thus presenting what is commonly thought of as passive consummation as a different kind of production (Certeau 1990, xxxv–liii). Certeau also concentrated on reading as a creative practice determined by such "tactiques", so much so that he came to call it "braconnage" ("poaching"; Certeau 1990, 239–55).

While the post-unification Italian actors that we discuss were almost always part of the dominant classes, their discourses about "Italian" travellers were often framed in revanchist terms, thus betraying the profound inferiority complex of the new Italian elite: against the more solid national narratives, not to mention the stronger economies, fully-fledged academic traditions and larger colonial empires of other European countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany, the Italian actors struggled to move from a position of perceived inferiority and historical dispossession to the place in the world that Italy allegedly deserved. Thus, they often framed the rereadings and reuses of early modern travellers as disrupting what they perceived to be the previous interpretations:

the travellers that were once considered to be "Venetian", "Genoese", "Florentine" and the like, and especially known for their services to "foreign powers", as in the case of Columbus and Spain, were now increasingly perceived and presented as "Italians". This interpretation depended closely on selecting which documents to publish, how to publish them, in what kind of institutional context, editorial setting and with what paratexts, reformulations, paraphrasing, etc. In this sense, the concept of *réemploi* is useful to underline the different scales of the rereadings and to emphasize both the different purpose of this practice and the different standing of the social groups employing it. At the international level, on the one hand, rereadings of travel literature were useful to subvert images of Italy perceived as negative and undeserved. At the domestic level, on the other hand, they were instrumental to the creation of a pedagogical narrative to be imposed on the nascent "nation" regardless of class difference. In fact, authors engaging in the practice of rereading did not only address scholars and researchers, but aimed to speak to a wider audience, which probably included both middle and working classes. These issues thus demand that we engage critically with the question of nation-building and national identity in the Italian context.

2. Nation-building

The essays in *Rereading Travellers* highlight the multiple, fragmented and negotiated nature of the processes involved in national identity-building, which are understood as the result of political, diplomatic, commercial and cultural encounters and clashes involving what are often very distant countries. These processes are studied over multiple temporalities and at different scales, in order to show how national identity is built through the continuous reworking of the past experiences of different societies (Bollati 1983). In this sense, the emerging national community is the result of the re-translation of these different experiences into a unified narrative. Italian political unity was only achieved in 1861, after centuries of political fragmentation and foreign domination. As stated by John Foot (2003), after the unification the Italian state found legitimation extremely difficult to obtain. Once unity was achieved, the pursuit of status on the international stage combined with the need to secure an Italian identity at an internal level, in a territory that until then had been politically and culturally fragmented.

In their seminal collection of essays, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger effectively underlined the spread of cultural practices in relation to the need for social cohesion and nation-building and how this intertwinement impacted on the perceptions and representations of a shared history. As Benedict Anderson (1983) pointed out, thinking of oneself as a member of a national public—envisaged as a large "family" or "community", but made up of thousands or millions of people, most of whom one will never meet—is an impressive feat of the imagination. Mosse's innovative anthropological approach to nationalism and his discussion of myth, liturgy and ritual as national legitimation has been crucial in understanding the emergence of European nationalisms, not least in Italy. As Mosse highlights, it was through

myths that the people participated in the worship of themselves as a nation (Mosse 1975). As for other countries across the globe, Italian nation-building also rested heavily on a game of appearances: how Italians saw themselves was increasingly connected to (the discussion of) how foreigners saw Italy. The work of Stuart Hall (1996) clearly demonstrates how much is important for nationalism to build an identity that is strong in the eyes of others.

At least since the historiographical renewal brought about, among others, by the works of Franco Venturi (1973), the events of the century leading to the Risorgimento and the Risorgimento itself have been placed in the context of cultural exchanges involving European and extra-European intellectuals, travellers, politicians and revolutionaries. In this historiographical frame, the question of Italian nation-building has been discussed, for example, by analysing the role played by the "invention" of a "national" past, from the medieval city-states and their prosperity and freedom to the Renaissance and the subsequent "decline" brought about by foreign domination; or by examining the intersections of religious and political discourses in the context of the struggle for "independence" and national unity (Banti 2000, 2006). The question of Italian identity and nation-building is still a heated topic of discussion both outside and inside academia (see e.g., Raimo 2019; Benigno and Mineo 2020).

However, limited attention has been paid to the problem of the construction of national identity through early modern travellers from the peninsula, or, in other words, those who came to be considered as the manifestation of the particular "spirit" of Italy—the genio italico. As Silvana Patriarca noted (2010), Risorgimento Italy was often critiqued as the Italians were believed to be indolent and effeminate, the opposite qualities to those of the travellers, increasingly presented as exemplary, brave and adventurous, that the Italians should emulate.

Italy's first African War (1880–1896) pitted the young and ambitious Italian nation, the "Least of Europe's Great Powers" (Labanca 2015), against the Ethiopian empire. As Finaldi (2009) argues, the outcome was a humiliating defeat for Italy, but notwithstanding Italy's disastrous first colonial experience, the idea of "empire" entered the minds of the Italian people. Italy felt the need to compensate for losses and a lack of relevance in the international arena by referring to a glorious past and characters—travellers, explorers and inventors—known to all, from whom Italians could legitimately claim to descend. The phenomenon of the construction and "accumulation" of the "myth of Italian travellers" in the East, from Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci to Giuseppe Tucci and Giotto Dainelli, is as a multidirectional use of the past spanning from the liberal and Fascist regimes to the proclamation of the republic and present-day Italy. This myth conveys an idea of Italianness that we could provocatively compare to other imperial ideas shaped around the qualities of a given community, such as those discussed by Anthony Pagden for early modern Spain, Great Britain and France (Pagden 1995). The very existence of "Italian" travellers doing great deeds throughout the ages implied the historical continuity of a national character incarnated in the travellers and helped the dominant classes—those doing most of the rereadings—to propose the nation a fitting role, or destiny, for their expectations.

The national use of travellers is visible at a more practical level too. For instance, as is widely known, Fascist Italy used the "Roman" image of the Mediterranean Sea as *Mare Nostrum* as rhetorical justification for its hegemonic claims over the area. In a similar way, the past experiences of travellers from the Italian peninsula came to be reread in order to lay claim to, build and eventually justify a large array of political, military and economic operations in areas which were completely outside the scope of the country's foreign policy. Thus, rereadings of travellers can be understood as the meeting point of two apparently distinct historical but mutually supporting phenomena: the overarching project of nation-building and the short-term goals of foreign policy. As we discuss below, travellers are connectors between two or more human polities: in this sense, rereading travellers was as instrumental for Italian nation-building as it was for fashioning collective identities for the other communities to which the travellers seemingly connected the Italian rereaders.

It should be remembered, however, that despite their great success, such nation-oriented rereadings also met with resistance, as is shown for example by Antonio Gramsci's remarks about the fundamental cosmopolitanism of early modern "Italian" travellers, in a veritable critique of the kind of rereadings that we intend to study (Gramsci [1949] 1966, 55–66). Gramsci's insightful critique suggests that such interpretative resistance should not be regarded as episodic. Indeed, travel writing in Italian has acquired different meanings and played different intellectual, cultural and political roles across the centuries, with cosmopolitan and national (re)readings often available at the same time (Hester 2008, 2019). Although our study focuses on nation-oriented rereadings, it is important not to lose sight of the social and political polysemy of travel literature as a subject of further study.

3. Travel and travellers

Travellers and travel literature have been an object of literary and historical enquiry at least since the beginning of the twentieth century. The open character of travel literature as a genre allows for virtually endless interpretative possibilities and lends this body of texts to the most diverse methodological stances. This state of things is well exemplified by the different traditions of scholarly study of travel literature that have spawned along national or intellectual boundaries. For instance, in the French-speaking tradition, the works by Friedrich Wolfzettel (1996) and Daniel Roche (2003) respectively exemplify the application of the Foucauldian concept of *discours* to travel literature and the attention to both material structures and *mentalités* typical of later interpreters of the *Annales* school of historiography. The extreme richness and complexity achieved by "travel writing studies" in recent decades can also be clearly seen in the plethora of companions, handbooks and introductions produced in the Anglosphere. Furthermore, this scientific literature is of interest with regard to its organizational and methodological principles. For example, the recent *Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (Das and Young 2019) is organized first of all by time frames: one chapter is dedicated to antiquity, two chapters to the Middle Ages, two to

the early modern age, and one chapter each for the last three centuries starting with the eighteenth century. Then a series of chapters mostly conceived along national, geographical or national-linguistic lines follow suit, with chapters on travel writing labelled as "Arabic", "from Eastern Europe", "in French" and "African", purportedly sewn together in "a global context". The last section, about "perspectives on travel writing", first expounds the newly acquired importance of "locality" in historical studies, then takes a more traditional approach to the different forms of travel writing (letters, diaries, etc.), while the final chapters discuss some of the most heated methodological and theoretical topics of travel writing studies, such as gender, translation and ecocriticism. Similarly rich and multifarious expositions can also be found in a number of other pieces of scholarly literature (see e.g., Thompson 2011; Pettinger and Youngs 2020).

In order to shape our conception of travellers, we started from the fundamental open-endedness of both travel literature and the scholarly tradition revolving around it. As is widely recognized, in the great majority of cases, travelling is not all that travellers do (at least until very recent times): for a start, the Holy Trinity of early modern travellers' classification is "diplomats, merchants and missionaries". We are often taught that the eighteenth century added scientists to the category and that the nineteenth century saw the awakening of mass travel, aka tourism. While such definitions are historically and contextually significant, and even more so for each specific rereading, what is relevant for us is the conception of travellers as people in motion, connecting one place or one community to another, in a specific historical setting as well as in historiography and the collective memory. Such a loose definition of travellers allows us to comprise among others merchants and colonial administrators, missionaries and diplomats, scholars, scientists and exiles under this heading, and even those historical figures that we are not accustomed to thinking of as travellers, due to the uniqueness of their situation (such as the case of the Lebanese emir, Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn, or the Knights of Rhodes). In other words, travellers, and the traces they left or the traces left for them, are meeting points and places of identity.

It is evident that this methodological position shows something that we have already discussed above: in submitting travel literature to this kind of analysis, at the level of both our definition of travellers and the connections established between travel literature, orientalism and nation-building, we are ourselves making and proposing a rereading of these sources. As such, it is evident that for all its scientific soundness, this operation is inescapably linked to the needs and expectations of present-day research in the humanities, not to mention larger political and societal issues, from the rise of new forms of nationalism to the all-important role which multiple Asian countries have come to play on the international stage in the last two decades.

4. Orientalism and oriental studies

Until recently, the intellectual appropriation of the "Orient" performed by modern Italian culture was a relatively unexplored terrain. This volume sets out

to promote innovative approaches to this subject by engaging in a creative dialogue between scholarly traditions connected to oriental studies and studies on orientalism in Italy.

The amount of scholarly literature that has piled up both before and especially since Said's ground-breaking essay on *Orientalism* (Said 1978) is such that any comprehensive treatment of the subject in the short space of this introduction would inevitably misfire.[1] The discussion of *Orientalism* and its legacy has nearly evolved to the status of a literary genre in itself, but it is nonetheless necessary to clarify where *Rereading Travellers to the East* stands with respect to the multifarious and apparently endless theoretical and methodological debates revolving around the issue of orientalism. Said's many critics have convincingly argued that the main force behind the development of "orientalism", taken in its scholarly manifestation, was neither the colonizer's lust for power and riches, nor the "Enlightenment project" epitomized in the *mission civilisatrice* (e.g., Irwin 2006; App 2010). The Middle Eastern focus of Said's analysis was misleading considering the much more varying experiences of other Asian polities located farther East. Almost anything that happened before that fateful day in which Napoleon set foot in Egypt runs counter to the monolithic portrait of the orientalizing West given by Said and his followers (e.g., Philipps 2014). In some important cases, the construction of a specific vision of the Orient was the result of cooperation between the dominant classes on the two sides of the imperial divide (e.g., Raj 2001). To all this we may add that the all-encompassing perspective of Said's conception of orientalism has often had a blurring rather than clarifying effect on the connections between the professional and disciplinary development of the academic field of oriental studies on the one hand, and the many different manifestations of orientalism in the arts or in popular literature on the other. On the contrary, only an operative distinction between "academic" and "extra-academic" orientalism can lead to a sound analysis of the actual entanglements between the two fields. What is most important for us, however, is the contradiction between Said's portrait of a monolithic West and his narrow focus on British, French and American dealings with the Orient. This contradiction has encouraged the production of many valuable works analysing contexts and backgrounds left out from Said's viewpoint: the study of orientalism in the German-speaking world,[2] for instance, has had a great hand in nuancing the characterization of orientalism as a western political and intellectual phenomenon. What about Italy?

[1] For a review of the main critical reactions to Said's *Orientalism*, the books by A.L. Macfie (2000) and Daniel Varisco (2007) are still useful.

[2] The literature on German-speaking orientalism has greatly expanded over the last 20 years, tackling specific questions such as the entanglements between orientalism, philology and race theories between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See, among others, the works of Pascale Rabault-Feuerhahn (2008), Suzanne Marchand (2009) and Ursula Wokoeck (2009).

First of all, it is important to remark that the Italian-speaking scholarly landscape includes different disciplinary traditions within which it has been possible to analyse the relations between Europe and Asia as a subject of intellectual and cultural as well as political history, by drawing upon several other resources than Said's work.[3] Even in the more narrow field of oriental studies, the tradition of disciplinary self-reflection and self-representation that Italian "orientalists" share with their European counterparts has developed into different strands of intellectual and institutional history of oriental studies, which by no means take Said's thesis as their defining trait.[4]

However, Said's global impact on the history of the humanities has undoubtedly pushed many Italian scholars to engage critically with his work and arguably played a significant role in encouraging them to take part in the ongoing reshaping of the study of orientalism. This development can be seen, for instance, through many of the essays collected in the three-volume project edited by Gabriele Proglio (2012). At the same time, scholars active in the field of Italian studies abroad have also contributed to the study of orientalism in modern Italy in the perspective explored by Said and his more constructive critics, like in the case of Barbara Spackman's important studies about female Italian travellers to the East (recently gathered in Spackman 2017).

On the other hand, the very recent special issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* edited by Rolando Minuti and Adrian Lyttelton ("Italy's Orient") conveys the relatively widespread scholarly position according to which while not ignoring the legacy of Said's work, any analysis of the history of orientalism and oriental studies should be based on a philological attention to the texts and a strong historical sensibility towards the political and intellectual context in which these texts were produced (Lyttelton 2021; Minuti 2021). At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the analogies, connections and similarities in the ways of dealing with the Orient found all over Europe—in a word, the transnational nature of any cultural development across the modern age, an issue that Minuti and Lyttelton discuss in terms of the construction of "Europeanness" (Minuti 2021, 106). The essays collected in *Rereading Travellers to the East* share this methodological approach, in the sense that only a careful discussion of text and context can lead to the conclusion that any western—in our

[3] We are thinking, for example, of Franco Venturi's seminal essay on oriental despotism (Venturi 1960), or about the tradition of studies on *alterità* ("otherness") that drew upon a critical appraisal of Said as well as Tzvetan Todorov's work (in particular Todorov 1982) in addition to well-established strands of research about religious difference and tolerance (see e.g., Rostagno 1983; Abbattista and Minuti 2006; Formica 2012; Tarantino 2012; Santus 2019; Tarantino and von Wyss-Giacosa 2021). To this we may add the perspective on oriental studies in terms of history of historiography developed by Fulvio Tessitore (2008) among others.

[4] If the works of Arabist Francesco Gabrieli (1975, 1993) are a case in point from both before and after Said's *Orientalism*, a useful example is provided by the essays collected in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* XCIV 1 (2021), such as those by Mastrangelo, Lo Turco and Crisanti.

case Italian—"gaze" on the East may have been part and parcel of a hegemonic project. The importance of context, understood as a specific political, social, cultural and material setting, is particularly evident in the case of Italy, where the often unique features of its different urban communities impacted significantly on how scholarly traditions and ways of dealing with Asia developed, as is discussed in Filipa Lowndes Vicente's study on orientalism in Florence for instance (2012). However, for our case, we have to place emphasis on a study of orientalism "in the national context".[5]

Several specific features of the history of Italy as a unitary state and an "imagined community" in the making—the process of unification, its faltering but brutal colonial expansion, the rise and establishment of Fascism, the constitution of the Axis and the abrupt shift to the republic and democracy—impacted heavily on "Italian" ways of dealing with Asia, both in the present and at the level of the historical reconstructions of "Italian" contacts in the past. What is more, a relative commonality of language going back to well before the unification made it comparatively easy to project into the past the Italianness of both the travellers and their relations with Asia.

Some of these specific features are precisely what encourages us to not lose sight of the fact that some of the methodological strong points espoused by Said and later propagated by postcolonial studies are still valid and even useful for a discussion of the Italian case. In the first place, the "nexus of knowledge and power", or the connection between orientalism and imperialism, presented by Said as the cornerstone of European dealings with Asia (Said 1978, 1–28), is crucial to our work insofar as it is indeed possible to document relevant instances of this connection. Secondly, the notion of "imaginative geography" (Said 1978, 49–73) is just as important. Scholars operating both inside and outside postcolonial studies have made it clear that our concepts of geographical space, including the continents (Lewis and Wigen 1992), or what we are used to calling East and West, "have never been free of myth and fantasy" (Hall 1992, 185). In more general terms, their validity ultimately depends upon the political, intellectual and material conditions of their very production (Grataloup 2018). Within the perspective that we have chosen, the issues raised by imaginative geographies concern both the East and Italy. The focus on travellers allows us to show a distinct way of "creating" both of these spaces: the Orient that we are dealing with was mostly materialized (and brought to the attention of the Italian reading public) through references to specific spaces and times in which Italy itself could be materialized by means of the travellers' passage—and vice versa. While Italy as an idea is stretched beyond its (mobile) geographical boundaries, many different Orients are summoned and the traditional tropes constituting its image—wealth and decadence, ignorance and wisdom, barbary and civilization—are arranged in specific forms according to (the rereading of) each traveller's expe-

[5] The expression is taken from the series of essays edited by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich between the 1980s and 1990s; see e.g., Porter and Teich (1981).

rience. Finally, the fundamental interplay between the Self and Other, identity and difference, that forms such an important part of Said's work and is also quite familiar to many different Italian scholarly traditions, is extremely relevant for our work too, since we intend to show the extent to which rereading travellers, aiming to enhance their "Italianness", contributed to nation-building processes. In this sense, our work fits the perspective explored by Fabrizio De Donno's important study of Italian orientalism, in which Italian dealings with the Orient are connected to the formation of nationhood (De Donno 2019).

5. Women as travellers

Before discussing the content of the papers, it may be useful to address the important question of woman as travellers. Akhimie and Bernadette have pointed out how early modern women's travel has traditionally been construed as an "absent presence" due to the general ban on women's movement outside the domestic sphere (2019, 1). In fact, the mobility of men was made possible by the stability of women (Mazzei 2013, 58). Nevertheless, the travels of European women constitute a topic that has certainly attracted the attention of historians over the years (Corsi 1999; Rossi 2005; Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson 2016). In the papers collected in this volume, however, the presence of women is extremely limited, if not completely absent, for several reasons.

Even though the figures of some European female travellers developed into myths, like the Viking explorer Gudrid Thorbjarnardóttir or the pilgrim Egeria, the presence of female long-distance/intercontinental travellers was extremely limited in early modern times and linked to specific circumstances. For instance, Jeanne Baret (1740–1804) was probably the first woman to circumnavigate the globe as a member of Louis Antoine de Bougainville's expedition in 1766–1769, but she did so disguised as a man, enlisted as assistant to the expedition's naturalist, Philibert Commerçon (Dunmore 2002). Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that even if women travellers did exist, they left very few traces (Mączak 1994, 215). More certainly still, we can affirm that even if some of them left documentation, their travels were reread in later periods to a much lesser extent than those of their male colleagues.

For many centuries, few women were allowed to follow their diplomatic husbands on their travels. Of these, a particularly famous case is that of Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), who from 1716 to 1718 travelled as the wife of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, in what was the golden age of the "grand tour" (Kostova 2001; O'Loughlin 2018; Geurts 2020; Tosi 2020). Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the picture of female travellers to the East began to change (Ciafardoni 2021), with many contributing significantly to the ever-changing genre of travel literature, such as Esther Stanhope (1776–1839), credited with carrying out pioneering excavations in the Ottoman Empire (the archaeological excavation of Ashkelon in 1815), who left six volumes of memoirs printed after her death. The British writer Gertrude Bell (1868–1926), who studied modern history at Oxford University, spent several

years travelling extensively in Iran, Syria and Iraq, and during World War I was recruited by the British Intelligence Service in Cairo, working with the famed T. E. Lawrence supporting the Hashemite dynasties (Cohen and Sharp Joukowsky 2006). As regards the Italian case (of which a systematic account can be found in Frediani, Ricorda, and Rossi 2013), women travellers between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were often simply wives following their husbands in the Italian colonies (Camilotti 2015). As noted by Scriboni (1996, 306), the travels of women met with prejudice and suspicion, and therefore they were mainly accompanied by family members (fathers, husbands, brothers), lest their African voyages jeopardize their chastity. This is the case of Rosalia Pianavia-Vivaldi Bossiner, wife of Colonel Pianavia-Vivaldi, who travelled for three years in Eritrea between 1893 and 1896, publishing the diary *Tre anni in Eritrea* (1901), accompanied by the pictures she took herself. Likewise, Amelia Pigazzi, wife of explorer Giuseppe De Reali (1877–1937), accompanied him to the Congo in 1925, collecting her impressions in the published diary *Alcuni appunti del mio viaggio al Congo* (1925), or the wife of big-game hunter, writer and director Vittorio Tedesco Zammarano (1890–1959), accompanied him on his Somali travels, immortalized by him in the feature film *Il sentiero delle belve* (1932). And again, accompanying German painter Fritz Berthold, who had been invited to paint the landscapes of the Somali colony in the 1930s by Governor Maurizio Rava, was his wife, Virginie Neuhaus, who published her book of memories *Nella più lontana terra dell'Impero* (1937).

Still, some female travellers left their mark, including a literary one, on the history of Italian travel to the East. Princess Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso (1808–1871) aristocrat and Risorgimento supporter, in exile on account of her active role in the failed Roman Republic of 1848, Belgiojoso lived in Anatolia for five years, where she authored the books *La vie intime et la vie nomade en Orient* (1855) and *Asie Mineure et Syrie, souvenirs de voyage* (1858) (Ricorda 2011). Amalia Nizzoli (1805–?) travelled to and resided in Egypt, moving there with her family when she was thirteen, entrusting her impressions of the country to her memoirs *Memorie sull'Egitto e specialmente sui costumi delle donne orientali e gli harem, scritte durante il suo soggiorno in quel paese* (Scriboni 1996; Spackman 2017). Particularly interesting is the case of Giuseppina Croci (1863–1955), a spinning mill worker in Lombardy. In 1890 she left for Shanghai to train Chinese women in the use of mechanical spinning machines, and stayed there for five years, returning to Italy with a large sum of money. Her diary, written during the 37 days she spent sailing from Genoa to Shanghai, is kept in the archives in Pieve Santo Stefano (Piastra 2013). Elisa Chimenti (1883–1969), writer and ethnographer, recorded and translated the oral traditions of Moroccan women: her family emigrated to Tunis in 1884 when she was an infant and she spent her whole life in North Africa, opening in 1914 an Italian school in Tangeri, where she died in 1969. In her extremely unusual case, the journey is that from the "East" to Europe, where she travelled, mainly to Germany, for research purposes (Cederna 2019).

To sum up, the absence of rereadings of travel literature written by women in this volume is mainly explained by the fact that this kind of text was extremely

rare in the chronological time frame in which travel literature later subjected to rereadings was produced, namely the early modern age; on the contrary, the period in which women acquired increased mobility and started publishing travelogues instead fell in the period which interests us for its rereadings more than for its own travel literature. In fact, despite being much less present in the East than their male counterparts, while female travellers may not have left traces that were reinterpreted and reread, they were nevertheless involved in the practice of rereading themselves: as Falcucci notes in her work in this volume, Olga Pinto (1903–1970), Tullia Gasparrini Leporace (1910–1969) and Maria Francesca Tiepolo (1925–2020) all worked on the editions of the *Nuovo Ramusio* travel literature series. While Pinto was vice-director at the Biblioteca dell'Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in Rome (Gabrieli 1971), and Gasparrini Leporace worked at the Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale in the same city, Tiepolo worked as an archivist and for the superintendence in Veneto. Further studies could determine whether there were differences in their rereading operations compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, the perspective of this volume suggests considering the "gender strand" in travel literature studies as a case of "mass" rereading of these texts, an aspect also deserving further investigation.

6. The contributions

The papers collected in this volume reflect the transdisciplinary approach discussed above and are founded on a large array of different sources. The first contribution, written by Beatrice Falcucci (*"Rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori": the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) and the "Myth" of Italian Travellers to the East*), offers a long-term perspective on the general question of rereading travellers to the East in post-unification Italy, while focusing on the activities of one of the Italian powerhouses of oriental studies, the Rome-based Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO). In particular, Falcucci's study aims to investigate the development of a shared sense of identity in Italy—from its unification until the end of the colonial empire, without neglecting its traces in the republican period. Falcucci shows how the production and dissemination of an Italian national consciousness was based largely on the construction of a "mythical past", through exhibitions, collections, printed works, magazines and institutes dedicated to magnifying the "exploits" of early modern "Italian" travellers and explorers in the East, from Marco Polo to Giuseppe Tucci. In so doing, the paper touches upon several issues discussed in more detail in the subsequent papers.

In his paper, Fabrizio De Donno (*Rereading Italian Travellers to Africa: Precursors, Identities and Interracial Relations in Narratives of Italian Colonialism*) discusses a number of writings about Africa by travellers which are reread, both historically and by the author, in order to construct and deconstruct Italian colonial identity. De Donno focuses on Cesare Cesari's *Viaggi africani di Pellegrino Matteucci* (1932), in which Matteucci is portrayed as a precursor of Fascist colonialism, and a contributor to Fascist "colonial science". The essay then moves

on to explore the more recent rereading by Angelo Del Boca and Igiaba Scego of respectively Indro Montanelli's *XX Battaglione Eritreo* (1936) and Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* (1961). In bringing these texts together, the essay shows that their rereading maps the transformations of Italianness from colonial to postcolonial times and reveals how colonial identity relied on a series of gender, racial and sexual tropes of exploration and conquest.

Alessandro Tripepi introduces us to the Far East in *Unsheathing the Katana. The Long Fortune of the First Two Japanese Embassies in Italy: Rediscovery and Rereading between Continuity and Discontinuity (1873-1905)*. At the end of the nineteenth century, Italy welcomed an official Japanese embassy. Its aim was to integrate the country into the new world scene it was entering; it was also the starting point for diplomatic and political relationships that would evolve into the infamous Tripartite Pact in the late 1930s. However, this "first" contact took place in the context of the increasing international rivalry in the Far East that ultimately led to the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Caught in a web of political, economic and industrial interests, some Italian actors took this encounter as an opportunity to rediscover, or rather invent, the long history of Italo-Japanese contacts through the study of early modern Japanese "ambassadors" visiting Italy.

Aglaia De Angeli moves from Japan to China in *Lodovico Nocentini: A Rereader of Modern Italian Travellers to China*. In 1882 sinologist Nocentini published a biography of Matteo Ricci, the most famous Jesuit active in China between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nocentini's work was the first comprehensive biography of Ricci not written by a fellow cleric. Nocentini's rereadings of Ricci's experience and works, mediated through the writings of other authors, provided a significant understanding of the origins of sinology and the role of Matteo Ricci, as an early modern Italian traveller, in the relations between China and the West. De Angeli examines Nocentini's rereadings through concepts and theories derived from the writings of Vladimir Nabokov, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, coming to understand Nocentini's work as a process of interpretation and reinterpretation, as well as appropriation of the original meanings of Jesuit writings.

The contribution of Luca Orlandi (*Searching for 'Italianità' in the Dodecanese Islands (1912-1943). Some Considerations on Art, Architecture and Archaeology through the Works of Hermes Balducci*) offers a different insight into the "East". Indeed, in his paper, Orlandi discusses how the search for the nation's identity might also have passed through the enhancement of the "Italian" past of the 14 Aegean islands—the Dodecanese—annexed by Italy during the Italo-Turkish War (1911–1912). In particular, Orlandi examines the work of the young engineer Hermes Balducci, who well represents the ambiguous attitude of the colonizers during the Fascist period, between an interest in the different manifestations of the multi-layered cultural landscape of the islands and the strong tendencies to "Italianize" both their historical past and current aspect.

With his essay *Medici Ambitions and Fascist Policies. (Re)reading the Relations between Italy and the Levant in the 1930s through the Historiography on Fakhr al-Dīn II*, Davide Trentacoste provides a new reading of Fascist foreign policy in the Middle East. Through the analysis of Maronite father Paolo Carali's work

on Lebanese Druze emir Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn (d. 1635), the author offers new insights into how Fascist Italy tried to create a historical narrative in support of its ambitions in the region, and in particular Lebanon. While the story of the relations between the Lebanese emir and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany has been told many times, the aim of this contribution is to discuss Carali's work as part of Fascist propaganda which set out to historically justify Fascist ambitions in the Levant by creating the myth of the civilizing effects of the contacts between Fakhr-al Din and Tuscany, narratively absorbed into "Italy" for the occasion.

In *An Italian Hero for China. Reading Marco Polo in the Fascist Era*, Laura De Giorgi gives an overview of the readings of Marco Polo's enterprise offered to the Italian public opinion during the Fascist era. The story of Marco Polo was adapted to the needs of patriotic pedagogy, the propaganda of Fascist values and colonial aspirations and the attempt to redefine Rome's political, economic and cultural role in the world. In a complex intertwining of academic and popular readings, the Venetian traveller was transformed by the official discourse into a symbol of Italianness in China and used to stress Italy's distinctive identity in comparison with the other Western powers. Although the Chinese reception of this discourse was limited at that time, this process certainly contributed to establishing Marco Polo's iconic significance in Sino-Italian cultural diplomacy later in the twentieth century.

In the last essay of the volume, *The Idea of Italian Travellers to Iran. Scholarly Research and Cultural Diplomacy in Post-war Italy*, Emanuele Giusti discusses the historical formation of "Italian travellers to Iran" as both a popular idea and scientific category. In the three decades after the Second World War, Italy and Iran were both going through profound transformations and entered a phase of intense political, economic and cultural relations. In this context, scholarly interests and political agendas jointly contributed to a representation of past travellers as the manifestation of an imagined and almost eternal connection between the two civilizations. This representation served to rhetorically enhance the role played by both countries in the history of mankind, and the contribution Italy and Iran could still give to humanity as nations among nations. However, Giusti argues that these events have also left their mark on how the history of connections between Italy and Iran, and the history of Iranian studies in Italy, are perceived and represented in scholarly milieus.

Finally, in his afterword, Giovanni Tarantino addresses the topic of Western representations of China by applying the notion of rereading to a wide variety of sources and media, including ballet and, in particular, a typically twentieth-century manifestation of the travel experience, namely the documentary, in this case *Chung Kuo/China* by Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni (1972). Paying attention to both Western and Chinese rereadings, Tarantino highlights how the practice of rereading can both support strategies of "assimilation and domination", but also give rise to stories "of restitution, reparation and beauty".

These papers can be read in many ways. The order in which we have just listed the chapters broadly follows the chronology of the rereadings, spanning from the unification to the first decades of the republic, and allows both continuities and ruptures to be traced in the patterns in which the travels are reread. While

the "Italianness" of the travellers is never forgotten, from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s, the urgent need that the heirs of the Risorgimento felt to fashion a national past was compounded by the systematization and escalation of the hegemonic or imperialist uses of this past during the Fascist regime, to then give way to the cosmopolitanism of nations typical of the days of the economic miracle. In this way, an analysis of the rereadings over the long term offers new insights into both Italian nation-building and the country's relations with Asia.

However, other interpretive perspectives can be adopted. For example, it is not rare for travellers to be reread in the context of strong economic opportunities, as is shown by the sale of armaments to Japan discussed in Tripepi's paper or the all-important oil agreement between Italy's ENI and Iran referred to by Giusti. The papers by De Giorgi and De Angeli and the afterword by Tarantino all deal with the relations between Italy and China; however, De Angeli discusses the kind and scope of the rereadings available in the nascent disciplinary field of sinology in Italy, while by analysing rereadings offered to a wider public through newspapers and popular literature, De Giorgi offers an insight into the effects of those rereadings that mixed a scholarly perspective with the clear intent to produce an impression on the masses. Tarantino, for his part, highlights the fault lines that could emerge around a specific travel experience and its filmic representation, at a time when conflicting political groups in a variety of countries were making their own rereadings. Another perspective could be taken from the papers dealing directly with the Mediterranean, like those of Trentacoste and Orlandi. While the historical reality of the presence of the "Italian" states in the early modern Mediterranean was one of fragmentation and rivalry, experiences as different as those of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Knights of Rhodes, not to mention Venice, Genoa or the papacy, were flattened into a uniformed national narrative, creating the myth of an "Italian" Mediterranean past. Last but not least, the papers by Falcucci and De Donno show the profound intertwinement between the practice of rereading travellers and the establishment of colonial projects and forms of identity, confirming the fluidity of any notion of the "Orient" one more time. Moreover, their perspective expounds the inextricable entanglement of rereadings with the legacy of colonialism, in the sense that the myth of "Italian travellers" has left a mark on the national conscience which is impossible to separate from the colonial past, perhaps the main field of application of the hegemonic discourse fashioned around the travellers of the past.

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"Rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori": the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) and the "Myth" of Italian Travellers to the East

Beatrice Falcucci

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the development of a shared sense of identity and community that occurred in Italy from its unification until the end of the colonial empire, and its traces in the republican period. This nation-building process will be examined by analysing Italy's relationship with the early modern age of the Peninsula and its pre-unification travellers to the East. We will see how the production and dissemination of an Italian national consciousness and sentiment was based largely on the construction of a "mythical past" through exhibitions, collections, printed works, magazines and institutes dedicated to magnifying the "exploits" of travellers and explorers in the East, from Marco Polo to Giuseppe Tucci.

Keywords: Italian colonialism, Italian nation-building, Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Tucci, IsMEO

This work examines the appropriation of the "Italian" past for political purposes along with the alleged, constantly asserted "exploits" of "Italians" throughout time and their intertwining with political and cultural colonialism (and its justification) and Italy's foreign policy, especially in the 1930s. The aim of this study is to highlight the nexus between the competition for status at the international level and the domestic political outcomes of cultural policies connected to Italy's need to build a national legitimacy and identity and a frame for its imperial aspirations. The paper investigates the uses of "Italian history" and the process of developing an "Italian narrative" around the "mythical" figures of travellers to the East from the early modern period. In fact, the liberal State, and later the Fascist regime, appropriated not only the ancient Roman past but also the medieval era and the Renaissance (Lazzaro and Crum 2004; Lasansky 2004) to create a canon of "*italianità*". This discourse remained alive for many decades and, as we will see, often returned as a theme, in close connection with the political and cultural life of modern Italy. In particular, the chapter will focus on IsMEO, an institute founded in the Fascist period by Giovanni Gentile and Giuseppe Tucci, as the Fascist State decided to finance tensions and tendencies that had already been ongoing for some considerable time, albeit in an unorganized manner, and point them in a single direction. At the heart of the Fascist plan for Italy was the belief that Fas-

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Beatrice Falcucci, *"Rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori": the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) and the "Myth" of Italian Travellers to the East*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.04, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 29-64, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

cist foreign policy was simply a path to rebuild an (imaginary) "Italian empire" that already existed. This determination was combined with a desire to confirm that Italians had arrived "first" in a particular place (on a mountain top, in an inaccessible city, on a distant island). The study will consider the use of scholarship, exhibitions, collections, printed works, magazines and institutes in the creation of a "scholarship of empire" whose aim was to magnify the past and present of Italy, and its relationship with the East, presented as a seamless continuum.

1. Italian Orientalism: the unification of the Kingdom of Italy and interest in the East

In 1878 Florence was chosen as the site of the Fourth International Congress of Orientalists organized by Secretary-General Angelo De Gubernatis (1840–1913), professor of Sanskrit at the Istituto di Studi Superiori. On that occasion, scholars of "the Orient"[1] from Europe—and beyond[2]—gathered in the former capital of the recently unified Kingdom of Italy (Brilli 2010).

Florence was one of the most prominent intellectual centres in Italy and home to the Regio Istituto di Studi Superiori Pratici e di Perfezionamento, modelled on the Collège de France (Garin 1959). An abiding interest in oriental studies was evidenced by the presence in the city of the Società Italiana per gli Studi Orientali (later the Accademia Orientale), founded by Michele Amari (1806–1889), patriot and scholar of Muslim Sicily, with De Gubernatis as secretary (Campana 2001). When the Società was founded in 1871, in the *Annuario della Società Italiana per gli Studi Orientali* Amari proclaimed his wish to continue a tradition that had its roots in the Middle Ages:

> Il genio italiano che nel Medioevo s'era vòlto il primo all'oriente con intendimenti commerciali e politici, e poi nel Risorgimento delle lettere e delle arti s'era spaziato spensieratamente per tutti i campi dell'intelletto ed avea colti anch'esso i suoi frutti negli studi orientali, si trovò disarmato e prigione dopo la pace del 1815. […] L'Italia maledisse e cospirò, mentre gli altri studiarono lieti: essa ha poi combattuto; ha atteso all'ordinamento politico […] (Amari 1872, iv).[3]

[1] It is not easy to determine what the "Orient" was at the time (just as it is difficult for post-colonial scholars to identify it even today). In this paper I will therefore use "Orient" in the meaning proposed by the authors themselves: as the essay goes on, it will become evident how this notion was intended to qualify the Italians who used it much more than the lands it defined. For a problematization of the term "Orient" and Orientalism, see the "Introduction" to this volume.

[2] For example, participating in the work of the congress from India was José Gerson da Cunha (1844–1900), physician and intellectual; the correspondence between De Gubernatis and Gerson da Cunha is held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Manoscritti, Carteggio Angelo De Gubernatis. On the complex relationship between the two, see Lowndes Vicente (2009).

[3] "The Italian genius, which in the Middle Ages had been the first to go to the East with commercial and political intentions, and then in the Risorgimento of letters and the arts had ranged carefree through all fields of the intellect and had also reaped its fruits in oriental studies, found itself disarmed and imprisoned after the peace of 1815. […] Italy cursed and conspired, while others studied happily, fought and waited for political order […]."

In addition, the "new" Florence intended to be heir to the tradition of the Medici Oriental Press established in 1584 (Saltini 1860). Many journals addressing the "East" were published at that time: *Rivista Orientale* (1867), *Bollettino degli Studi Orientali* (1876) and *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana* (1885) (Rosi 1985; Iannello 2001), and "Eastern" collections of great artistic and archaeological significance could also be found in the city (Anastasio 2017; Curatola 2018; Diana 2018). After Paris (1873), London (1874) and St Petersburg (1876), Florence seemed to be the logical city to host the next congress of orientalists, and it did not fall short of expectations, making a name for itself as a moment of fundamental importance for Italian oriental studies.

A rhetoric strongly linked to the "mythical" travellers of the early modern age developed following the Florentine congress. Scholars presented these travellers as role models for every Italian who, at the end of the nineteenth century, wanted to look outside national borders and, in particular, towards an undefined East[4] (for an interesting profile of European travellers to the East at the turn of the century, see Behdad 1994).

One of the congress attendees was Giuseppe Sapeto (1811–1875), a missionary and explorer in the Horn of Africa since 1837. In 1869, on behalf of Raffaele Rubattino's shipping company, Sapeto purchased the Bay of Assab, which became the first Italian overseas possession when it was ceded to the Kingdom of Italy in 1882. Sapeto attended the conference with a paper on Ethiopian languages and catalogues of geez scrolls and was elected vice-president of the first section of the congress (Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti 1881). While Sapeto's role in Italy's colonial expansion is well known (Del Boca 1976, 34), it is interesting to note his reference to Marco Polo as the "ideal Italian" and the constant point of reference for every traveller (Maraini 1951, 27):

> Dio volesse, che questo mio lavoro invogliasse alcuno Italiano a viaggi proficui a ogni guisa di scienze; che pur troppo dai nostri giorni la schiatta dei Marco Polo è al tutto spenta, e nessuno v'ha ch'io sappia, il quale allettato dall'amor della scienza, dia l'addio all'Italia per viaggiare in luoghi ricchi di produzioni naturali, di monumenti, d'iscrizioni, o di preziosi manoscritti, i quali da lui studiati recassero alla storia naturale, all'etnografia alla geografia, alla storia, alla filologia utili scoperte, che facessero meritevole la nostra patria di sedere accanto alle altre nazioni più dotte d'Europa in questo genere di studi, come per la sua savia politica è stata riputata degna di convenire nei consigli alla diplomazia (Sapeto 1941, 252).[5]

[4] For example, several Italian authors expressed their great expectations for the opening of the Suez Canal, which would "restore" Italy's privileged position in trade, creating new opportunities for profitable exchange with the East (Lyttelton 2021). On the importance attached to the Suez Canal in the 1930s, see Sammarco 1939.

[5] "God willing, this work of mine might induce some Italians to travel profitably in every way of science: nowadays the lineage of Marco Polo is completely extinct, and there is no one who, tempted by the love of science, bids farewell to Italy to travel to places rich in natural

De Gubernatis himself, a man of anarchist and internationalist ideas (Bocchi 2013) who was not involved in Italian colonial policy (Lowndes Vicente 2009), could not help but express his regret that:

> Le Indie furono, senza alcun dubbio, come l'America, rivelate all'Europa da soli italiani condannati poi ad udire che il tal capitano portoghese, il tal capitano spagnuolo avevan scoperta nuova terra e occupata nel nome del suo sovrano (De Gubernatis 1875, 10).[6]

De Gubernatis lamented the undeservedly subordinate position of Italians: a "race" of travellers who did not see their efforts recognized. Indeed, he emphasized the value of "Italian" travellers to the East from the pre-unification era throughout his scholarship, in works such as *Memoria intorno ai viaggiatori italiani nelle Indie Orientali dal secolo XIII a tutto il XVI* (1867), *Gli scritti del padre Marco della Tomba, missionario nelle Indie Orientali* (1878)[7] and *Roma e l'Oriente nella storia, nella leggenda e nella visione* (1899). De Gubernatis was not alone in making such complaints. For example, in his book *Degli antichi navigatori e scopritori genovesi* (1881), the historian from Genoa Michele Giuseppe Canale (1808–1890) celebrated the eastward-bound travellers of the Republic of Genoa, but complained that they were in the service of the Portuguese. Proud Venetian patriot and historian Guglielmo Berchet (1833–1913) undertook to write a history of relations between the Venetian Republic and Persia, published in 1865 (Berchet 1865); similarly, Niccolò Di Lenna worked at the beginning of the twentieth century to enhance the reputation of Venetian travellers such as Giosafat Barbaro (1413–1494) and Ambrogio Contarini (1429–1499) (Di Lenna 1914, 1921).

De Gubernatis set up an oriental exhibition during the congress of 1878, asking the participants of the congress to contribute to it with donations and loans (*Catalogo dell'Esposizione Orientale* 1877–1882), and making the visit to the exhibition a central moment of the conference. The exhibition also included references to well-known travellers of the early modern age: for example, there were artificial versions of bezoars used as medicines, brought from Goa in the sixteenth century by Florentine Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588) and loaned by the

productions, monuments, inscriptions or precious manuscripts, which would bring useful discoveries to natural history, ethnography, geography, history and philology, and make our country worthy to sit next to the other most learned nations of Europe in this kind of studies, in the same way as for its wise policy it has been deemed worthy to take part in diplomatic talks." As we will see, it is no coincidence that in 1941 the volume *Viaggio e missione cattolica fra i Mensa, i Bogos e gli Habab: con un cenno geografico e storico dell'Abissinia*, published by the Holy Congregation of Propaganda Fide in 1857, would be reprinted and made known to the general public by the Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale (ISPI).

6 "The Indies were undoubtedly, like America, revealed to Europe by the Italians alone, who were then condemned to hear that a certain Portuguese or Spanish captain had discovered a new land and occupied it in the name of his sovereign."

7 Marco Tomba (1726–1803) was a Capuchin friar who served as a missionary in northern India; he was also part of the mission to Tibet financed by Propaganda Fide.

Museo di Fisica e Storia Naturale in Florence. Sassetti was a figure of particular importance in the writings of De Gubernatis, who considered him a true "pioneer" of Italian oriental studies and the first to establish a relationship between Sanskrit and European languages (De Gubernatis 1886, 153–81). Additionally, the exhibition was also loaned the portrait of Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), a legendary figure at the time, recognized as one of the greatest missionaries to China, by the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in Rome.

The Museo Indiano of Florence was set up in 1886 on the basis of the original group of objects collected by De Gubernatis for the exhibition (Donati 1887; Jacoviello 1998; the museum would later be incorporated into the Museo di Antropologia e Etnologia, Ciruzzi 1990).[8] Located on the second floor of the Istituto di Studi Superiori in Piazza San Marco, the museum was inaugurated for the first time in the presence of the royal family (*La Nazione* 1886) and for a second time upon presentation of the catalogue and a plaque in honour of Filippo Sassetti (*La Nazione* 1887). In his inaugural speech, De Gubernatis once again recalled the glorious "Italian travellers" to the East, explicitly referring to a tradition of the medieval and modern ages (De Gubernatis 1887).

Ultimately, the Fourth Congress of Orientalists returned "travellers to the East" to prominence in the post-unification era, although interest in them had never been truly dormant, and, at the same time, comprehensive works such as Pietro Amat Di San Filippo's *Bibliografia dei viaggiatori italiani ordinata cronologicamente ed illustrata* (1874) contributed to the expansion of the list of "noteworthy Italian travellers".

Such interest in this peculiar category of travellers was undoubtedly heightened by contingencies, such as the beginning of colonial expansion (Del Boca 1976), commercial travel and exploration (Surdich 1985; Di Meo 2021),[9] as well as the influence of theories on Aryan settlement and diaspora, and the establishment of the first national chairs of oriental languages[10] in Italy (De Donno 2019).

[8] The same years saw the completion of the house-museum of Frederick Stibbert (1838–1906) in Florence: it counted 36,000 objects, including European painting, furniture and decorative arts, Japanese and Chinese porcelain, and European and non-European arms and armour.

[9] Vittorio Arminjon's (1830–1897) travels to Japan and China in 1866; Pietro Savio (1838–1904) and his twelve trips to Japan starting in 1867; Torino Luchino Dal Verme's (1838–1911) voyage to the Far East on board the *Vettor Pisani*; Vittorio Sallier de la Tour (1827–1894), minister plenipotentiary in Japan; Alessandro Fè d'Ostiani (1825–1905), ambassador to Japan and the Chinese Empire from 1870 to 1877; Enrico Alberto d'Albertis (1846–1932) and his many travels to the East. For an interesting case study on Italian traders in Japan, see Turina 2021: due to a disease that affected European silkworms in the 1850s, Italian silkworm egg merchants travelled to Japan for decades; some of them settled in Yokohama, playing an important role in the diffusion of Japanese objects in Italy and contributing to the development of knowledge about Japan.

[10] Gaspare Gorresio (1808–1891) was the first holder of a Sanskrit chair at the University of Turin as of 1852. Antelmo Severini (1828–1909), the first lecturer in sinology and iamatology in the whole of Italy, taught Far Eastern languages from 1863 at the Regio Istituto Studi Superiori; the first Japanese language course was launched in 1873 at the Regia Scuola

The dawn of the twentieth century, the conquest of Libya and the advent of Fascism accelerated and gave a new ideological depth to the rereading and reinterpretation of the Italian traveller to the East, culminating in the birth of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO).

2. The new century: nationalism, Fascism and the colonial paradigm

The new century opened for Italy, following its participation in the Eight Nation Alliance during the Boxer Uprising, with the acquisition of the Chinese concession in Tianjin in 1902 (Di Meo 2015). The acquisition of this small port ("cittadina modello" and "zona d'Italia in Oriente", as described by Giornale Luce)[11] fostered Italy's relations with the Far East (Chiminelli 1903; Nocentini 1904; Trafeli 2012),[12] bringing it into the limelight for the wider public and popularizing its narrative in newspapers, magazines, postcards, photographs and even board games (Comberati 2012; Clerici 2018; Villa 2012). While in Italy the small concession served to awaken interest among non-specialists in the Far East, in Tianjin streets, squares and statues were dedicated to the most famous "Italians" who had ever travelled to China: Matteo Ricci and Marco Polo (Marinelli 2007).[13] Polo was claimed as authentically Italian (but also extolled locally as a Venetian emblem, Volpi 1926) and presented as the ultimate expression of a successful explorer, allowing Italy to boast an international legitimacy far older than its few years as a unitary tate would actually allow. Interestingly, the name chosen for the concession newspaper published in Italian in Shanghai in 1939–1941 was *Il Marco Polo: Rassegna italiana per l'estremo oriente*.[14]

As noted above, the fascination with the Far East and its popularization is evident in the emergence of Far Eastern collections,[15] as is the case of the Chiossone Museum in Genoa, for example. The museum, boasting one of the largest collections of Japanese art outside Japan (about 15,000 artefacts), opened to the public in 1905 and was named after Edoardo Chiossone (1833–1898), engraver

Superiore di Commercio in Venice. In 1885, famous linguist Ignazio Guidi (1844–1935) was appointed chair of Abyssinian History and Languages, set up by minister Coppino following the occupation of Massawa: the colonial enterprise formally made its mark on Italian academic Orientalism. Giuseppe Gabrieli, Giorgio Levi Della Vida, Francesco Beguinot, Carlo Conti Rossini and Enrico Cerulli were all trained at Guidi's school.

11 Giornale Luce B/B0697, *Visita alla città di Tien-Tsin,* Istituto Nazionale Luce, 19/06/1935.

12 An interest already cultivated in the last decades of the nineteenth century by central figures in Italian culture and politics of the time, such as Giuseppe Ferrari (1811–1876). See Minuti 2021.

13 A statue to Marco Polo (with the visible dedication "a Marco Polo 1254–1324") is also framed in the short film Giornale Luce B/B0698, *Festa della celebrazione dell'Intervento della Concessione Italiana a Tien Tsin,* Istituto Nazionale Luce, 19/06/1935.

14 Some works that relaunched the concession in the Fascist press in the years of the empire were Pistolese 1935 and Cesapi 1937.

15 Carrying on and adapting a tradition of private collections of oriental art and curiosities that had been in existence long before the unification of Italy, see Abbattista 2021.

at the emperor's court, who had donated his collection of oriental art objects to the Accademia Ligustica di Belle Arti in Genoa in 1898 (Marcenaro 1971). The collection aroused the admiration of Chiossone's contact, De Gubernatis who claimed that it included the most beautiful bronzes in the world. Indeed, such was De Gubernatis' admiration that he considered transforming his "Museo Indiano" into a "Museo Asiatico" with the participation of the Genoese (Iannello 2001, 346). In 1907 Francesco Lorenzo Pullè (1850–1934), Risorgimento patriot and professor of Indo-European philology, founded the Museo Indiano in Bologna with findings he brought back from his trip to the First International Congress of Far Eastern Studies held in Hanoi (1902), and his later travels to India (1904) and Indochina (1905) (Verardi 1988; Villa 2016). The museum was created with the aim of documenting "lo studio della storia e delle arti nei rapporti commerciali e civili dell'Italia coll'Estremo Oriente". Among the highlights of the collection, it was said "si ammira il *Ramayana* edito dall'abate Gorresio sotto gli auspici di Carlo Alberto nel 1848, edizione che costò la bellezza di 400.000 lire" (*L'Archiginnasio* 1907, 156–57). Disciple of De Gubernatis in Florence, Pullè perfectly embodied the generation of orientalists working at the turn of the century. His scholarship clearly marks the passage from works such as *Un capitolo fiorentino d'indologia del secolo XVII* (1898) committed to reconstructing relations between pre-unification Italy and the East (albeit in a celebratory key), to the exaltation of Italy's civilizing role in *Le conquiste scientifiche e civili dell'Italia in Oriente dall'antichità ai tempi nuovi* (1912), and a clear stance in favour of colonial expansion, building on the long tradition of exploration of proto-Italian travellers, in *Gli studi orientali e la espansione coloniale* (1914).

Moreover, a convergence between nationalism and a fascination with the East can be seen in the literary production of one of the fathers of Italian nationalism, journalist Enrico Corradini (1865–1931), who founded the Associazione Nazionalista Italiana. From the pages of *Il Regno* (Nello 2020), Corradini celebrated the Japanese as perfect warriors in an article entitled "Susume" (the Japanese word for "forward", the battle cry of the Japanese troops then, in 1904–1905, engaged in conflict against the Russians, Corradini 1904a).[16] In a further article entitled "Una nazione" Corradini praised the cult of the emperor and the perfect balance between individuality and collectivity in Japanese society, admiring "la religione degli eroi e della natura […] gli eroi sono popolo del passato, la natura è la patria" (Corradini 1904b). Not only men of letters but also men of science

[16] Nationalist and later Fascist intellectuals showed an immense fascination with the Japanese, their martial arts and the rhetoric relating to their spirit of sacrifice (Tucci 1939; Hofmann 2015; Raimondo 2018; Basilone 2019). This fascination would grow in the 1930s, culminating at the time of the drafting of the Tripartite Pact. Fascist intellectuals also discussed the problem of how to create a racial policy that would include the Japanese within the Aryan doctrine (Monserrati 2020). Julius Evola (1898–1974) was one of many who wrote about the peculiar intertwining of spirituality and the Japanese imperial idea in *Asiatica*, the journal of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente edited by Giuseppe Tucci (Evola 1940; Iacovella 2001).

began to express an interest in "recovering" a "privileged" relationship with the Far East (Guareschi 1904, 449–54; Vacca 1912).

The Italo-Turkish War (1911–1913) and then the First World War marked a further awakening, this time political rather than literary, of interest in the East.[17] Geographer and geologist Giuseppe Stefanini (1882–1938), professor at the Regio Istituto di Studi Superiori in Florence and later a well-known explorer of Somalia with Nello Puccioni, wrote about the situation of the decaying Ottoman Empire:

> L'atteggiamento equivoco della Turchia, determinatosi fin dai primi giorni della guerra [...] raggiunse una prima fase culminate allorquando, per suggerimento forse della Germania, abolì le Capitolazioni. Il provvedimento colpiva direttamente gl'interessi dell'Italia in Oriente (Stefanini 1919, 141).[18]

While praising figures such as Antonio "Bey" Figari (1804–1870), pharmacist and naturalist who worked for over 50 years in the service of the Ottoman governors of Egypt (Stefanini 1921), Stefanini warned Italian politicians against the risks of pan-Islamism and called for the protection of Italy's centuries-old interests in the eastern Mediterranean.[19] It is precisely from this point of view that one can read the blossoming of documentation on Venice's centuries-old presence in the Balkan peninsula, the Dodecanese islands and Cyprus, which were thus claimed to be "long-standing Italian" (Baldacci 1917; Magnante 1925, 1929; Silva 1927; Giorgi De Pons 1929; Bertonelli 1930). The erudite study *I viaggiatori veneti minori: studio bio-bibliografico* (funded by the Società Geografica Italiana, with a dedication to the Count of Misurata, Giuseppe Volpi, Donazzolo 1929) introduced over 400 little-known Venetian travellers, many of them to the East, presenting them as evidence of the legitimacy of contemporary Italian political stances. Historian Raffaele Ciasca (1888–1975), later to become president of the Istituto per l'Oriente in the 1950s and 1960s, even went so far as to write about the "storia coloniale italiana medioevale e moderna" (Ciasca 1937, 169).

With Benito Mussolini's rise to power, the strategy in the East developed hand in hand with the new foreign policy (Hughes 1953), which saw Italy exploit tensions between other countries (especially between the United King-

[17] The Commissione per lo studio delle questioni islamiche d'interesse coloniale was set up in 1914. It included scholars and orientalists Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872–1938), in 1921 among the founders of the Istituto per l'Oriente in Rome and its periodical, *Oriente Moderno*, and David Santillana (1855–1931), an Italianized Tunisian Jew, appointed professor of Muslim law at the University of Rome in 1913 (Cianferotti 1984; Strika 1984; Gabrieli 1993; Soravia 2005).

[18] "Turkey's equivocal attitude, determined from the first days of the war [...] culminated when, perhaps at the suggestion of Germany, it abolished the Capitulations. The measure directly affected Italy's interests in the East."

[19] In the early years of the twentieth century, Enrico Insabato (1878–1963), historian of Islam in Egypt, advocated the utility of "pro-Islamic politics" (Baldinetti 1997). The periodical *Avvenire Arabo*, edited by Nallino, was created to this end and to directly meet the needs of Fascist propaganda towards Arab countries (Nallino 1932).

dom and its colonies) by unscrupulously inserting itself among the chessboard of alliances in the Mediterranean area and beyond (Collotti 2000; Quartararo 2001; Arielli 2010).

The acceleration of Italian penetration into China at the beginning of the Fascist era is evidenced by the opening of the Italian Bank for China in 1924 and the foundation of the first "*fascio*" in China in 1926, a year before Galeazzo Ciano's arrival. In his role as ambassador to China, Ciano worked to make the Chinese know and appreciate Fascism, using tools such as the Italo-Chinese League, created in 1932 (and later absorbed by IsMEO), and insisting on the creation of a Fascist corporate law course at Shanghai University (Moccia 2014, 114–15; Lasagni 2019). In the meantime, the circulation of Chinese-themed works grew exponentially (De Giorgi 2010).

Regarding India, the converging exaltation of the figures of Gandhi[20] and Mazzini, which had already begun in the liberal era (De Donno 2008), was joined by a certain fascination with characters such as B. S. Moonje and Subhas Chandra Bose (De Felice 1988; Casolari 2020),[21] an interest in Buddhism (Formichi 1923) and the presentation of the Italian Risorgimento, in continuity with Fascism, as an anti-imperialist phenomenon of emancipation, to which colonial subjects could look for inspiration (Borsa 1942; Formichi and De Carlo 1942).[22] Between December 1928 and January 1929, the Italian Naval League organized a three-month cruise in India and Ceylon. Members of Italian high society, including businessmen, politicians and Edda Mussolini, the Duce's daughter, took part in the trip (Casolari 2020, 33).

Once again, museums and temporary exhibitions provide us with a good indicator of how the construction of the "myth of the pioneers" (Della Valle 1931) accelerated under Fascism: travellers, geographers, explorers, but also inventors and scientists were co-opted as (proto-)Italian "champions" for legitimization purposes by the regime's propaganda machine (Canadelli, Beretta and Ronzon 2019; Carli 2021). The Fascist regime manipulated aspects of Italy's cultural and

[20] Gentile wrote the preface to the Italian translation of Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, published by Treves in 1931.

[21] Contacts with Subhas Chandra Bose were a fundamental moment in the strategy of Fascist Indian politics. Chandra Bose, politician and central figure in India's struggle for independence, who was head of a pro-Japanese government (the Azad Hind government) allied to the Axis during the Second World War, sought the support of Mussolini and Hitler to free India from British rule. Bose visited Italy and met Mussolini and Tucci, with whom he collaborated on cultural initiatives, as well as acting as spokesman for the Italian cause in Ethiopia. Here it is worth highlighting the role of IsMEO, which published the translation of his book, *La lotta dell'India (1920–1934)*, that had appeared in English in 1935. The Italian edition of 1942 was enriched by an appendix in which the author summarized the events from 1934 to 1942.

[22] An important event in this context was the visit to Italy in 1925 and 1926 of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, who was received with full honours by Mussolini and held in high esteem by Fascism, until Tagore made clear his aversion to the regime (Kundu 2015).

scientific heritage from all periods (Lazzaro and Crum 2004), striving to create the ultimate visual hegemony, by fusing elements of the past and the present.

The first Esposizione Nazionale di Storia della Scienza, held in Florence in 1929 with over 9,000 scientific exhibits from some 80 cities and over 200 private and public lenders, brought the issue of safeguarding the national historical scientific heritage to the attention of the general public, while emphasizing the central role played by science in constructing Italian cultural identity (Barreca 2016). One of the focal points of the exhibition, portrayed on many postcards and pictures, were the globes of Venetian Vincenzo Maria Coronelli (1650–1718), the most renowned geographer and cosmographer of his time (Bonelli 1960). At the Mostra dell'Aeronautica (*Esposizione dell'aeronautica italiana* 1934) in Milan in 1934, the "hall of pioneers" housed objects and writings by Leonardo da Vinci, Father Francesco Terzi Lana, Tiberio Cavallo, Fausto Veranzio and Don Paolo Andreani. The same year, at the Exposition du Sahara at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, the Italian pavilion hosted Genoese explorer Antonio Malfante's 1447 map of the Moroccan Sahara and Medici adjutant Benedetto Dei's 1470 map of Timbuktu (*Le Sahara Italien* 1934). Again, in Paris in 1937, Galileo's telescope was displayed in the Italian section of the exposition "Arts et techniques dans la vie moderne" (Campagne, Gauthier, and Zahar 1937). An entire exhibition dedicated to Italian genius and inventions (with particular reference to Leonardo da Vinci, Beretta, Giorgione and Canadelli 2019) was held from 9 May to 1 October 1939 in Milan (*Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci e delle invenzioni italiane* 1939). The Leonardesque exhibition was reprised in 1940 in New York and in 1942 in Tokyo. In Japan, the purpose of the exhibition was to demonstrate that Leonardo borrowed elements from Asian cultural tradition (Takuwa 2019).

Lastly, the Mostra Triennale delle Terre d'Oltremare held in Naples in 1940 was a crucial event for Fascist propaganda (Arena 2011). The many pavilions and special exhibits included the Padiglione dell'Espansione Italiana in Oriente (designed by Giorgio Calza Bini)[23] and a pavilion dedicated to the maritime republics with a 1:1 scale reproduction of the Venetian galley allegedly commanded by Admiral Marco Querini during the Battle of Lepanto (*Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare* 1940). The Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente was asked to participate with

[23] The building was adorned with bas-reliefs by sculptor Luigi Scirocchi depicting the meeting between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, missionaries in the East and a Roman fleet sailing the Asian seas. The courtyard, featuring two Chinese and Japanese gardens, gave access to Marco Polo's tower. In the tower, panels depicted the diplomatic relations established between Rome and China from the second to fourth centuries and continued by displaying miniatures of Marco Polo's *Il Milione*; in the centre of the tower was a showcase displaying the oldest editions of the book. Inside, bas-reliefs depicted important milestones that had consolidated the relationship between the East and Italy, such as the foundation of the Collegio dei Cinesi, later renamed Università L'Orientale, and the nineteenth-century Italian explorations of Odoardo Beccari in India and Malaysia and General Paolo Crescenzo Martino Avitabile in Iran.

> una mostra che visibilmente documenti i rapporti dell'Italia con i paesi del Medio ed Estremo Oriente dai tempi di Roma ad oggi. […] Tale esposizione mostrerà come gli italiani siano stati i pionieri della penetrazione occidentale in Estremo Oriente, e illustrerà le tracce da essi ivi lasciate che sebbene quasi del tutto ignorate sono tanto frequenti ed importanti da rivendicare all'Italia un giusto primato.[24]

Among the many manuscripts on display, it seems fitting to mention that there was also a 1523 manuscript by Venetian traveller Alessandro Zorzi who travelled around the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Almagià 1936).

In the 1930s, important collections of oriental art and ethnography were made available to the public, such as the collection of Carlo Puini (1839–1924), a scholar of East Asia[25] who had taught Chinese language and literature in Florence. His personal collection of about 150 bronze Asian art objects was purchased by the Castello Sforzesco museum of art and archaeology in Milan in August 1926. In fact, in 1920 companies became established in Milan, such as the company of Enrico Bonomi, which specialized in importing objects for armchair Orientalists and collectors from the Far East since 1920. The museum purchased a series of Japanese objects from Bonomi to add to the ethnographic collection (Vitali 1926; Comune di Milano 1995). Opened in 1932, the Indian Missionary Museum of the Capuchins of Montughi in Florence was another step in the popularization of objects, stories and images from the Far East: the collections, originating from the mission stationed in Agra, India, and consisting of manuscripts, fabric samples, flora, fauna, clothing and jewellery, were put on display by the archaeologist and anthropologist Paolo Graziosi (1907–1988) (Il Museo Missionario Indiano dei Cappuccini di Montughi 1932).

At his death in 1932, tireless traveller Captain D'Albertis[26] donated the castle at Mongalletto and its collections to the city of Genoa. The castle (today known as the Museo delle Culture del Mondo) was his home.[27] He imaginatively en-

[24] "An exhibition that documents Italy's relations with the countries of the Middle and Far East from Roman times to the present day. […] This exhibition will show how the Italians were the pioneers of western penetration into the Far East, and will illustrate the traces they left there, which, although almost completely ignored, are so frequent and important as to claim Italy's rightful primacy." Fondazione Roma Sapienza (Biblioteca di Filosofia, Villa Mirafiori, Rome), Fondazione Giovanni Gentile (FGG), "Giovanni Gentile 1882-1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", "Attività dell'IsMEO. 1938".

[25] Puini's interest in Tibet could not fail to include the study of one of the "pioneers" of Italian exploration in the area: Ippolito Desideri (1715–1721), considered to be Europe's first Tibetologist (Puini 1904).

[26] On one of his most famous voyages, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America, he retraced Christopher Columbus's route using only the means of navigation available in the fifteenth century: the quadrant and the nautical astrolabe, which he reconstructed himself (D'Albertis 1893).

[27] Built between 1886 and 1892, the inauguration coincided with the celebrations for the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus (Tabet 1924).

riched it with exotic, neo-Gothic and Hispano-Moorish references, as well as the reconstruction of a nautical cabin, probably to signify the castle as a ship. Along with ethnographic and archaeological artefacts collected by D'Albertis on his travels, arranged with showcases, panoplies and hunting trophies in the style of a cabinet of curiosities, the museum housed model ships, instruments and nautical charts, a photographic archive and a library (Bush 2017).

One of the many scenarios reconstructed by the museum was the "Turkish Salon", where ornaments, jewellery, weapons, vases, sofas and lamps could be spotted under the heavy ceiling curtain, between hookahs and ostrich eggs (Orlandi 2009). In the catalogue, compiled by the captain himself, as highlighted by Orlandi (526), the objects are simply classified as "oriental" (e.g. "Vaso Orientale", "Pantofole Orientali", "Tavolino Orientale", "Lampadario Orientale").

The museum of the Società Geografica Italiana, located in Rome's Villa Celimontana since 1924, included an entire room dedicated to Matteo Ricci, alongside contemporary explorers such as Vittorio Bottego (particularly beloved by the Fascists) and Luigi Amedeo di Savoia (De Agostini 1958).

These collections, and others, along with the printing and circulation of new works and re-editions of works dedicated to travelling to the East, the production and dissemination of artwork, postcards and photographs, contributed to making "the Orient" "familiar" and "close". Now, after investigating the direction taken by Fascism in its relations with the East, demonstrating how the Orient was becoming ever closer and more familiar to Italian politicians and citizens, and outlining the progressive acceleration in the construction of the myth of the "pioneers", I will show how all these instances converged in the foundation of a central institute for Fascist cultural policy: IsMEO.

3. Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Tucci and the birth of IsMEO

With the birth of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, existing efforts were coordinated and consolidated. If attempts to inscribe "mythical" travellers in a tradition of Italianness had already been noted in the liberal era, with the advent of Fascism this operation was taken to a new level of organization.[28]

IsMEO came about from the collaboration of two figures: Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984), experienced explorer, historian of religions and Orientalist, who was interested in giving his missions an institutional framework and financial support (Nalesini 2011), and philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), the greatest ideologue of Fascism and author of the reformed system of public education. As we shall see, Gentile was interested in the more theoretical aspect of the conciliation between East and West, which Italy was to embody (Gnoli

[28] "La nostra azione ha proceduto per troppo tempo in modo parziale e senza coordinazione. Occorre stringere rapporti diretti sia personali sia con istituti in modo da preparare le file per un'azione più efficace in un prossimo futuro […]. L'Italia deve diventare il porto dell'Europa e per l'Asia". FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", undated typescript.

1994; see Albertina 1984 for an overview of Gentile's activities as an "organizer of culture").[29]

From the outset, the institute qualified as a body that was absolutely consistent with the regime, financed directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which the Duce took over as of 1932) and placed under the direct control of Mussolini, who appointed its advisors (Ferretti 1986; Di Giovanni 2012).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, also thanks to the spread of mountaineering as a sport[30] (with the "politicization of the mountains" and the instrumentalization of sport in general: Pastore 2003; Pastore 2004; Canella Giuntini 2009), a series of professional and amateur, scientific or unscientific Italian expeditions ventured to Asia in an attempt to explore its remotest regions, such as Tibet.[31] The best-known of these twentieth-century Italian explorers,[32]

[29] It is not the purpose of this paper to examine the lives and works of these two figures. For a reconstruction of their biographical and intellectual profiles, see Turi 1995; Crisanti 2020.

[30] Osvaldo Roero di Cortanze, who travelled extensively in Asia, published *Ricordi dei viaggi al Cashemir, piccolo e medio Tibet e Turkestan in varie escursioni fatte da Osvaldo Roero dei marchesi di Cortanze dall'anno 1853 al 1875* on his return. The volume, written in hope of "far nascere in alcuni dei nostri connazionali il desiderio di visitare quelle regioni" (1881, 133), opened with a dedication to Vittorio Emanuele II, "primo alpinista d'Italia". The first Italian expedition to Central Asia in the twentieth century was organized by Prince Scipione Borghese (1871–1927, famous for his victorious participation in the Peking-Paris raid in 1907) to Tien Shan in 1900. The expedition was prepared with the help of Vittorio Sella (1859–1943), alpinist, photographer and great connoisseur of the region, which he had visited on several occasions in 1889, 1890 and 1896. In 1913 the wool entrepreneur and amateur mountaineer Mario Piacenza (1884–1957) planned and financed an expedition to the Suru region (Kashmir Himalaya): he visited Ladakh together with Cesare Calciati (1885–1929), touching the twin peaks of Nun Kun and Z3, known in Italy as Cima Italia. Piacenza managed to meet the Grand Lama of the Hemis monastery and document on film the Set-Chu ceremony, held every twelve years in honour of Padmasambhava, the master who spread Buddhism in the Himalayas. The documentary material and studies on his mountaineering activities, as well as the collection of objects he brought back from his expedition to Ladakh are kept at the Museo della Montagna in Turin, which he directed from 1945 to 1957.

[31] In 1909, the Duke of the Abruzzi (1873–1933), accompanied by Sella, and doctor and explorer Filippo de Filippi (1869–1938), organized and directed a scientific mountaineering campaign in the K2 region. Nevertheless, in 1913–1914 de Filippi and geologist Giotto Dainelli (1878–1968) organized an expedition to Karakoram: the expedition benefited from funds from the Società Geografica Italiana (SGI, which still preserves many of the materials, including photographs, of the expedition today), the Istituto Veneto per le Scienze, le Arti e la Letteratura, and the Royal Geographical Society. Exploration expeditions of any kind were viewed favourably by Fascism. In 1929 the Duke of Spoleto (1900–1948), funded by the City of Milan and sponsored by the SGI and the Club Alpino Italiano, organized an expedition to the Karakoram together with geologist Ardito Desio (1897–2001). Florentine scholar Dainelli returned to Tibet in 1930 with an important expedition to the Siachen Glacier, reporting it in his diary which is still preserved in the SGI library. On this occasion, Dainelli was the first to follow the length of the Siachen to Rimu pass, giving it the name "Colle Italia" (De Filippi 1912, 1924; Calciati 1930; Dainelli 1924, 1932; Savoia Aosta and Desio 1936; Fiory Ceccopieri 1981; Surdich 2009).

[32] And one of the most closely followed by the British secret services during his missions (Bargiacchi 2009).

who—by his own admission—followed in the footsteps of famous explorers such as Matteo Ricci and Cassiano Beligatti (1708–1791, Capuchin missionary who travelled to Bengal, Tibet and Nepal), was Giuseppe Tucci (Tucci 1947, 65).

In 1931, after returning from a five-year-long trip to Asia, Tucci (who had been a member of the Accademia d'Italia since 1929) presented a report to Mussolini and the then minister of foreign affairs, Dino Grandi, to illustrate the results he had obtained and propose the creation of an institute to support large-scale scientific projects in the East:

> Tale istituto dovrebbe avere un carattere esteriore culturale sul tipo dell'istituto buddistico di Leningrado o della Società degli amici dell'Oriente di Parigi, o della società indiana di Berlino; ma di fatto dovrebbe svolgere un'opera più complessa che non fosse semplice scambio di cultura.[33]

Having just returned from India, Tucci was busy working on his *Indo-Tibetica* and disseminating the results of his mission, writing articles for the *Corriere della Sera*, *Le Vie d'Italia* and *L'Illustrazione Italiana*. In an article for the latter weekly, titled *La spedizione scientifica Tucci nell'India, Nepal e Tibet*, Tucci wrote that Italy had contributed like no other country to the knowledge of Tibet through the explorations of Osvaldo Roero di Cortanze, Filippo de Filippi, Giotto Dainelli, the Duke of the Abruzzi, and, of course, his own (Tucci 1931, see also Tucci 1936).

On 16 February 1933, IsMEO was officially established as a non-profit organization by Royal Decree number 142. The Fascist government decided to devote a great number of resources and energies to the project. The institute's aims included developing cultural and economic relations with the countries of central, eastern and southern Asia (Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente 1934, 3–4). In particular, it provided scholarships (with the undeclared aim of "indoctrinating" the young scholarship holders arriving in Italy from various parts of Asia), offered student and teacher exchange programmes, organized conferences and publications, and promoted language courses. IsMEO reflected these declared aims in its structure: while Gentile was president, the vice-presidency was shared between Tucci and the Count of Misurata, Giuseppe Volpi (1877–1947), former minister of finance in the 1920s, who represented the economic interests behind the foundation of the institute.

A few years later, during a speech at the inauguration of the Comitato Lombardo per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Gentile recalled the institute's beginnings, saying that IsMEO:

[33] "Such an institute should have a cultural character along the lines of the Buddhist Institute in Leningrad or the Society of Friends of the Orient in Paris, or the Indian Society in Berlin; but it should perform a more complex task than the simple exchange of culture." FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882-1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", "Relazione presentata da G. Tucci al capo del governo B. Mussolini, Rome, March 1931".

> incontrò subito le simpatie degli uomini di cultura e insieme degli uomini della finanza, dell'industria e del commercio. Talché si ebbe presto la certezza che la nuova istituzione rispondeva ad un bisogno reale del paese, e non era una di quelle invenzioni fittizie (Gentile 1937, 5).[34]

At the time of the institute's first meeting on 21 December 1933, Tucci had returned to Tibet and then Nepal,[35] and was therefore unable to attend. The opening speeches were delivered by Gentile and Filippo de Filippi, who gave a lecture entitled *I viaggiatori italiani in Asia* completely centred on the concept of the continuity of Italians' presence in the East, from Marco Polo to the Duke of Abruzzi, whom IsMEO was now sponsoring (De Filippi 1934).[36]

The following day, on 22 December 1933, Mussolini gave his famous "Oriente e Occidente" speech in front of an audience of Asian students during the Roman Week of Oriental Students:

> Ricordo che qualcuno disse, e che molti dopo di lui, ripeterono: 'East and West will never meet'. Questa affermazione è smentita dalla storia. Venti secoli or sono Roma realizzò sulle rive del Mediterraneo una unione dell'occidente con l'oriente che ha avuto il massimo peso nella storia del mondo. E se allora l'occidente fu colonizzato da Roma, con la Siria, l'Egitto, la Persia, il rapporto fu invece di reciproca comprensione creativa. Questa unione fu il motivo fondamentale di tutta la nostra storia. Da essa sorse la civiltà europea. Questa deve oggi ritornare universale, se non vuole perire. L'unità della civiltà mediterranea, che era oriente ed occidente, creata da Roma, è durata per molti secoli. Poi i traffici, deviati verso altri mari, l'afflusso dell'oro, lo sfruttamento di ricche regioni lontane furono la condizione di nascita di una nuova civiltà a carattere particolaristico e materialistico, civiltà che fu situata fuori del Mediterraneo. Da allora i rapporti

[34] "It immediately found favour with men of culture as well as men of finance, industry and commerce. It soon became clear that the new institution responded to a real need in the country and was not one of those fictitious inventions."

[35] It is perhaps no coincidence that the 1933 expedition to western Tibet promoted by the Reale Accademia d'Italia (Tucci and Ghersi 1934), the first carried out by Tucci after the founding of IsMEO, was filmed by Istituto Luce cameramen, giving it undoubtedly greater notoriety and publicity (Argentieri 1979). A documentary called *Nel Tibet occidentale* (D048406) was produced by the Istituto Nazionale Luce using footage shot by Captain Eugenio Ghersi (1904–1997) during the five-month expedition from June to October 1933 (Nalesini 2008; Ghersi 2016). In addition to this documentary, intended for cinema release, the Istituto Nazionale Luce also made newsreels, two of which are still preserved (*L'esplorazione del Tibet. Interessanti visioni della spedizione scientifica dell'accademico Tucci* (1934), B040506 and *Tibet. La spedizione dell'accademico Tucci nel Tibet. Suggestive visioni di paesaggi e di costumi* (1934), B040606). The 1933 expedition was the first in which Tucci used film alongside photographs. Indeed, from then on, until his last expedition to western Nepal in 1954, Tucci wanted to document all of his journeys with film footage so as to facilitate the dissemination of the results obtained. Pietro Francesco Mele's *Tibet Forbidden*, based on Tucci's 1948 expedition, won the prize for best short film at the Venice Biennale in 1949.

[36] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882-1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", "Alla seduta inaugurale".

> dell'occidente con l'oriente divennero esclusivamente di subordinazione e si limitarono ai semplici rapporti materiali. Cessò ogni vincolo spirituale di collaborazione creativa. Si formò e si diffuse l'opinione di un'Asia nemica dell'Europa, mentre, in realtà, si trattava di una particolare mentalità formatasi in certi Paesi di Europa, che era incapace o indifferente a comprendere l'Asia. Per essa l'Asia era solo un mercato di manufatti, una fonte di materie prime. Questa civiltà a base di capitalismo e liberalismo nei secoli scorsi ha investito tutto il mondo. [...] Oggi Roma e il Mediterraneo, con la rinascita fascista, rinascita soprattutto spirituale, si volgono a riprendere la loro funzione unificatrice. È perciò che la nuova Italia - questa Italia - vi ha qui convocati. Come già altre volte, in periodo di crisi mortali, la civiltà del mondo fu salvata dalla collaborazione di Roma e dell'oriente, così oggi, nella crisi di tutto un sistema di istituzioni e di idee che non hanno più anima e vivono come imbalsamate, noi, italiani e fascisti di questo tempo, ci auguriamo di riprendere la comune, millenaria tradizione della nostra collaborazione costruttiva (Mussolini 1933, 127–28).[37]

In his speech, Mussolini addressed some central themes in Fascist propaganda: from the "return of Rome" (Munzi 2001) to its ancient Mediterranean provinces, to the "*civilizing* mission" of *"romanità"* (Visser 1992; Gentile 1997), and the discrediting of the other European colonial powers (France, but especially Great Britain).[38] More innovative, however, was the attempt to present Italy as a

[37] "I remember someone saying, and many after him repeated: 'East and West will never meet'. This statement is refuted by history. Twenty centuries ago on the shores of the Mediterranean Rome brought about a union of the West with the East that has had the greatest impact on the history of the world. And while the West was then colonized by Rome, with Syria, Egypt and Persia, the relationship was one of mutual creative understanding. This union was the fundamental motive of our entire history. From it arose European civilization. Today, it must become universal again if it is not to perish. The unity of the Mediterranean civilization, which was East and West, created by Rome, lasted for many centuries. Then the traffic, diverted to other seas, the influx of gold, the exploitation of rich distant regions gave the conditions for the birth of a new civilization with a particularistic and materialistic character, a civilization that was located outside the Mediterranean. From then on, the relationship between the West and the East became one of subordination and was limited to simple material relations. All spiritual ties of creative collaboration ceased to exist. The opinion of Asia as the enemy of Europe was formed and spread, when in fact it was a matter of a particular mentality formed in certain countries of Europe, which was incapable of or indifferent to understanding Asia. For them, Asia was only a market for manufactured goods, a source of raw materials. This civilization based on capitalism and liberalism has affected the whole world over the past centuries. [...] Today, Rome and the Mediterranean, with the Fascist rebirth, which is above all a spiritual rebirth, are resuming their unifying function. It is for this reason that the new Italy—this Italy—has summoned you here. Just as at other times, in times of mortal crisis, the civilization of the world was saved by the collaboration of Rome and the East, so today, in the crisis of an entire system of institutions and ideas that no longer have a soul and live as if embalmed, we, Italians and Fascists of this time, hope to resume the common, age-old tradition of our constructive collaboration."

[38] On a cultural level, the competition was geared towards letting competitors in the East know that "Italians" had already been present in the region for a long time: in 1932 an English translation of the manuscript by Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri, *An Account of Tibet*,

place of synthesis between West and East, a concept very dear to Gentile.[39] While traces of ancient Rome could still be seen in the East (Tucci 1940), it was important to focus on the present. In *L'Italia e l'Oriente*, Gentile pointed out the similarities between Italian Fascism and "oriental philosophy" as both represented the struggle of "nations with a soul" against nations without one, recognizing Indians and Italians as brotherly peoples owing to their shared lack of materialism.

On 18 March 1934, Mussolini returned to the subject, clarifying that Italy's historical objectives were Asia and Africa, and hoping that the nature of Italy's peaceful intentions would not be misunderstood:

> Non si tratta di conquiste territoriali, e questo sia inteso da tutti vicini e lontani, ma di una espansione naturale, che deve condurre alla collaborazione fra l'Italia e le genti dell'Africa, fra l'Italia e le Nazioni dell'Oriente immediato e mediato. […] L'Italia può fare questo; il suo posto nel Mediterraneo, mare che sta riprendendo la sua funzione storica di collegamento fra l'Oriente e l'Occidente, le dà questo diritto e le impone questo dovere; non intendiamo rivendicare monopoli o privilegi, ma chiediamo e vogliamo ottenere che gli arrivati, i soddisfatti, i conservatori non si industrino a bloccare da ogni parte l'espansione spirituale, politica, economica dell'Italia fascista (V.V. 1934).[40]

In order to proceed with the dissemination of these ideas of closeness between Italy and the East, in 1934 IsMEO inaugurated the *Letture orientali* series at Gentile's Sansoni publishing house. Publication of the institute's *Bolletino* began in 1935, the following year becoming the bi-monthly *Asiatica*, published until 1943 (from 1950 to 2009 it was published as *East and West*). IsMEO's activities branched out further when it moved to the prestigious Palazzo Brancaccio in 1936, where a library was opened and a first nucleus of oriental art objects

was published by Filippo de Filippi (De Filippi 1932). On a political level, an informant of the regime reported that in March 1940 he had heard Tucci discussing disruptive actions against the British: "S.E. Tucci, in via confidenziale, raccontava che il Duce, per scopi di alta politica, avrebbe desiderato rendere noie e preoccupazioni all'Inghilterra provocando agitazioni e movimenti separatisti nelle Indie inglesi, sperando – d'accordo con Gandhi ed altri agitatori nazionalisti indiani, o di altre caste, di poter aggravare i rapporti fra le Indie e l'Inghilterra". Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale di pubblica sicurezza, Divisione polizia politica (1927–1944), fascicoli personali: "Tucci, Giuseppe", busta 1382, "Roma, 8 marzo 1940".

[39] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882-1945", s.2 "Manoscritti gentiliani (1891–1944)," Discorso 143: "Discorso in Campidoglio per l'inaugurazione dell'Istituto per il Medio e Estremo Oriente (21 dicembre 1933)".

[40] "It is not a matter of territorial conquests, and this is understood by all those near and far, but of a natural expansion, which must lead to collaboration between Italy and the peoples of Africa, between Italy and the nations of the immediate and mediated East. […] Italy can do this; its place in the Mediterranean, a sea which is resuming its historical function of linking the East and the West, gives it this right and imposes this duty on it; we do not intend to claim monopolies or privileges, but we do ask and want the arrivistes, the self-satisfied and the conservatives not to take it upon themselves to block the spiritual, political and economic expansion of Fascist Italy from all sides."

began to come together (often as a result of ambassadorial gifts; a collection of oriental manuscripts was also gifted to the institute by Tucci).[41]

Moreover, as of 1936, IsMEO, whose board members counted Istituto Luce president, Giacomo Paulucci di Calboli (1887–1961) (1939, 1942), regularly sent news bulletins on cultural, political and economic topics related to the East to the EIAR (Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche) radio broadcasting body.

In the meantime, the war in Ethiopia alienated Italy from the sympathies of many Indian nationalists (Procacci 1984) and so the regime's (and therefore the institute's) attention increasingly shifted to the Far East and Japan (Ferretti 1995).[42] Consequently, in 1935 Italy entered economic relations with the Manchukuo and political-military relations with Chiang Kai-shek's China (Gentile 1935).[43] Figures such as Harukichi Shimoi (1883–1954), a Japanese language teacher at the Orientale in Naples, an "*ardito*" during the First World War, then a "*legionario*" in Fiume, acted as a "mediator of Fascism" in Japan, convincing Japanese politics to support Italy during the invasion of Ethiopia and contributing to the political rapprochement between Fascist Italy and imperial Japan (Majoni 1937, Hofmann 2015).

The acquisition of Ethiopia, a territory sometimes deemed "oriental",[44] was a widely celebrated event:[45]

[41] The institute's museum, which included Giuseppe Tucci's collections from Nepal and Tibet put together since 1928, opened to the public in 1958. In 2016 its collections were moved into the new Museo delle Civiltà (MUCIV), the collections (over 40,000 pieces) being transferred to the new EUR premises together with those of the former Museo Coloniale. All of this followed what had already happened at the institutional level: the Istituto Italo Africano (IIA, founded in 1906) and IsMEO merged in 1995 into a new institute called IsIAO (Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente), also dissolved in 2012. The library of the former IsMEO, and then IsIAO, is now rehoused in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Rome (Falcucci 2021).

[42] The progressive approach to Japan is well documented in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs files, Archivio Storico Diplomatico Ministero Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), "Affari politici (1931–1945)", "Giappone", b. 9, f. "Propaganda culturale". The documentation proves the initiative taken by the Japanese, with diplomat Sigimura getting in touch with Gentile. See also FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", "Problemi giapponesi". Gentile would argue that IsMEO brought Italian politics closer to Japan, and not the other way around, Ferretti 1986.

[43] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s.5 "Attività Scientifica e Culturale", ss.4 "IsMEO", sss.2 "Attività", u.7 "Attività didattica e scientifica", "Ideali della Cina moderna".

[44] A trip to Italian East Africa was the prize for a competition for young university students held at IsMEO in 1940. FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882-1945", s. 5, "Attività scientifica e culturale [post 1910-1940]", ss. 4. "Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente [settembre 1932-ottobre 1942]", sss. 2 "Attività [settembre 1932-ottobre 1942]", u. 5, "Pro-Memoria".

[45] The Museo Etnologico Missionario inside the Convento di San Francesco in Fiesole, founded by Friar Ambrogio Ridolfi (1875–1966), contains objects from Egypt and China, brought to the monastery by missionaries who collected them with the help of Egyptologists such as Ernesto Schiaparelli (1856–1928). One year after the proclamation of the empire, on 9 May 1937, the monks of the Florentine monastery requested to install a plaque on the wall of the monastery commemorating the presence of two monks in Ethiopia (Alberto da Sarteano and Tommaso Bellacci) as early as the fifteenth century, in the attempt to establish a logical continuity between this medieval event and the Italian conquest of Ethiopia.

> Mentre sul finire del XV secolo Cristoforo Colombo e Amerigo Vespucci, che diede il suo nome al nuovo continente, lo scoprirono per gli interessi stranieri, i pionieri italiani del XIX secolo hanno dischiuso per la loro patria la parte etiopica dell'Africa (Reck 1940, 137).[46]

The historical justification for the aggression against the country of the Negus was even traced by some to Andrea Corsali (1487), who was in Ethiopia in 1517 on the instructions of Lorenzo de' Medici (Guida 1941).

In the years immediately following the proclamation of the empire, many intellectuals strove to direct Italian ambitions towards the Orient (Masi 1936; Nava 1937; Zanon 1938), while dispelling the myth that Italians had never dealt with the Far East:

> Un'altra leggenda, intanto, deve essere sfatata, e cioè che gli italiani non si siano mai occupati dell'Estremo Oriente. La rievocazione di alcune, fra le grandi figure di missionari, di pionieri, di artefici, noti ed ignoti, che hanno aperto all'Occidente le vie dell'Oriente, serve a dimostrare come la coscienza italica sia sempre stata vigile e desta al senso di queste realtà che oggi il mondo è chiamato a vivere. Da Marco Polo a Benito Mussolini, la valutazione dei problemi determinati dal contrasto fra le caratteristiche delle due civiltà, l'orientale e l'occidentale, acquista una sempre maggiore aderenza a queste realtà che troppi hanno voluto ignorare […] Le orme d'Italia nell'Estremo Oriente sono tracciate profondamente ed esprimono la comprensione, l'eroismo, il sacrificio; sono esse che segnano l'itinerario che la civiltà dovrà percorrere per il raggiungimento delle mete che si elevano oltre le nebbie delle rivalità mercantili ed oltre il pantano delle illusioni dei cultori dello status quo ad ogni costo (Catalano 1937, 6, 26).[47]

In his book, Catalano contextualized well-known explorers, such as Colombo and Magellano, with more obscure ones like Fra Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (1182–1252), Giovanni da Empoli (1483–1518), Matteo Ricci, Niccolò Longobardi (1565–1654), Caterino Zeno (1450), Gerolamo de Angelis (1567–1623), Antonio Pigafetta (1480–1531) and Alessandro Malaspina (1567–1623), affirming their Italianness and positioning them in a continuity culminating in the Fascist empire.

[46] "While at the end of the fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci, who gave his name to the new continent, discovered it for foreign interests, the Italian pioneers of the nineteenth century opened up the Ethiopian part of Africa for their homeland."

[47] "In the meantime, another legend must be clarified, namely that Italians have never been concerned with the Far East. Remembering some of the great missionaries, pioneers, and known and unknown creators who opened the roads leading East up to the West serves to demonstrate how the Italian conscience has always been alert and awake to the sense of these realities that the world is called upon to experience today. From Marco Polo to Benito Mussolini, the evaluation of the problems caused by the contrast between the two civilizations of East and West is increasingly in tune with these realities that too many have wanted to ignore […]. Italy's footsteps in the Far East tread deeply and express understanding, heroism and sacrifice; they mark the route that civilization will have to follow to reach the goals that rise above the mists of mercantile rivalry and beyond the quagmire of illusions of lovers of the status quo at all costs."

At the inauguration of the Comitato Lombardo per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente on 14 February 1937, Gentile highlighted Italy's proximity to Japan and their spiritual sympathy as two "nazioni vive, dialettiche entrambe". For Gentile, Shintoism and Fascism were both opposed to Americanization and atheistic Bolshevism. He defined Japan as "laborioso, instancabile, tenace, forte della sua fede e della coscienza del suo grande avvenire […] naturale alleato dell'Italia" (Gentile 1937).[48] In 1939, Japan and Italy formalized their already well-established collaboration with a cultural agreement.[49] In the 1941 editorial in *Asiatica*, *Saluto al Giappone*, Japan was described as

> una grande nazione che in meno d'un secolo si è svegliata, alzata in piedi e messa in cammino per creare una nuova storia. Ancora una volta "ex Oriente lux": e dagli estremi confini del più vecchio mondo una nuova umanità avanza. Sulla sua bandiera è scritto: nuova Asia. E vuol essere un'Asia che, senza rinunziare al suo passato altamente umano e vitale, si assimili alle conquiste spirituali dell'Europa.[50]

[48] After Buddhism, Shinto also aroused the interest of Fascism; this was mirrored in the lectures given at IsMEO by Yotaro Sigimura (1884–1939), Japanese ambassador in Rome, and the publication of his book *L'Evoluzione del Giappone* in the *Letture orientali* series in 1936. In the spring of 1937, just a few months before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Tucci gave a speech in the presence of Baron Okura, president of the Japanese Friends of Italy association at the Italian-Japanese Institute (Giornale Luce B/B1079 *L'istituto italo-nipponico*, 21/04/1937). The IsMEO-based Amici del Giappone association, with Paulucci de Calboli as its president (and Tucci as its vice-president, something that would later be used as an indictment in the Tucci purge trial; Crisanti 2020, 360), was born in 1941 (De Calboli 1940). ASDMAE, Affari politici 1931–1945, Giappone, b. 23, fasc. "Rapporti culturali", Telespresso n. 901312/103 da Ministero della Cultura Popolare a Ministero Affari Esteri, 3 February. There was also a Venetian section of the association, which hinged around Ca' Foscari (Donadon 2019). On 6 November 1937, Italy acceded to the Anti-Comintern Pact signed by Germany and Japan the year before, which formed the first embryo of the Tripartite Pact that would be formalized on 27 September 1940. Cultural initiatives continued: in 1937 Karl Haushofer (1869–1946), German general and geographer, gave a lecture at IsMEO entitled "Parallelismo nello sviluppo dell'Italia, della Germania e del Giappone" (Haushofer 1937), the travelling Fascist Exhibition was set up in Japan in the same year, and in spring 1940 two Italian cultural institutes were inaugurated in Tokyo and Kyoto. The association's journal, *Yamato*, was published in 1941–1943. Edited by Pietro Silvio Rivetta (1886–1952), professor at the Orientale University in Naples, it had an editorial board formed by Tucci and ambassador Giacinto Auriti (1923–2006), who wrote most of the articles.

[49] "Tucci elogia molto le capacità e doti dell'Ambasciatore giapponese a Roma mi dice che l'Accademia ed egli, nella qualità di vice presidente, ha accettato di buon grado le pressioni che gli venivano fatte dall'ambiente dell'Ambasciata di ospitare in Italia, per un ciclo di conferenze nelle Università uno dei maggiori giuristi del Giappone celebre professore di Diritto Commerciale al suo paese in cambio egli invierebbe in Giappone un nostro scienziato per un ciclo di conferenze; […] egli secondo diceva iersera, avrebbe intenzione di proporre S.E. Fermi […] o un cultore di biologia studi che interessano enormemente il Giappone e che hanno profondi cultori da noi per es. il Prof. Pende." ACS, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale di pubblica sicurezza, Divisione polizia politica (1927–1944), fascicoli personali: "Tucci, Giuseppe", busta 1382, "memoriale riservato, 8 dicembre 1935".

[50] "A great nation that in less than a century has woken up, stood up and set out to create a new history. Once again 'ex Oriente lux': from the far reaches of the oldest world a new humanity is advancing. On its flag is written: new Asia. And it wants to be an Asia that, without re-

The idea of a close relationship between the two countries was once again reaffirmed by looking back at the past: the exhibition organized in 1942 at the Farnesina, with memorabilia relating to the printing of Latin and Italian works by missionaries in Japan in the 1600s and recollections of Japanese embassies to Rome in 1598 and 1613 (Tucci 1940), was intended to strengthen the historical ties between the two countries, highlighting their long duration, and legitimize Italian ambitions in the East, by once again identifying "pioneers" (Sarti 2015).

During the 1940s, publications dedicated to Italian pioneers, from the most erudite to those aimed at the general public, continued unabated: *Relazioni della Toscana Granducale con la Reggenza di Tunisi (1818–1823)* (Riggio 1940); *Marco Polo* (Dainelli 1941, published in the *I grandi italiani* series, a popular collection of biographies supervised by Luigi Federzoni for UTET); *Arabia Felix e Itala Gens* (Sertoli Salis 1942); and *L'Africa di Livio Sanuto, geografo veneto del '500* (Lefevre 1942) are just some examples.

In those years, partly due to competition from the Nazi Reich, whose leadership was at least in part interested in Tibet,[51] Tucci vigorously reaffirmed the primacy of Italian explorers in the region he loved above all others (De Rossi Filibeck 2008). In a speech at the University of Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, at the time part of the Kingdom of Hungary), he strongly emphasized that despite not reaching the actual city of Lhasa, Odorico da Pordenone (1280–1331), a Franciscan friar and missionary explorer who travelled through India and China (where he spent three years in Beijing), was the first European to ever report its existence (Tucci 1942a).

Almost obsessive references to Italian achievements can also be found in *Indo-Tibetica IV*, published by the Reale Accademia d'Italia in 1941:

> Che del resto l'Italia si occupi di Tibet è naturale perché furono proprio gli italiani che per primi fecero conoscere all'Europa l'anima di questo popolo così devoto agli ideali religiosi (Tucci 1941, 2).[52]

nouncing its highly human and vital past, assimilates itself to the spiritual achievements of Europe." Ideas also reiterated in Gentile (1942).

[51] A German expedition to Tibet was carried out from April 1938 to August 1939 under the auspices of the SS Ahnenerbe (SS Ancestral Heritage Society), and led by German zoologist and SS officer Ernst Schäfer (1910–1992). The expedition was the subject of the documentary *Geheimnis Tibet* or *Lhasa-Lo. Die verbotene Stadt* (1943) directed by Ernst Schäfer and Hans-Albert Lettow. The objective of the expedition, which enjoyed Himmler's support, was the racial categorization of the indigenous peoples of inner Asia. During the research trip, Bruno Beger (1911–2009), racial anthropologist who worked for the Ahnenerbe, carried out numerous anthropometric measurements of the indigenous population, trying to find "skeletal remains of earlier Nordic immigrants" and "the Nordic race among the population" (Engelhardt 2004; Neuhaus 2012, 106–7). Schäfer and his team brought with them from Tibet around 2,000 ethnological objects, 20,000 black-and-white photographs, 2,000 colour photographs and 16,000 metres of black-and-white film footage (on the Nazi-Tibet connection in popular culture, see Engelhardt 2008).

[52] "It is only natural that Italy should be concerned with Tibet, because it was the Italians who first introduced Europe to the soul of this people so devoted to religious ideals."

It was a view that Tucci had already vehemently expressed:

> è una verità all'estero troppo spesso dimenticata che gli italiani furono i primi a riaprire le vie dell'Oriente appena le tenebre dell'alto medioevo cominciarono a diradarsi […], ragioni pratiche di mercantare e irrequieto spirito di avventura subito dopo la pavida attesa del Mille, guidarono viaggiatori audaci per le strade medesime sulle quali Roma s'era protesa […]. Su tutte le opere e relazioni italiane e straniere primeggia per sicurezza e profondità di giudizio quella di Desideri [al quale dobbiamo] il primo sorgere degli studi tibetani (Tucci 1938, 435, 444).[53]

Tucci also emphasized the figure of the missionary Orazio della Penna (1680–1745) as the last "foreigner" in Tibet for centuries, and author of the first Tibetan dictionary, before the return of "Italia nuova" (Tucci 1938, 446).

At the time of the Armistice of Cassibile, the activities of IsMEO, by then with branch offices in Milan, Genoa, Turin, Venice, Trieste and Bari offering courses on oriental languages and cultures, were largely interrupted.[54] However, despite the uncertain conditions in Italy in 1943, Tucci wrote to Gentile about the institute: "L'IsMEO non cadrà […]. L'Italia non deve rinunciare all'Oriente se vuole vivere".[55] Just one year later, Gentile had been killed by Florentine partisans and Tucci put under scrutiny by the purge commission (his trial is accurately described in Crisanti 2020). IsMEO had fallen, but only temporarily.

4. "Un popolo di navigatori, di trasmigratori": the post-war period and the survival of the myth of travellers to the East

Tucci's removal from all institutional positions was short-lived, and as early as 1946 he was reinstated to the chair of Religions and Philosophy of India and the Far East in Rome, which he held until his retirement in 1969 (Crisanti 2020, 397). In 1947 Tucci also became president of IsMEO, a position he held until 1978 (becoming honorary president in 1979). Gentile, on the other hand, was effectively removed from the institute's official history.[56]

[53] "It is too often forgotten abroad that the Italians were the first to reopen the roads to the East as soon as the darkness of the early Middle Ages began to fade […], practical reasons of mercantile advantage and a restless spirit of adventure immediately after the fearful expectation of the Thousand guided bold travellers along the same roads on which Rome had expanded […]. Of all the Italian and foreign works and reports, the one by Desideri [to whom we owe] the first emergence of Tibetan studies, stands out for its certainty and depth of judgement."

[54] See the correspondence between Gentile and the dean of Ca' Foscari, Alfonso de Pietri-Tonelli, on the establishment of IsMEO branches: Ca' Foscari Fondo Storico (Venezia) - Serie Rettorato, "Scatole lignee" (1912–1966), b. 30, f. 3, "Corsi per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO) (1942–1944)", 308107–308475.

[55] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s.1 "Corrispondenza", ss.2 "Lettere inviate a Gentile (1882–1944), u.5742 "Tucci Giuseppe (9 agosto 1919 – 7 aprile 1944)", 17 August 1943.

[56] For instance, see the three-volume work dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the institute, from which Gentile is totally absent. The death of Tucci, who passed away shortly before the release of the volumes (published in 1985–1988), resulted in an even more extensive celebration of the explorer, beginning from the name *Orientalia Iosephi Tucci Memoriae Dicata.*

From 22 to 25 May 1950, the Convegno Nazionale su problemi orientali conference was held at Palazzo Brancaccio. The following were selected as discussion topics:

1) Le cause e i motivi comuni dei movimenti e delle mutazioni determinatesi o che si stanno determinando nei paesi del Medio ed Estremo Oriente
2) Possibilità di collaborazione economica tra paesi dell'Asia e l'Italia fondata sulla complementarità attuale o potenziale di risorse interessi e scopi.[57]

IsMEO's work resumed, starting with a project that had remained unimplemented due to the war, namely the *Il Nuovo Ramusio* editorial collection. Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485–1557) had been a diplomat and geographer of the Republic of Venice and is believed to be the author of one of the first geographical treatises of the modern age, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*. The treatise, published in three volumes between 1550 and 1559, collected more than 50 memoirs of journeys and explorations from classical antiquity to the sixteenth century, from Marco Polo to Vespucci and the great African explorations. With the reference to the Venetian geographer and the tradition of the Republic of Venice in its new publishing series, IsMEO intended to publish accounts of the eastern travels of "great Italians" (Beonio-Brocchieri 1957).[58]

Tucci and Gentile believed that Ramusio's work had been left for so long without any continuators, that "gli italiani a tal punto dimenticarono di averne per primi aperte le vie dell'Oriente".[59] The *Nuovo Ramusio* project was conceived in 1941.[60] It was to be chaired by Gentile, and the steering committee was to have

[57] "1) The common causes and reasons for the movements and changes that have or are taking place in the countries of the Middle and Far East. 2) Possibilities of economic cooperation between Asian countries and Italy based on the current or potential complementarity of resources, interests and aims." ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Direzione Generale Affari Politici, Affari Generali 1926–1954, b.16, f. 13, "Convegno Nazionale su problemi orientali".

[58] A trend that can also be observed in the strictly colonial sphere: in the early 1940s, the Ufficio Studi of the Ministry of Italian Africa was working on a series entitled *Grandi Italiani d'Africa* (also referred to in the documentation as *Grandi Africani d'Italia*) published by Vallecchi: Archivio Storico Diplomatico Ministero Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), ex Ministero dell'Africa Italiana (MAI), "MAI vol. IV 1855–1962", ex Ufficio Studi MAI, b. 6, f. 16. "Collana I Grandi Italiani d'Africa". The following titles were published in the series: *Vita di Antonio Cecchi* (1940), *Le memorie di Carlo Piaggia* (1941), *Il diario eritreo di Ferdinando Martini* (1942), *Vita di Guglielmo Massaia* (2 vols. 1943–1944) and *L'uomo che donò un impero: vita ed opere di Pietro Savorgnan di Brazzà* (1944). Although already in the making, many other volumes, such as those on Miani, Matteucci or Gessi, were not published.

[59] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s. 5, "Attività scientifica e culturale [post 1910–1940]", ss. 4. "Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", sss. 2 "Attività [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", u. 6 "Pubblicazioni (settembre 1932–gennaio 1943)", "Il Nuovo Ramusio".

[60] FGG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s. 5, "Attività scientifica e culturale [post 1910–1940]", ss. 4. "Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", sss. 2 "Attività [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", u. 6 "Pubblicazioni (settembre 1932–gennaio 1943)", "Promemoria. Fondazione per la pubblicazione degli scritti dei viaggiatori italiani in Asia ed Africa", 21 October 1941.

included Tucci, Daineli, Pasquale d'Elia (1890–1963) and Ethiopianist Enrico Cerulli (1898–1988), earmarked to edit the never published volume *Documenti sui rapporti tra Italia ed Etiopia nel Rinascimento*.[61]

Publication of the *Nuovo Ramusio* actually began in 1950, under the scientific direction of Tucci, and continued until 1973. The first volume in the collection was the book that should have been published in 1942, *Liber peregrinationis di Jacopo da Verona* edited by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881–1954), which recounted the Augustinian monk's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the second half of 1335. In its introduction we once again find the idea of Italy as a bridge between East and West. The titles published in the series were: *I Missionari Italiani nel Tibet e nel Nepal* (seven volumes published between 1953–1956) edited by Luciano Petech (1914–2010), *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer (Costantinopoli 1436–1440)* (1956) edited by Umberto Dorini and Tommaso Bertelè, *Viaggi di C. Federici e G. Balbi alle Indie orientali* (1962) edited by Olga Pinto (1903–1970), *Le navigazioni atlantiche del veneziano Alvise da Mosto* (1966) edited by Tullia Gasparrini Leporace (1910–1969), *I viaggi di Pietro Della Valle: lettere dalla Persia* (1972) edited by Franco Gaeta (1926–1984) and *Viaggi in Persia degli ambasciatori veneti Barbaro e Contarini* (1973) edited by Raimondo Morozzo Della Rocca (1905–1980), Maria Francesca Tiepolo (1925–2020) and Laurence Lockhart. A project by Roberto Almagià (1884–1962), which was not brought to light, also envisaged a new edition of Ramusio's *Navigationi et Viaggi,* purged of all content dedicated to non-Italian travellers.[62]

Moreover, between 1942 and 1949 it was the same Pasquale d'Elia, interested in the history of missiology and relations between China and the West, who began to publish his three volumes of *Fonti Ricciane: documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579–1615)* with the Accademia d'Italia and later with the Accademia dei Lincei (Lincei Academy).

At the time of its conception, Tucci wrote about the new series:

> L'Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente e la Libreria dello Stato intraprendono oggi la pubblicazione integrale e scientifica delle opere dei più grandi viaggiatori italiani e dei documenti che portano luce sui rapporti che le nostre genti ebbero con l'Oriente, e la intitolano dal nome glorioso di Ramusio. Questa pubblicazione documenterà la parte avuta dall'Italia come tramite di cultura fra l'Oriente e l'Occidente e la importanza della sua missione unificatrice corrispondente nel campo ideale a quel suo protendersi nel mare come un ponte gettato a congiungere i continenti. Gli scritti dei nostri pionieri che dettero all'Europa notizia delle più remote civiltà, cercarono comprenderne i più segreti

[61] FGG, "Il Nuovo Ramusio".

[62] GG, "Giovanni Gentile 1882–1945", s. 5, "Attività scientifica e culturale [post 1910–1940]", ss. 4. "Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", sss. 2 "Attività [settembre 1932–ottobre 1942]", u. 6 "Pubblicazioni (settembre 1932–gennaio 1943)", "Promemoria sul progetto di una nuova edizione del Ramusio".

> caratteri e diffusero in Oriente le scienze occidentali e tentarono avvicinamenti d'arte finalmente pubblicati in degna veste e con un completo apparato critico, metteranno pienamente in luce la mirabile attività della nostra stirpe, la quale non scavò fra i popoli incomprensione né accaparrò ingiusti privilegi di labili potenze, ma umanisticamente cooperò ad uno spirituale incontro tra Occidente e Oriente.[63]

The celebration of travellers continued in the 1950s and 1960s, also outside the *Nuovo Ramusio*: the more popular publishing series *La conquista della Terra. Esploratori ed esplorazioni* by UTET, edited by Giotto Dainelli, published *Esploratori e alpinisti nel Caracorùm* (1959), *Il Duca degli Abruzzi. Le imprese dell'ultimo grande esploratore italiano* (1959), *Missionari e mercadanti rivelatori dell'Asia nel Medio Evo* (1960) and *Il passaggio di nord-ovest* (1961).

Although forced to give up their colonial empire and their foreign policy ambitions (also) in the East, Italian intellectuals did not seem ready to give up what anthropologist Lidio Cipriani in his book *Dal capo al Cairo* defined as the Italians' "*doti innate*", namely the ability to triumph everywhere as explorers and conquerors (Cipriani 1932, 628). In fact, at the very moment of the fall of the colonial empire and the loss of the colonies, the Italian Orientalist school highlighted its complex relationship with colonialism and the difficulty in untangling one from the other.

While the changes taking place resulted in the prime exaltation of "local history" (see, for example, Tucci's almost obsessive reference to travellers from the Marche region, and from Macerata especially, such as Ricci and Beligatti, Giovanni Francesco da Camerino, Domenico da Fano, Gregorio da Lapedona, Tranquillo da Apecchio, Costantino da Loro, Floriano da Jesi, Ciriaco d'Ancona and himself: Tucci 1942b; Tucci 1947; D'Arelli 1998; Garzilli 2006), IsMEO did not give up celebrating "great Italians" such as Marco Polo (*Oriente Poliano* 1954; Tucci 1954) or the Venetian Niccolò Manucci (Tucci 1963).

In 1949 Tucci published *Italia e Oriente*, a volume entirely dedicated to the concept of rereading proto-Italian travellers in the East, with the aim of incorporating them into a national narrative. The path from the earliest to the most recent explorers of the East, culminating with Dainelli and Tucci himself, was traced back to Emperor Augustus and Prester John, via Giovanni da Pian del

[63] "The Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East and the Library of the State are today undertaking the integral and scientific publication of the works of the greatest Italian travellers and the documents that shed light on the relations that our peoples had with the East, and entitling it after the glorious name of Ramusio. This publication will document the role played by Italy as a cultural intermediary between East and West and the importance of its unifying mission, which ideally corresponds to its reaching out into the sea like a bridge that joins the continents. The writings of our pioneers, who gave Europe news of the most remote civilizations, sought to understand their most secret characteristics, spread western sciences to the East and attempted artistic approaches, finally published in a dignified format and with a complete critical apparatus, will fully highlight the admirable activity of our race, which did not cause incomprehension among peoples or grab unjust privileges from labile powers, but cooperated humanistically in a spiritual encounter between East and West." FGG, "Il Nuovo Ramusio".

Carpine, Giovanni de' Marignolli, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti commercial agent of the Compagnia de Bardi, Antonio Pigafetta, Filippo Sassetti, the Vecchietti brothers, Jesuit Antonio Rubino, Pietro Della Valle, Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, Lazzaro Papi and many more.

In the introduction to the volume Tucci wrote:

> Dopo le grandi imprese coloniali e la prepotente espansione dell'Europa in tanta parte del mondo, e soprattutto in Asia, sembra che sia stata del tutto dimenticata la parte avuta dall'Italia, sia nello svelare i misteri dell'Oriente, sia nel diffondere in quelle terre il pensiero e l'arte dell'Occidente. Né sarà male in tempi così tristi come quelli che seguono una guerra perduta, quando non pure gli stranieri, ma gli stessi Italiani non risparmiano vituperi ed umiliazioni alla patria ferita, rievocare certe nobili opere dei nostri maggiori. Tanto più conviene farlo perché non si tratta di conquiste avventurose e rapaci, ma di un generoso e illuminato scambio di cultura, confortato da un vivo senso di umana comprensione; e difatti leggendo queste pagine si vedrà quanto ai nostri missionari e viaggiatori vada debitrice la conoscenza che l'Europa ha lentamente acquistato dell'Asia e come non poche siano le tracce che il pensiero, l'arte e la cultura italiana, e, attraverso l'Italia l'Occidente in genere, hanno lasciato in Oriente (Tucci 1949, iv–v).[64]

According to Tucci, Italy had never sought to obtain colonies in Asia with the desire to overpower them, but rather always moved with civilizing and generous intentions, unlike the other European powers (Scarfoglio 1937; Gnoli 1994, 226). It was a die-hard myth in the post-war period, fomented not only by the veteran officials of Italy's former African colonies (Del Boca 2005). Once again by presenting Italy as "mistreated" by the other European powers, Tucci intended to celebrate his country, defending it from the same Italians eager to forget its "noble deeds" accomplished all around the world.

Tucci did not abandon his celebratory intentions in the new Italian Republic and went on seeking continuity between the "Italians" of the past and those of the present.[65] In an undated letter addressed to Giulio Andreotti (1919–2013),

[64] "After the great colonial enterprises and the overbearing expansion of Europe in so much of the world, and above all in Asia, it seems that the part played by Italy, both in unveiling the mysteries of the East and in spreading the thought and art of the West in those lands, has been completely forgotten. Nor will it be a bad thing in such sad times as those following a lost war, when not only foreigners but the Italians themselves do not spare the wounded country any vituperation or humiliation, to recall certain noble works of our greatest. It is all the more appropriate to do so because it is not a question of adventurous and rapacious conquests, but of a generous and enlightened exchange of culture, comforted by a lively sense of human understanding; and in fact, upon reading these pages, one will see how much our missionaries and travellers are indebted to the knowledge that Europe has slowly acquired of Asia and how many traces Italian thought, art and culture, and, through Italy, the West in general, have left in the East."

[65] The institute's range of action did not seem to shrink, but rather broadened: for instance, in the 1970s a series dedicated to Italian travellers in Indonesia was launched in collaboration with the Jakarta Centre for Italian Culture, publishing *Lettera di Giovanni da Empoli* (1970) and *L'Indonesia nella relazione di viaggio di Antonio Pigafetta* (1972).

leader of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) party and three times prime minister, who himself authored the book *Un gesuita in Cina. 1552–1610: Matteo Ricci dall'Italia a Pechino*, Tucci wrote:

> Le sono grato non per me ma per gli studi che coltivo e che in tal guisa, continuando una tradizione antica dal tempo del Desideri e del Beligatti, restano un privilegio degli italiani […] ciò naturalmente accrescerà, in Oriente, prestigio alla scienza italiana.[66]

IsMEO's activities continued even after the end of Tucci's presidency: from 1979 the institute operated under the leadership of Iranist Gherardo Gnoli (1937–2012), who later became the first president of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO), established after the unification of IsMEO with the Istituto Italo-Africano and active until 2012. Works celebrating Tucci's IsMEO and "his direct heirs" (Gnoli 1994) and the Italian presence in the East continued to be published by the institute (e.g. Menegatti 2005), alongside more technical works on the results of excavations and manuscript studies (Gnoli 1983).

Recently the acronym IsMEO has been taken over by the Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente of Rome, which is often referred to as the "new IsMEO". The "new IsMEO" has also resumed publication of *East and West (New Series)*: "after almost a decade of silence, with this first issue of the 2020 Volume. This is exactly seventy years after Giuseppe Tucci, in his quality of president of IsMEO, began, with his *Foreword* contained in the first pages of the first issue of *East and West* 1 (1950), his dialogue between East and West".[67] In 2019, the new institute also launched the publishing series *Il Nuovissimo Ramusio*.

Whether Tucci is still considered a "*paramanguru*" (Garzilli 2012, xxii) nowadays or not, his (and Gentile's) legacy remain alive and the rereading and resemantization of the works of Italian travellers and scholars in the East certainly continues.

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[66] "I am grateful, not for myself, but for the studies that I foster and that in this way, continuing an ancient tradition from the time of Desideri and Beligatti, remain a privilege of the Italians […] this will naturally increase the prestige of Italian science in the East." Letter from Giuseppe Tucci to Giulio Andreotti in Garzilli 2012, II: 1028–1029.

[67] IsMEO, "East and West" <https://www.ismeo.eu/east-and-west/> (2021-12-21)

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Rereading Italian Travellers to Africa: Precursors, Identities and Interracial Relations in Narratives of Italian Colonialism

Fabrizio De Donno

Abstract: This essay considers a number of travellers' writings about Africa which are reread to construct and deconstruct Italian colonial identity. It focuses on Cesare Cesari's *Viaggi africani di Pellegrino Matteucci* (1932), which deems Matteucci a precursor of Fascist colonialism and contributor to Fascist "colonial science". The essay then moves on to explore the more recent rereading by Angelo Del Boca and Igiaba Scego of respectively Indro Montanelli's *XX Battaglione Eritreo* (1936) and Errico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera* (1961). By bringing together and rereading these texts, the essay maps the transformations of Italianness from colonial to postcolonial times and reveals how colonial identity relied on a series of gender, racial and sexual tropes of exploration and conquest.

Keywords: Africa, colonial identity, race, sex, gender

1. Introduction

In the chapter entitled "Italian Travel Writing" of the *Cambridge Companion to the History of Travel Writing*, Nathalie C. Hester maps out the vast production of this genre by travellers from the Italian peninsula, in a trajectory leading from the texts of "medieval merchants" to "autobiographical texts by contemporary migrants" (Hester 2019, 206). I believe this trajectory to be a productive one, especially given the focus of this volume, as it points to insightful links in the production, transmission and *rereading* of travel writing associated with the Italian peninsula across the ages, and in the post-unification period in particular. Hester claims that this trajectory consists of three distinct phases, albeit with some continuity between them: the early modern stage, the post-unification stage and the contemporary stage. She finds continuity in particular in "the conditions of production and reception of Italian travel writing, currents that point less to philosophical or political consideration than to a notion 'capable of representing complex repertoires of allegiance, identity, and interest'" (206). Hester refers to the first stage as the cosmopolitan-humanist stage and includes writers from the pre-unification city-states, republics, duchies and kingdoms of the Italian peninsula working for their local courts or other European powers, such as Marco Polo, Odorico da Pordenone and Christopher

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Fabrizio De Donno, *Rereading Italian Travellers to Africa: Precursors, Identities and Interracial Relations in Narratives of Italian Colonialism*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.05, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 65-82, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Columbus. The cosmopolitanism of these authors, Hester goes on to say, is identifiable in "the duration and breadth of [their] itineraries and in the multilingual nature of their texts' transmission" (206). The humanist dimension, on the other hand, derives from the fact that early modern travel writers borrowed from the literary works of authors such as Dante, but especially Petrarch and Boccaccio, as they all "foreground travel and movement in their works, from the otherworldly allegorical voyage of the *Divine Comedy*, through the spiritual and geographical restlessness in Petrarch's poetry and letters, to the vivid tales of Mediterranean mobility in Boccaccio's *Decameron*" (208).[1] As Italian humanism was based on the revival of classical antiquity, and it was "conceived as exportable and universally applicable" (208), Hester finds an element of cosmopolitanism here too, even though she does not address its Eurocentrism. The next stage identified by Hester is the post-unification period—the real focus of this essay and volume—when "attention to travel was part of the impulse to create a narrative of Italian identity and belonging" (216), including an Italian colonial identity. She mentions the growth in the production of travel texts, as well as biographies and histories of travellers from the Italian peninsula across the ages, who are *reread*—in essence, appropriated and "Italianized"— through the lenses of national identity and belonging, as well as colonial expansionism and foreign policy. As part of the trend of rereading earlier travellers, Hester mentions works such as Pietro Amat di San Filippo's *Biografia dei viaggiatori italiani* (1881), before moving to the Fascist period with the 18-volume series entitled *Viaggi e scoperte di navigatori ed esploratori italiani*, published by Alpes Publishing between 1928 and 1932. Interestingly, however, Hester tells us that cosmopolitanism returns to Italian travel writing in the last phase, especially through migrant autobiographical writings such as Salah Methnani and Mario Fortunato's *Immigrato* (1990), or the work of second-generation Italian-Somali writer Igiaba Scego who in her *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010) talks about "her hybrid cultural and linguistic identities" as well as "Italy's inability to acknowledge its colonial past" (220). This is the phase, in short, "when travel writing offers new ways of understanding Italianness as plurilingual, pluricultural and cosmopolitan" (220).

The distinctions as well as the claims of continuity in this trajectory are particularly useful as they invite reflections on how identitarian notions of Italianness (as well as Europeanness and Westernness) and cosmopolitanism alter across the different stages. Even more importantly, they point to how identities, allegiances and interests are transformed by the geopolitical dynamics of the changing times, which is a crucial element to consider in the rereading process. What Hester's discussion of cosmopolitanism does not account for, however, is the long genealogy of Eurocentrism in early modern and modern European

[1] As Mary Watt (2017, 34–46) has shown, many travellers to the New World, and in particular Columbus, appropriated Dante's imagery of the netherworld to describe the topography and anthropology of the Caribbean.

travel writing.[2] The question that arises here is: how do we approach the identity politics of cosmopolitanism throughout the three stages once we recognize that the notion of "cosmopolitanism" varies dramatically depending on whether the objective is self-aggrandizement (through essentialism) or genuine pluralism?

Columbus may well have been a cosmopolitan in that he wrote in Spanish and not Italian, and worked for imperial Spain rather than the Republic of Genoa. However, at the same time he wrote about the Caribbean in Eurocentric and essentializing ways (borrowing from the imagery of Dante's hell to construct a Caribbean otherness) that inspired the later production of Eurocentric (and racist) travel writings by other European nations, including Britain and France, and later on, post-unification Italy. Is it not striking, for instance, that in the aftermath of the 2020 Black Lives Matters campaigns the statues of travellers like Columbus were attacked to condemn western identity and racism against blacks as a legacy of European colonialism? And so we will see below how Columbus and other early modern explorers from the Italian peninsula were appropriated and Italianized in post-unification narratives of colonial explorations so as to turn them into the precursors of modern Italian colonial exploration.

Moreover, the rereading of earlier travellers, which often went as far back as the Roman times, also served the purpose of establishing traditions and continuity within "Italian" history between the ancient, medieval and early modern (city-) states of the Italian peninsula, and post-unification Italy. This "Italian" history was also used as a means to cultivate Italianness within modern Europeanness by emphasizing the central role of these "Italian" travellers as constitutive symbols of European colonial identity. The legacies of these earlier travellers were thus used in Italian post-unification narratives of colonial explorations to place the newly formed nation at the heart of European colonialism once more. Writing genealogies and traditions of "Italian" travellers thus became a powerful tool of colonial identity-building for the new nation as it sought a new place on the European and world stage. It is a process that would intensify under Fascism, with what has been called the mystique of the "precursors of fascist imperialism" (Chelati Dirar 1996, 29).

As I engage with Hester's overall trajectory, and focus on the series *Viaggi e scoperte di navigatori ed esploratori italiani*, I attempt to investigate the construction of these genealogies of exploration by placing the rereading of earlier travellers in the context of Fascist "*scienza coloniale*".[3] I look at the last of the 18

[2] Kwame Anthony Appiah provides an example of Eurocentric and essentializing cosmopolitanism as he discusses British Orientalist and explorer Sir Richard F. Burton's interest in non-European peoples, languages and cultures. Appiah attributes this interest to Burton's self-aggrandizement (and British imperialism) rather than cultural pluralism *per se* (Appiah 2007, 18–26). For insightful discussions of cosmopolitanism, see also Braidotti, Hanafin, and Blaagaard (2013).

[3] The term "colonial science" was coined by Nicola Vacchelli (1928) to refer to an interdisciplinary body of works aiming to produce colonial knowledge. As will be seen below, in his discussion of geography as a new discipline, he stresses its crucial role and function in the colonial epistemological field. See also Atkinson (2005) below for further details on the development of this body of colonial science and geography's central role in it.

volumes of the series—army general Cesare Cesari's *Viaggi africani di Pellegrino Matteucci* (1932)—and explore how Matteucci was not only turned into a heroic precursor of Fascist colonialism, but also situated in the great tradition of Italian travellers and explorers across the ages such as Columbus and Polo. I then place this and other rereadings of Italian travellers to Africa by Cesari in dialogue with the more recent postcolonial rereading of Indro Montanelli's *XX Battaglione eritreo* (1936) and Enrico Emanuelli's novel *Settimana nera* (1961) by Angelo del Boca and Igiaba Scego respectively, in which they address the amnesia of Italian colonial history and identity. I am interested in the transformations of Italian colonial consciousness from construction and celebration to postcolonial amnesia and shame: if Fascism reread travellers to appropriate and sacralize their enterprises and celebrate colonial identity, Del Boca and Scego's present-day, genuinely pluralist rereading of colonial travellers— as per Hester's last phase in her trajectory—can help us reconfigure how Italian colonial identity was constructed and existed in theory and practice, especially through racial, gender and sexual metaphors. We can also understand how it was then forgotten and replaced by the myth of "*Italiani brava gente*" (Italians [are] good people), until it resurfaced in the public consciousness, especially in contemporary expressions of racism in Italy.

2. Fascist genealogies of "Italian" exploration: *Viaggi e scoperte di navigatori ed esploratori italiani*

Viaggi e scoperte di navigatori ed esploratori italiani, populated with some of the most important exploratory efforts of figures related to the Italian peninsula, including Ludovico De Varthema, Antonio Pigafetta, Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Niccolò de' Conti and Odorico da Pordenone, was one of the largest series of its kind to be published in Fascist Italy. The general editor of the series, Rinaldo Caddeo, was also author and editor of the first volume, which clarified the main purpose of the series. The aim was to emphasize the "primacy" of "Italian" explorers—mainly explorers from the medieval republics of the Italian peninsula, and especially those of Genoa and Venice—in passing their pioneering skills in the maritime, geographical and commercial sciences to the Portuguese, Spanish, French and British explorers, thereby shaping European colonialism (Caddeo 1928). Caddeo's production of works on Italian travellers was actually a momentary digression from his greater interest in the history of the Risorgimento—the Italian independence movement—the subject of his most original work, with texts such as *Uomini, vicende e tempi* (1931) and *Storia e critica* (1934). A nationalist of Mazzinian convictions and interventionist in World War I who contributed to the development of the idea of irredentism, Caddeo may have been put under pressure to edit this series by the regime, owing to the Fascist intensification of the "Italianization" of earlier explorers from the Italian peninsula. Indeed, Caddeo also edited the famous (and controversial) volume in the series by Fernando Columbus, Christopher's son, *Le historie della vita e dei fatti di Cristoforo Colombo*, first published in 1571, and already

reissued several times before Caddeo's version (1930). In this edition, Caddeo spells out that the many critiques of the previous editions by American and other European scholars, in particular concerning Columbus's Italianness, were just out of "envy". As such, Caddeo sets out to restore the denied "authenticity" of the volume by Columbus' son, reclaiming "Italian" ownership of Columbus's achievements and visions, and using them to give impulse to the Fascist colonial campaigns. He writes: "*Colombo è nostro: l'evento che iniziò l'era moderna e diede una nuova fisionomia al mondo, è nostro*" (Caddeo 1930, lxvii–lxviii). It was not a note of exaggerated national pride, he goes on to claim, but defence of the historical truth from "foreign attacks". It is Fascist Italy, Caddeo concludes, that must make Columbus's work its own in its attempt to claim "il posto che le compete sotto il sole" (lxviii).[4] Caddeo's claims – which placed the Italian city-states and their pioneering explorers at the root and heart of modern European imperialism, and were a way to make it up for the fact that post-unification and Fascist Italy were in actual fact *late participants* in the process – encapsulate the whole objective of the series: to provide new impulse to Fascism's late-1920s' resumption of Italian colonial campaigns and international relations. The emphasis here is not only on the appropriation of Columbus' enterprise as a way of legitimizing the Italian and Fascist "right" to imperialism, but also on stressing that the age when "Italian" explorers worked for "foreign" powers (what Hester calls the cosmopolitan age) was now over. Given that, for the greater part, the series intended to affirm the relationship between travel, exploration and colonialism, and given that Italian colonialism developed primarily in East Africa, I focus on Cesari's rereading of Pellegrino Matteucci as the greatest of the Italian travellers to Africa, placing him in the tradition of Columbus and other early modern and modern travellers from the Italian pre-unification states.

3. From Matteucci to Cesari's Matteucci: geography, heroism and martyrdom

As one of the European pioneers in the exploration of the unknown parts of Africa in the 1870s and 1880s—the period that then became known as the "heroic" age of African exploration—Matteucci was an appealing symbol. Born in Ravenna in 1850, after dropping out of medicine, Matteucci studied Arabic, ethnography and the natural sciences on his own accord. He soon developed an interest in geographical exploration, and in Africa in particular. In 1875, he published a booklet entitled *La spedizione italiana all'Africa equatoriale* in order to persuade the newly established *Società Geografica Italiana* (hereafter SGI) to organize an expedition to equatorial Africa. In 1879, he embarked on his first expedition to Sudan and the kingdom of Gallas (part of contemporary Ethiopia) with Romolo Gessi, publishing a book entitled *Sudan e Gallas* about the experience (1879). Matteucci then participated in another expedition to Ethio-

[4] "*Columbus is ours: the event which began the modern era and gave a new physiognomy to the world is ours* […] its due place in the sun" (italics original).

pia organized by the *Società d'Esplorazione Commerciale* in Africa, where he was asked to evaluate the potential for Italian commercial relations with Ethiopia. As a result of this expedition, he wrote *In Abissinia: Viaggio* (1880), in which he famously warned the Italian government that Ethiopia was not a suitable place for commercial relations with Italy, and therefore was not suitable for Italian colonialism (Matteucci 1880, 281).[5] What made Matteucci famous worldwide, however, was his third expedition, in which he crossed Africa from the Red Sea to the Niger Delta together with Navy lieutenant Angelo Maria Massari, at the end of which he caught malaria and returned to Europe on an English ship en route from West Africa to England. He died in London in 1881. Matteucci wrote little about this last journey, which was tentatively reconstructed posthumously by another explorer, Giuseppe Dalla Vedova (1885).

Matteucci and the development of the discipline of geography were certainly central to the early post-unification attempts to get the Italian colonial campaign under way. As David Atkinson has discussed, the aggressive imperialism of the period spanning the 1860s to the 1880s saw a dramatic increase in interest in geography, with about 80 geographical societies springing up in every part of Europe (Atkinson 2005, 17). The practice of scientific geography included the "practical construction of colonial territory", as well as the transformation of abstract geographical imaginations into "legible, knowable places with their dimensions, topographies, and characteristics enshrined in cartography and scientific survey" (16). Indeed, due to colonialism taking centre stage in Mussolini's policies from the late 1920s and early 1930s, Fascism made an even greater commitment to the interdisciplinary field of geography in the colonial context (20). The director of the *Istituto Geografico Militare,* Nicola Vacchelli, also spelt out how geography could make a contribution to the developing field of "*scienza coloniale*", whose mission "entailed the collection, organization, and dissemination of all relevant knowledge about overseas territories to develop Italy's colonial consciousness, reinforce the colonial domain, and enable effective governance" (Atkinson 2005, 20).[6] Luigi Federzoni, president of the SGI and former leader of the *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, was then made minister of the colonies, thus strengthening the link between geography and colonial expansionism even further.

Like Federzoni, army general Cesari was part of this colonial science network and collaborated with the *Istituto Coloniale Fascista*. Like some of the oth-

[5] This is the statement by Matteucci in Italian, which I paraphrased in English: "in Abissinia, non conviene illudersi, la ricchezza è in potenza e non in *atto*, e se noi Italiani cerchiamo di guadagnare la fortuna in una prima impresa, possiamo cambiare via, perchè questo in Abissinia non è possibile".

[6] Vacchelli himself wrote that this "colonial science" had to provide a profound and accurate knowledge of the geographical environments and the societies inhabiting them. In this sense, with the support of and in dialogue with disciplines such as botany, geology ethnography, anthropology, orientalism, and the political and economic sciences, geography would fulfil these criteria and provide the ultimate scientific basis for colonial and foreign policies (Vacchelli 1928, 159).

er volumes in the series, his rereading of Matteucci is an example of the attempt to revamp geography and construct a narrative (and a tradition) of "Italian" geographical and colonial exploration through the refashioning of past figures, symbols and identities—a narrative allegedly rooted in scientific rigour, and contributing to the wider objective of Fascist colonial science to persuade the Italians "to conceptualise themselves as an 'imperial people'" (Atkinson 2005, 24). However, while the choice of Matteucci may have been related to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the explorer's death, there are two other reasons that made him particularly appealing to both Cesari and Federzoni: firstly, the idea of making a peculiarly Fascist celebration of a martyr of the *patria* who died for the "cause" of colonial exploration, as a precursor of Fascist colonialism, and a heroic symbol of explorational vigour; secondly, the need to urgently correct Matteucci's conclusion about the lack of any potential for commercial relations with Ethiopia, when Mussolini was already planning its occupation for the foundation of his empire in East Africa.

Given the context of geographical colonial science in which Cesari's rereading of Matteucci occurs, it is not surprising that the volume comes with a "preface" by Federzoni himself. Here Matteucci is celebrated with the typical liturgical and solemn language of Fascism which, as Emilio Gentile has famously shown, is often borrowed from Christian worship in order to sacralize political action (Gentile 1996). Matteucci thus becomes a heroic symbol of colonial exploration and an example of Fascist martyrology, rhetorically staging what Roger Griffin has termed the "palingenesis" of Fascism, or the national rebirth promised by Fascism, especially by exalting the suffering and sacrifices of the nation's heroes (Griffin 1993). Matteucci is remembered alongside the heroic travellers of the "past", including those that served foreign powers, with Fascism ensuring that from now on Italian colonial explorers would serve the Italian nation alone. Federzoni is the author of this identitarian rhetoric, stressing that Matteucci inaugurated a new chapter in the history of Italian exploration after the "loss" of the last of the Italian "grandi conquistatori per conto dello straniero", Pietro Sarvognan di Brazzà, "creatore del Congo francese" (Federzoni in Cesari 1932, xi). Federzoni completes his construction of Matteucci's "Fascist" identity by calling him a young hero, alluding to his tragic death and constructing the figure of the spiritual, heroic and patriotic martyr: he praises his "energie stimolatrici" and "supreme idealità umane" (Federzoni in Cesari 1932, xii),[7] and compares him to other glorious patriotic heroes such as Goffredo Mameli or Ippolito Nievo who, like him, died "sul primo fiorire dell'ingegno e della fede", making them "spiriti" imbued with "una più pura luce di poesia e di eroismo" (xix).[8]

[7] "[…] great conquerors on behalf of foreigners […] creator of the French Congo […] stimulating energies […] supreme human ideals".

[8] "[…] at the first appearance of their brilliance and faith […] spirits […] a purer poetic and heroic light".

4. Matteucci's pious colonial exploration: race, gender, religion, and anti-slavery?

Fascism no doubt exploited the more spiritual aspects of Matteucci's work. In his own writings, Matteucci comes across as a patriotic explorer, with a strong enthusiasm for exploration, religion, science and the development of geography in Italy. His (nationalist) cosmopolitanism is ambiguous in that it aims to claim a primacy for Italy on the world stage through colonialism and international relations, but also through anti-slavery narratives. For instance, he begins his book *Sudan e Gallas* by exalting the role of the SGI in the new explorations of post-unification Italy, and compares his age (and himself) to the ages (and figures) of Polo and Columbus (Matteucci 1879, 1). Matteucci also praises the role of the Catholic missions in Africa, stressing their supremacy in relation to other missions, thus bringing together a set of primacies in travel, exploration and the missionaries themselves (14).

There is no doubt that Matteucci's work at large, and especially his most interesting travel diary, *In Abissinia*, is sophisticated ethnography. Matteucci calls himself a pseudo-geographer, but his prose is imbued with philological, anthropological, archaeological, cartographical, topographical and political references. There is curiosity in his wanting to define racial types, and above all, in condemning slavery, though every consideration he makes alludes to the civilization the indigenous people lack, and the potential role of Italy in bringing it to them, first through commercial relations, and then colonial conquest. It is therefore important to pause for a moment on the way in which race, colonial exploration and the issue of slavery are addressed in Matteucci's work. In *In Abissinia*, for instance, Matteucci writes relatively positively about the Ethiopians and claims that

> In Africa non credo vi sia una razza più corretta di questa; sono Europei con tanto di guadagnato nella costituzione fisica, e con una diversità di colorito che offre tutte le gradazioni nella scala dei colori dal nero d'ebano al bronzo chiaro (Matteucci 1880, 10).[9]

The emphasis is, of course, on women. He explains that when they are maidens, "sono estremamente seducenti"; when they become women, "sono procaci"; and when they are old, "divengon venerande".[10] Matteucci's Eurocentrism and patriarchy are relatively subtle here: he stresses that the only thing missing from these "voluptuous" women is "civilization", and it is Italy (and primarily Italian men) that will remedy this by bringing it to them, so that they will really "look beautiful, even if they are black" (Matteucci 1880, 10–11).[11]

Here Matteucci is using gender, racial and sexual metaphors which were, of course, central to the discourse of European colonial exploration and conquest.

[9] "I believe there is no better race than this in Africa; they are Europeans with a lot of advantages in their physical constitution, and with a variety of colouring that offers all the gradations from ebony black to light bronze."

[10] "[…] they are exceedingly enticing […] they are busty […] they become venerable […]".

[11] In the original, Matteucci uses (in italics) a Latin expression: "*Nigra sum sed formosa*".

As Clare Midgley (1998, 2) reminds us in relation to the British Empire, these metaphors were central "to the description of colonial exploration and conquest as the penetration of virgin lands", as well as "to the femininized representations of colonised men". More generally, gender was a signifier in "relationships of power" (2), while "masculine subjectivities" were imagined in relation to colonial explorers and soldier heroes. These dynamics are applicable to Italian colonial discourse too, which was broadly shaped on the model of Britain and France. Moreover, with particular regard to the question of gender, and the myth of the virgin land, Anne McClintock (1995) points out that in these patriarchal narratives, "to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency, passively awaiting the thrusting, male insemination of history, language and reason". It is therefore not a surprise that, in colonial narratives, "the eroticizing of the 'virgin' space also affects territorial appropriation, for […] white male patrimony is violently assured as the sexual and military insemination of an interior void" (30). One more reference to Columbus seems apt in this context as he himself wrote that the Earth was not round, but "shaped like a woman's breast, with a protuberance upon its summit in the unmistakeable shape of a nipple toward which he was slowly sailing" (21). Though common to the genre of travel writing across the early modern and modern periods, these sets of gender tropes and metaphors about travel, discovery and conquest betrayed not only male anxiety and longing for the female body, but also pointed to the same image of the female body "as marking the boundary of the cosmos and the limits of the known world, enclosing the ragged men, with their dreams of pepper and pearls, in her indefinite, oceanic body" (22). In short, as summed up by McClintock, "women are the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned" (31). Far from being limited to colonized women, this ownership also extended to colonized men as a result of their "femininization". As will be seen, interracial relations often involved a sense of the colonizer's ownership of the colonized (female and male).

In Cesari's celebration, Matteucci's use of gender and racial metaphors to address colonial power are given a more pious connotation. I am particularly interested in how race and abolitionist attitudes were instrumentalized by Fascism to put forward a rhetoric—not a reality—of anti-racist justice for Fascist colonialism and foreign policy (as opposed to the supposedly more racist British and French policies). I will then move on to compare this with some other accounts of interracial relations where racism and "unofficial slavery" are prominent.

Cesari's Matteucci is presented as an adventurer, but also as a scholar and a man of deep religious feelings, whose work is sacralized as "un apostolato di scienza, fede e civiltà" (Cesari 1932, 6).[12] Cesari mentions the "redemptive" nature of Matteucci's work in its concerns with racial issues and abolition, especially his study on the Akka and African races. This work, published in 1877,

[12] "un apostolato di scienza, fede e civiltà".

was somehow employed by Fascism as a rhetorical tool pointing to the allegedly emancipatory nature of Italian colonialism:

> In Pellegrino Matteucci furono tutte le doti di un giovane educato all'indagine scientifica, seria e rigorosa [...] [egli] sentì la nobiltà di una missione di redenzione, [aveva] un animo aperto a sentimenti elevatissimi di civiltà e di patriottismo; anche di patriottismo perchè mai perdette di vista il sogno di un'Italia grande nella sua opera di colonizzazione, particolarmente in Africa. Per tali requisiti Matteucci non poteva sentirsi che un antischiavista convinto (Cesari 1932, 6).[13]

Matteucci did actually claim to be an anti-slavery campaigner, and he did place abolitionist campaigns at the heart of his narrative in his *La spedizione italiana all'Africa equatoriale* (1875), a short pamphlet addressed to the Marquis Orazio Antinori, secretary of the SGI. In this account, epistemology as well as religious and humanitarian concerns come together in the promise that colonialism would bring benefits to Africa through the production of knowledge, the fight against slavery and the introduction of Catholicism (Matteucci 1875, 5). Cesari, of course, is quick to exploit and amplify Matteucci's piousness, and thus writes that his was the voice of a visionary who could see what was "good" for both Africa and Italy (Cesari 1932, 9). It is on these "civilizational" and "emancipatory" objectives that Cesari based his rereading of Matteucci's journeys.

5. Matteucci's journeys and other journeys in Fascist colonial science and propaganda

Cesari's text is divided into three main accounts of the three journeys, which consist of quotations from publications and letters written by Matteucci, and Cesari's own (rather superficial) prose commentary. There is also an appendix with "documents", that is, mainly letters Matteucci wrote to institutional figures, friends, patrons, fellow travellers and family. I have already touched on some of the more significant elements of his commentary, but below are some of the most relevant points of Cesari's accounts.

Of the first journey, it is worth mentioning how Cesari praises the travellers' virtues, as both Matteucci and Gessi embarked on their expedition alone and with few resources, uncertain whether to admire more "il loro ardimento o la loro modestia" (Cesari 1932, 13).[14] In Khartoum, for example, Matteucci is said to have produced some of the most vivid impressions of his journey relat-

[13] "[...] an apostolate of science, faith and civilization [...] Pilgrim Matteucci embodied all the qualities of a young man educated in serious and rigorous scientific investigation [...] [He] felt the nobility of a mission of redemption and [had] a soul open to feelings of civilization and patriotism; patriotism because he never lost sight of the dream of a great Italy in its work of colonization, especially in Africa. As a result of his qualities, Matteucci could not but deem himself a convinced abolitionist."

[14] "their passion or their modesty".

ing to his anti-slavery concerns and pious idea of colonialism, on one occasion witnessing—and perhaps even taking part in—the liberation of some slaves by cutting their chains (15).

In the narration of the second journey, Cesari makes reference to the "movimento espansionista italiano" (29),[15] which he traces back to Matteucci and the early days of the SGI, and the enthusiasm and faith in his aspirations. Like many of the other texts in the series, however, his concern with Matteucci was also aimed at rectifying the general understanding of the lives and work of these travellers, as well as their findings, allegiances and identities. In Matteucci's case, it was his view of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia that needed to be rectified. Cesari, like Federzoni, was interested in reviving this impulse in the present, especially in relation to Ethiopia, and so was keen to dismiss Matteucci's warning against any commercial relations with the country. For this reason, Cesari claims that Matteucci's *In Abissinia* is "un'opera di impressioni più che di realtà assoluta" (51).[16] Apart from this exception, Cesari's commentary conveys the enthusiasm of the expedition, and gives prestige to the figure of the Italian travellers coming from "l'Impero d'Italia" (even though the Italian Empire was only proclaimed four years later by Mussolini), claiming that they were treated with the utmost respect by the African kings, sultans and rulers, thus reinforcing a colonial identity for Italians via geography and exploration.

Of the third journey, except for the claim that Matteucci had been the first to have crossed Africa, most of the commentary gives accounts of routes, encounters with local kings and princes, and fellow European travellers. Cesari pauses once again on Matteucci's reflections on areas with a potential for Italian colonization, as well as on how such potential could be fulfilled through various kinds of commercial and political relations with the Wadai Sultanate and the Bornu Empire (93). Here Cesari uses Matteucci's journeys as a "handbook for exploration" in the renewed colonial climate of Fascism, proposing new itineraries of conquest and epistemological approaches and interracial attitudes towards Africans. In typically Fascist fashion, Cesari's accounts of Matteucci's journeys are at once celebratory, symbolic, spiritually invigorating, and most importantly, masculine and virile, even if pious (in relation to slavery). Cesari's conclusive remarks stress that Fascism has finally achieved Matteucci's dream of providing Italy with the "prestigio di grande potenza colonizzatrice", thanks to its overseas possessions. The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his death was hence an opportunity to once again evoke liberal and Fascist Italy's dream of colonial conquest, thus placing Matteucci's name among Fascism's colonial precursors and in the "Pantheon delle glorie nazionali" (136).[17]

After writing *Viaggi Africani*, together with manuals of colonial history on the origins of the Italian colonial possessions (Cesari 1937), Cesari went on to write

[15] "Italian expansionist movement".

[16] "a work of impressions rather than of absolute reality".

[17] "prestige of a great colonial power […] Pantheon of national glories".

other genealogies of travellers to Africa that were broader in scope, but even more superficial in essence. For instance, in his *Gli italiani nella conoscenza dell'Africa* (1933), Cesari continued his work of documenting Italy's "primacy" among European nations in the exploration of the continent across the ages, from ancient Rome to Fascist Italy. All these "Italian" travellers (Cesari provides hundreds of names) are praised for their discovery, knowledge, civilization, spirituality, conquest and, of course, for having made the *patria* great.[18] However, in his *Orme d'Italia in Africa* (1938), Cesari contradicts what he had said in his previous work. Here he argues that the real pioneers of Fascist colonialism were those "Italian" scientists, missionaries and explorers that had travelled to Africa from 1820 to the present day, and that really paved the way to Italy's domination of North and East Africa, culminating in the conquest of Ethiopia and the proclamation of the Italian Overseas Empire (Cesari 1938, 8).[19] The rhetoric of this book is dominated by the trope of imperial Rome and its tradition of colonialism, which this time would also serve as an outlet for Italian emigration and, more importantly, to "liberare milioni di schiavi"[20] and bring civilization to barbaric Africa (171).

Having established how Fascism's rereading of Matteucci's (and others') journeys contributed to the construction of a colonial identity by celebrating the heroism of the "Italian" colonial explorer and the implied gender, racial and sexual tropes, it is interesting to compare the anti-slavery slant used by Cesari in his rhetorical praise of Matteucci's (and Fascism's) colonial ethos to other propaganda texts published around the same period and more centred on interracial relations. From the early 1930s, and even more so from the implementation of the racial laws in the Fascist empire in 1937 up until 1941, there was a considerable growth in the body of propaganda materials about Fascist ideas on race and empire, which ranged from ethnography and colonial novels to travel writing, Orientalist scholarship, race theory, political pamphlets and imperial historiography (De Donno 2019, 295–323). Moreover, a great deal of Fascist propaganda also dealt with interracial relations and the promise of sexual adventure in the colonies so as to allure young Italian men to join ranks in Africa. Countless colonial novels depicted the life of Italian men in the colonies

[18] The Roman explorers and geographers include Aelius Gallus, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, Septimius Flaccus and Claudius Ptolemy, to mention a few, before moving on to the Middle Ages with the Vivaldi brothers, Malocello Lanzarotto, the Pizzigani brothers, Nicoloso da Recco and Angiolino de' Corbizi, up to Antoniotto Usodimare who began the tradition of working for foreign powers (in this case Portugal). The list of all the later travellers goes on with the well-known travellers and missionaries from Columbus and Pietro Della Valle and the "Italian martyrology" of missionaries such as Antonio di Pietra Bagnara and Lodovico da Laurenzana. The last couple of chapters include nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century travellers, military and missionaries to East Africa in particular, including, of course, Matteucci and Gessi, up to Fascist travellers such as Carlo Citerni, Attilio Giuliani and Eugenio Ruspoli, among others.

[19] Even in this text the list of travellers is long and includes Massaia, Stella, Sapeto, Negrelli, Miani, Piaggia, Matteucci, Massari, Cecchi, Chiarini, Gessi, Casati and others.

[20] "to free millions of slaves".

through sexual relations and their position of absolute power over female but also male indigenous people (Campassi and Sega 1983; Pickering-Iazzi 2000). A case in point is the novel *Femina Somala* by Gino Mitrano Sani published in 1933—one year after Cesari's volume about Matteucci—in which the "*madama*", or the "acquired" temporary African wife of the Italian colonizer is depicted as "una cosa del capitano, una serva, una schiava senza valore che deve dare il suo corpo quando il maschio bianco ha voglia carnale" (Mitrano Sani 1933, 146).[21] Mitrano Sani's novel is a useful example of the way in which the travellers' colonial identity is enacted through interracial relations and was far from being shaped by genuine anti-slavery concerns. At the same time, it is evidence of the unsurprisingly contradictory nature of Fascist colonial propaganda, as well as the variety of text types produced in relation to colonial identity construction that imply travel, race, gender, sexuality and conquest.[22]

6. Rereading Montanelli and Emanuelli: from colonial memory to a new postcolonial cosmopolitan pluralism

By way of conclusion, to touch on the last of Hester's stages (and thus bring the three stages together), I would like to briefly draw on Del Boca's rereading of Montanelli's *XX Battaglione eritreo* and Scego's rereading of Emanuelli's *Settimana nera*, writings by travellers originally produced outside of propaganda contexts. Hence, they can provide an even greater sense of the reality surrounding the enacting of Fascist colonial identity through (inter)racial, gender and sexual metaphors. Clearly, this is a very different kind of rereading to Cesari's, relevant here as it points to the stage when Italianness moves towards a cosmopolitan pluralism and comes to terms with the memory of Italian colonial identity and its deconstruction.

Montanelli is a particularly interesting case in point as a colonial traveller and prime symbol of Italian colonial identity. As is well known, in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in May 2020 protesters in the streets of Milan turned to the statue of Montanelli to do precisely the same thing that US protesters had done with the statue of Columbus in Boston, that is, deface it and spray it with graffiti. Montanelli took part in the colonial war leading to the occupation of Ethiopia in 1936 as a lieutenant in a battalion of *Askari* (Eritrean soldiers of the Italian Colonial Army) and was a convinced Fascist at least until the end of the Ethiopian war. He was also the "owner" of a 12-year-old Eritrean girl called Destà, whom he "acquired" for the price of 350 liras through the infamous practice of *madamato*. Therefore, Montanelli is now widely considered to be the embodiment of Italian colonial abuse.

[21] "a thing owned by the captain, a servant, a slave with no value who must give her body when the white man has carnal desire".

[22] Other important examples of racist rhetoric in relation to the peoples of East Africa published in the same period include the works of anthropologist Lidio Cipriani (1931, 1932, 1935) and Orientalist Carlo Conti Rossini (1935).

XX Battaglione Eritreo was first published by Panorama in 1936 and obtained great success. However, it was never published again until the very recent edition by Rizzoli, which came with the addition of some unpublished letters. Montanelli, Del Boca explains, had sent the various fragments of his "war diary" to his father Sestilio, who, in turn, had given it to Massimo Bontempelli. The latter liked it and published it, while Ugo Ojetti, who liked the fact that the text was not mere propaganda, wrote a review in which he compared the young Indro to a Rudyard Kipling in becoming. Montanelli was in Africa from May 1935 to September 1936, not only for the Ethiopian war, but also, as he put it, "per ragioni letterarie" and, rather ironically, given the abuses he committed, to find a "una coscienza di uomo" (Montanelli 2002, 23).[23] As the historian tells us in the introduction, Del Boca's new edition and rereading of *XX Battaglione Eritreo* has two purposes: one is personal, and is to shed more light on the famous disagreements between himself and Montanelli about the crimes of Italian colonialism and the use of mustard gas in the Ethiopian war (Montanelli denied the claims of Del Boca); the other is related to the revived interest in the history of Italian colonialism in Italy, prompted by Del Boca himself, which has now regained consideration after decades of "amnesia" (Del Boca 2010, 11–12). The daily abuses enacted by Italians in interracial relations through colonial identity were also part of the amnesia of colonialism that Del Boca challenges—hence the relevance of Montanelli's new edition in debates around colonialism in postcolonial Italy. Though not mere propaganda, Montanelli's text is concerned with the interracial relations between the *Goitana* (the Italian officer, "lord" or colonizer in general) and the *Askari*—a relationship mediated through Italian/European colonial identity. This Italianness, but also Europeanness, builds on issues of military, masculine, sexual and racial notions in the colonial context.[24] Montanelli tells us that the *Goitana* is not just an "ufficiale" or simply a "signore", but "l'Assoluto" (Montanelli [1936] 2010, 25).[25] Italian and European identities are negotiated as Montanelli explains that *Goitana* is an African word that encapsulates a non-European concept (whereby non-Europeans regard Europeans as deities) (25).[26] The absolute power the Italian has over the African is further described with a touch of paternalism as Montanelli tells us that, when the *Askari* deal with the Italians, "scompaiono le loro volontà e coscienze, si rassegnano nelle sue mani". They become like "una tenera pietra che puoi ridurre all'espressione che ti pare" (19).[27] This relationship, Montanelli writes, "impon[e all'ufficiale] d'essere un Dio", which is a feeling that "ti da

[23] "for literary reasons […] a moral conscience".

[24] Including homosexual interracial relations in colonial contexts—a subject studied by Aldrich in the broader European context (2003).

[25] "an officer […] a lord […] the Absolute".

[26] Montanelli writes: "Tu ufficiale ricordati che sei 'Goitana' e impara – l'ascaro stesso è che te lo insegna – che questa parola racchiude un concetto non europeo."

[27] "their will and conscience disappear as they place themselves in the Italians' hands […] a tender stone which [the Italian officers] can reduce to the expression [they] wish".

quasi le vertigini". Indeed, this "abitudine al padreternismo è il vero mal d'Africa,[28] quello della patologia umana, non soltanto letteraria" (26).[29] Montanelli constructs this relationship on the assumption that it is the Africans themselves who regard the Italians and their "government"[30] (or Fascist regime) as a *Goitana*, in that they look up to them as superior beings (28). This father-child and master-slave narrative can also be sexual, not just in a metaphorical sense, like in the humorous account of a special *Goitana*, Sassahà, as he was called by his *Askari*. Sassahà often visited Terù, his favourite Eritrean soldier, who, instead of taking part in conversations around the campfire at night with the other *Askari*, "preferiva addormentarsi presto perchè venisse Sassahà nella notte accanto a lui e gli parlasse con la sua dolce voce" (139–40).[31]

But sexual interracial relations as a way of negotiating colonial identity were of course even more popular, or at least more explicit, with female African natives. This is certainly the case narrated in Enrico Emanuelli's *Settimana nera*,[32] a novel set at the time of the Italian protectorate of Somalia, when the Italians were expected to teach democracy to the Somali and lead them to independence. Despite the parallels with Mitrano Sani's *Femina somala*, this was not a propaganda novel. However, the novel still depicts how Italians continued to exercise a form of colonial power over Africans through interracial relations (featuring both heterosexual relations with African women and hinting at homosexual relations with African men). The character in the novel is an Italian man in his forties who hunts monkeys for an American pharma company that is developing a vaccine against polio. He has his servant Abdi with him, whom he treats as his personal possession. Eventually, he is drawn into an erotic affair with Regina, the *madama* (Somali temporary wife) of Farnenti, a former Fascist hierarch who has remained in Somalia and encourages the protagonist to "own" Regina for a week while Farnenti is away. Even though the protagonist condemns the violent behaviours of Farnenti, and pretends to develop feelings of love for Regina, he too eventually falls prey to his desire for her and treats her

[28] The expression *mal d'Africa*, referring to nostalgia for Africa and especially the exotic and literary experience of the white colonizer in the African colony, was made famous by Riccardo Bacchelli (1935) in his homonymous novel. In his use, Montanelli, however, places emphasis on the nostalgia for the God-like feeling and sense of absolute power that the Italian colonizer felt in the East African colonies.

[29] "demands of [the officer] to become a God […] almost gives you vertigo […] becoming accustomed to this God-like feeling is the real *mal d'Africa*, that of human pathology, not just of literary pathology".

[30] Montanelli describes how the *Sciumbasi*, or the Eritrean man of the highest rank among the *Askari*, naively regards the Fascist regime as a *Goitana*: "Il Governo è per lui un Goitana imprecisabile, un Goitana più Goitana di tutti gli altri, un Goitana che sta a Roma" (Montanelli [1936] 2010, 28).

[31] "preferred to go to bed early, because soon Sassahà would come to lie next to him to speak to him with his sweet voice".

[32] Emanuelli was primarily a travel writer and journalist who wrote about Spain and Ethiopia during Fascism, and about Russia, China and India in the post-war period.

as abusively as Farnenti: he behaves ambiguously between the recognition and condemnation of colonial violence, and his eventual and conscious embracing of it, of which he also becomes ashamed. Indeed, his shame with regard to his sexual, gender and racial attitudes to Regina become metaphors to address the violent nature of colonial identity. This is the foundation on which a postcolonial identity for Italy can be built.

While this novel is the only real literary attempt to decolonize Italian consciousness and conscience and to come to terms with Italian colonial identity after Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere* (1947), Scego's rereading of and "preface" to the new 2021 edition—the first after the 1961 edition—points to the lack of a debate about decolonization and the erasure of Italian colonial identity in the early (post-1960s) postcolonial period. To use Hester's parlance, Scego is herself a symbol of a plurilingual and pluricultural cosmopolitanism. Her postcolonial rereading looks at previous constructions of Italianness, from colonial identity to the post-war myth of "*Italiani brava gente*", only to denounce colonial amnesia and propose a new consciousness that acknowledges the crimes and cruelty of Italian colonialism and its legacies of racism. She says that the rereading was "la prova che cercavo" (Scego 2021, 7) to make Italians face their colonial responsibilities, as well as the responsibilities of the period of the Somali protectorate, when the myth of "Italiani brava gente" became that of "Italiani bravi insegnanti".[33]

Both myths are in fact easily discredited: the character of Regina is reduced to a state of slavery by Farnenti who, by dint of his "ownership", "lends" her to the protagonist of the novel. As Barbara Tonzar points out, the whole point of the novel is to explore the conscience of the protagonist as he relates ambiguously to the exploitative and bestial behaviours of former Fascist colonialists such as Farnenti, or his homosexual friend, Contardi, whose eventual suicide signals the horrors of the violence not only of the colonial period but also of the Italian protectorate of Somalia between 1950 and 1960 (Tonzar 2017, 130). Emanuelli courageously recognizes the horrors of Italian and Fascist colonialism and colonial identity,[34] but for this very reason the novel was quickly dismissed in the climate of colonial amnesia of post-1960s Italy. Scego's rereading of Emanuelli's fictional travels to Somalia, in line with Hester's trajectory, is therefore timely and crucial in understanding the current transformations in postcolonial Italianness, and reckoning that a true cultural decolonization is only just beginning to take place in postcolonial Italy. The hope is that contemporary pluricultural Italianness will build further on these representations of Italian colonial violence while continuing to look at the critical moments of Italian colonial identity and their legacy through a truly cosmopolitan pluralist lens.

[33] "the proof [she] was looking for"[...] "Italians [are] good people"[...] "Italians [are] good teachers"

[34] As the protagonist admits, "era ipocrisia volerla nel letto quando mi risvegliavo" ("it was hypocrisy to want her in my bed when I woke up") (Emanuelli [1961] 2021, 193).

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Unsheathing the Katana. The Long Fortune of the First Two Japanese Embassies in Italy: Rediscovery and Rereading between Continuity and Discontinuity (1873–1905)

Alessandro Tripepi[1]

Abstract: At the end of the nineteenth century, Italy welcomed an official embassy sent by the government in Tokyo to make Japan more integrated into the new world scene it was entering. The cultural and political elites of the peninsula had the chance to discover, or rather rediscover, the charm of a world that had been lost over the centuries. This essay aims to reflect on the means and meanings of this late nineteenth-century encounter. Indeed, from this moment onwards, Japan increasingly became part of Italian mental horizons, in particular through the rereading and reuse of two precedents dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that saw the two countries dialogue and "discover" each other for the first time.

Keywords: Italy, Japan, Iwakura, Boncompagni, mikado

1. Introduction

When historians examine the relations between Italy and Japan in contemporary era, they inevitably focus on the political and ideological ties that bound the regimes of the two countries from the 1920s, culminating in the alliance during the Second World War.

The intention of strengthening this friendship led the two partners to organize frequent mutual visits between the countries. However, due to the highly ideological nature of the axis between Rome and Tokyo, the attention of the visiting delegations was focused on short-term objectives. Cultural interest almost never prevailed over political and propagandistic ends, with both interlocutors attentive to the needs of the present.

During this period, many prominent political figures travelled in both directions (Vagnini 2015). In 1928, for example, the minister plenipotentiary of

[1] This result is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (TACITROOTS, PI: Giulia Giannini, Grant agreement No. n. 818098).

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Alessandro Tripepi, *Unsheathing the Katana. The Long Fortune of the First Two Japanese Embassies in Italy: Rediscovery and Rereading between Continuity and Discontinuity (1873–1905)*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.06, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 83-101, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Japan, Count Uchida, came to Milan at the end of his diplomatic mission in Paris.[2] In 1930, Imperial Prince Takamatsu travelled to Italy, accompanied by his wife.[3] Finally, a few years later, in 1936, F. Ushizaka, procurator on behalf of the mayor of Tokyo Masao Yoshiyama, stayed in Milan with "l'incarico di studiare ed ispezionare l'andamento generale del lavoro nell'amministrazione municipale della vostra città".[4]

The Italian press and society paid great attention to these occasions of encounter between the two countries. However, due to the duration of the visit and its cultural implications, the honeymoon of Prince Nobuhito Takamatsu and his wife Kikuko was the event that aroused the greatest interest. The *Corriere della Sera* described the sumptuous receptions and ceremonies during the imperial couple's stay in Turin, Milan, Florence and Rome. It also reported on the curiosity of the public as they witnessed the unusual procession of Japanese princes passing through the Italian streets (*Corriere della Sera* 1930a, 1930b).

While it was undoubtedly an unusual event, it was certainly not unique or isolated. There are in fact several more or less recent precedents of ceremonial journeys made to the peninsula by delegations and delegates from Japan.

The first Japanese journey to Italy, the one closest in time to the imperial couple's honeymoon, was made in 1873 by the minister plenipotentiary, Iwakura Tomomi. Before that, between 1585 and 1615, two other delegations had left the archipelago under the impetus of Catholic evangelization in the Far East. These embassies were one of the first tangible moments of cultural interaction between the European and Japanese worlds and were welcomed in Italy in an atmosphere of celebration and euphoria.

The journey of the young imperial couple can be seen as a piece in a complex puzzle. It was in fact the most recent trip that a delegation from Japan had made to Italy. There is, of course, no continuity—either in time or, above all, in meaning and purpose—between the various Japanese delegations that had crossed the Italian stage since the sixteenth century. However, the journeys of the various embassies over the course of more than three centuries can be used to tie up the threads of a fluctuating relationship between the peninsula and the archipelago.

Despite receiving great attention, the young imperial couple's trip (in addition to the political and ideological closeness between Rome and Tokyo) was not enough to set in motion a process during the 1930s to rediscover and reread a more or less distant past. In fact, neither the press nor the largest cultural forum giving a voice to Italian intellectuals, the *Nuova Antologia. Rivista di lettere scienze e arti*, took the trouble to examine the long relationship between the two partners.

[2] Archivio di Stato di Milano (from now on ASMi), Prefettura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio fino al 1937 - Serie I, 742.

[3] ASMi, Prefettura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio fino al 1937 - Serie I, 742.

[4] ASMi, Prefettura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio fino al 1937 - Serie I, 742: "the task of studying and inspecting the general municipal administration work carried out in your city".

All attention was instead polarized around the interests of the present. Indeed, if the more openly Catholic scientific journals—such as the *Gregorianum*—dealt with the theme of the *longue durée* of contacts between Italy and the Far East, they did so from a point of view totally in line with the regime's propaganda. For example, in his considerations on the evangelizing action of the Society of Jesus in China and Japan, the Jesuit Pasquale d'Elia placed the stress almost exclusively on the fact that the mission was an Italian initiative. In his articles on Matteo Ricci and Alessandro Valignano, the two Jesuits were the main focus of attention, while the consequences of their action provided but a blurred background to the narrative (D'Elia 1935, 121–30; 1940, 482–526).

In order to explain the reasons for such a specific interest in the historiography of the 1930s, it may be useful to refer to the theory of historicism, a conception of history which has its roots in the complex thought of Giovan Battista Vico (1688–1744). At the time of the above-mentioned Japanese visits to Italy, the greatest exponent of historicism in Italy was Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). In 1938, Croce published one of his most seminal books, *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (*History as Thought and Action*). In this book, the philosopher famously maintains that the only history that can exist is contemporary history, because all history is nothing but the manifestation of the interests of the present in which the historian lives: "perché, per remoti e remotissimi che sembrino cronologicamente i fatti che vi entrano, essa è, in realtà, storia sempre riferita al bisogno e alla situazione presente, nella quale quei fatti propagano le loro vibrazioni" (Croce 2002, 13).[5] While Croce was by no means involved in the Fascist regime, this conception of history could resonate strongly with the cultural atmosphere of the time and be intertwined with representations of Italian history aimed at satisfying the political needs and objectives of the present. In this sense, the reference to Croce can provide a methodological starting point for an essay that, in the 2020s, aims to reread the events of the early modern age through the documentary lens offered by the first sources to reconsider them, between the 1870s and the first decade of the following century.

Indeed, it is as a result of sudden changes in Italian and Japanese society between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the voyages of 1585 and 1615 regained the limelight. The reasons that led an entire generation of journalists, intellectuals and politicians to deal with the events of that distant past once again have to be sought in the needs of their present. These interests have to be taken into consideration in order to understand the inevitable relationship of continuity and discontinuity in the double chronological jump examined in these pages.

However, before we get there, let us go over the Japanese delegations' journeys to Italy between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries and what they represented in the two different eras, namely, the one when they took place and the one when they were rediscovered and reused.

[5] "because, however remote the facts may seem chronologically, in reality, history is always referred to the present needs and situation in which those facts propagate their vibrations".

2. The two embassies of the modern age

> Questi Principi Indiani hanno q.ta [questa] mattina nella sala Regia havuto il Concistoro publico levati al popolo da tutta la Corte, dalle guardie del Papa, et nel modo che si fa à gli altri Amb.ri [Ambasciatori] di Re […] essendo essi trè, et il quarto rimasto all'alloggiamento infermo, cioè due nipoti del Re di Fiunga, uno chiamato Yto Don Mancio et l'altro Chiyva Don Miguel nipote del Re d'Arima et del Re d'Omura. Gli altri dui sono principal.mi [principalissimi] ss.ri [signori] nel Giapon di quel regno di Figta, uno di nome Nocauro Don Iulian, et l'altro Fara Don Martin. Ha orato per loro un P.re [Padre] Iesuita Portughese, et essi sono comparsi in habiti Indiani, cioè con drappi d'oro a guisa di pacienze sopra vesti tessute di seta di varii colori a figura di diversi uccelli, con scimitarre al fianco stravaganti, et in testa cappelli di feltro mischio con piume bianche all'uso nostro.[6]

This is what the secretary of Pope Gregory XIII reported in March 1585 about his first meeting with the delegation of princes from Japan.

In this first image, the young Japanese delegates are placed at the edge of the scene. At the centre, the undisputed protagonists and narrators of the events were the Jesuits who accompanied them. Thus, a first interpretative problem is to understand the real dimension of these two modern-age journeys: on one hand their original meaning, and on the other the interests of the Italian society that welcomed them.

The two diplomatic initiatives that came to Europe from the archipelago should be seen in the political and cultural climate of the early modern era, when the birth of an increasingly connected world conditioned the actions of those European actors who claimed to be universal: the Philippine monarchy and the Counter-Reformation church (Broggio 2003, 249–89; 2004; 2013, 441–78; Visceglia 2013; Flynn, Giráldez, and Sobredo 2001; Clossey 2008; Tremml-Werner 2015, 192–99).

Two subjects with such a marked institutional asymmetry cannot be directly compared. A general parallel between these two actors, however, seems inevitable: indeed it is right to underline that both found their "Eldorado" in the Far East. They saw sixteenth-century Japanese society as the perfect context in which to assert their hegemonic models. The first, the Jesuits, opted for a spir-

[6] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 1053, Rome, 23 March 1585, ff. 138–39: "These Indian princes held their public consistory this morning in the royal hall in front of the people and the whole court in the manner of the king's ambassadors. There were three of them, while the fourth remained in his quarters because he was ill: one is a nephew of the king of Fiunga, and is called Yto Don Mancio, the other is called Chiyva Don Miguel and is a nephew of the king of Arima and the king of Omura. The other two are noble lords of the kingdom of Figta in Japan, one named Nocauro Don Iulian, and the other Fara Don Martin. A Portuguese Jesuit spoke for them; they appeared in Indian dress, that is to say: in robes of multi-coloured silk with various birds painted on them and with gilt inserts. They wore extravagant scimitars on their hips, and hats on their heads with white feathers as we are accustomed to wear."

itual conquest using the cross rather than the sword; the second, the Spanish, wanted to make Japan a bridgehead for their oceanic and imperialist ambitions. The archipelago was supposed to serve both as a port of call for their galleons on the long Pacific route crossings, and— above all—as an outpost for a (mainly dreamed-of) conquest of China (Boxer 1969; Sola 2012).

The hybridization of the hegemonic strategies of the two European players, with the Jesuits increasingly interested in the construction of a parastatal network and the Spaniards ready to exploit the contrasts existing between the Society and the other religious orders active in the East, led to an increasingly evident rivalry, which at the end of the 1580s resulted in ill-concealed hostility that ended up damaging both contenders (Broggio, Cantù, Fabre, and Romano 2007; Millán and Visceglia 2008, 26–31; Sola 2012, 23–39; Friedrich 2017; Corradi 2019; Tripepi 2021).

At the third vertex of this triangle were the political institutions of the Japanese archipelago. After an initial phase of fleeting opportunities for contact left to the initiative of Portuguese captains, the Jesuits were the first Europeans to settle permanently in Japan. From 1549, with the arrival of Francis Xavier, the Jesuit mission laid the foundations for the next half century of success (Boxer 1951; Elisonas 1991, 2008; Boscaro 2008; Correia 2018).

From the very first contacts, the Japanese institutions paid particular attention to the newcomers: in a period of great social unrest and a void of power since the end of the previous century, large sections of Japanese society looked to them with interest and sympathy. The weakest social classes were fascinated by the concepts of equality and personal freedom that traditional local religions did not contemplate. Moreover, in a period of violent wars and deprivation, the Christian concept of life beyond death was a reassurance in the face of conditions of misery and uncertainty. On the other hand, the so-called *daimyos*, the powerful territorial lords who gained possession of the voids left by the crumbling central power, considered the Jesuit fathers an opportunity to enrich themselves and their territories. It was in this climate that, from the 1550s until at least the second half of the 1580s, the Jesuits prospered and the religion spread throughout local society (Elisonas 2008; Bang 2015; Hesselink 2016; Wirbser 2017; Correia 2018; Tripepi 2021).

In the first 30 years of unexpected expansion for the Jesuit mission, the need for order and regulation had been overlooked. It was only in 1579, with the arrival of the visitor-general of the Indies, Alessandro Valignano, that the foundations on which the Jesuit missionary edifice rested were strengthened and stabilized (Moran 1993; Ross 1999; Luca 2005, 22–24; Tamburello, Üçerler, and Di Russo 2008).

Among the many operations carried out by the Jesuit from Abruzzo was the establishment of special seminaries, schools and colleges to create an indigenous clergy capable of actively integrating the work of the European missionaries. He also visited the great *daimyos* who were friends of Catholicism and it was from these meetings that the idea of a *Cerimoniale* for the brothers working in Japan was born. This operation was necessary so that they would be aware of

what behaviour and external manifestations Japanese society could expect from members of the religious hierarchy.

What Valignano did was formalize an evolution that had already started some time before. The text was therefore the ideological manifesto of the Society's actions in Japan and the first theorization of Jesuit syncretism. From now on, the fathers were advised to conform their external practices to the local Japanese religions: clothing, attitudes, even the architecture of the sacred places. In the Japanese minds, everything had to evoke the idea of respect paid to their religious authorities (Sanfilippo 1997; Catto 2011).

With the formulation of the theory of *adaptatio*, the Society completed on the doctrinal and theoretical level the evolutionary process that had already been underway for a decade on the political level. After these changes, in 1586, Valignano wrote to General Claudio Acquaviva in a state of despondency owing to criticism from inside and outside the order. The visitor's words, full of regret, show the difficulty of presenting the particular conditions present in Japan to the European world:

> [...] poiché le cose che avvengono così lontano [...] sono tanto caratterizzate da circostanze così ignote e insolite, come quelle del Giappone, non si lasciano comprendere in fretta e bene come conviene, essendo questo punto così importante, di certo mi perdo d'animo non sapendo come posso ben chiarirlo e farlo ben capire (Boscaro 2008, 215).[7]

Valignano's answer to the sceptics and detractors of the Jesuit actions in the archipelago was a masterpiece of cunning. By sending a delegation of young Japanese princes to Europe, he would confront the old continent with the reification of a very precise narrative of Japan: the Japan presented by the delegation and the one recounted by the fathers in their letters should totally coincide. In this way, the European world see the successes and difficulties of the Jesuit evangelization in Japan for itself and realize that, far from being blameworthy, the policy of adaptation to the circumstances had been useful for the spread and establishment of the Catholic faith there.

It is known that crowds met the Japanese princes on their European journey in what Angelantonio Spagnoletti defined as "a phenomenon of collective hysteria that crossed the Iberian and Italian courts" (Spagnoletti 2018, 225–26). Everyone was involved, and the Society's propaganda move was—at least in the short term—extremely successful: from Madrid to Rome, passing through Florence, Venice, Mantua, Ferrara, Milan and Genoa, everyone participated actively and with genuine interest in the passage of this unusual procession.

The return of the embassy coincided with the beginning of a new political phase for the archipelago, however, cementing what had already begun at the

[7] "[...] since things that happen so far away [...] are so characterized by unknown and unusual circumstances—like in Japan—they cannot be understood quickly or as well as they should be, and since this point is so important, of course I feel frustrated not knowing how I can clarify it and make it well understood."

end of the previous decade. Indeed, the 1580s saw the autonomist impulses coming from the endless galaxy of small and large local potentates be forcefully and steadily counteracted by the central political authorities (Hesselink 2016, 88–91, 97–102, 141–46; Correia 2018).

First Oda Nobunaga and then Toyotomi Hideyoshi succeeded in creating the basis for the definitive recentralization of political power. Despite starting under the best auspices for the Society, this new phase soon turned against the fathers. Supporting the independent positions of the southern *daimyos*, they were involved in the open clash that followed and were defeated and deprived of the position of advantage and privilege that had been their strength and fortune for almost half a century.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, took advantage of the new situation: uncompromising with the enemies of the new master of the Japanese political scene, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, they were seen as the perfect partner to make the country's economy flourish. The result was a profound split in the Catholic front, so much so that at the end of his reign, Philip II undertook an investigation campaign against the Society in order to discredit the fathers and limit their power and influence (Millàn and Visceglia 2008, 26–31).

The immediate result was a great increase in the presence of the Franciscan order in the archipelago, which was closely linked to the Philippine monarchy. The Jesuits had to accept the change, despite the attempts of Valignano who, in 1585, had managed to obtain a bull from Pope Sixtus V granting them the exclusive right to evangelize Japan: a bull that was swiftly disregarded and cast aside by the development of events.[8]

The idea of a second embassy came from a Franciscan, Luis Sotelo. The aim of the trip was to create a diocese in northern Japan to flank that of Nagasaki, which had been a Jesuit monopoly for decades: Sotelo hoped to become bishop of this hypothetical new diocese. In order to satisfy his career goals, the Andalusian Franciscan reached an agreement with the *daimyo* of Oshu, in the north of the archipelago, exploiting his ambitions to become the official intermediary in the trade between Spain and Japan.

A pompous diplomatic mission to Madrid was organized in order to negotiate new routes that would also allow the Japanese to reach Europe on a yearly basis (León-Portilla 1981; Gil 1991, 384–425; Alvar 1995; Fernández Gómez 1999; Lee 2008; López-Vera 2013; Colomar Albajar and Lázaro de la Escosura 2013). The request was somewhat provocative: to accept it would have meant that the Spanish king, Philip III, who had succeeded his father, would have voluntarily relinquished his position of global commercial supremacy and hegemony. So, it

[8] The archival documentation on this subject is both rich and explicit: Hideyoshi was aware of the hostilities within the Catholic front and decided to exploit them to his advantage. The growth of the Franciscan presence led to an increasing decline in the Society's importance. Even the bulls of Sixtus V were quickly disregarded and cancelled by his successors. *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu*, Jap. Sin. 12 II, ff. 191v–192r, Gams (1957, 132) and Sorge (1991, 29).

was inevitable that the king was reluctant to grant an audience to the delegates, all the more so after *daimyo* Date Masamune's decision to send the embassy on board the first ocean-going ship built and piloted entirely by Japanese seafarers.

The arrival of the vessel in Mexico was seen as—almost— an explicit declaration of war: not only did the embassy require the Spanish to voluntarily renounce their hegemony, but even showed them that this hegemony could be broken at any moment, with the direct entry of the Japanese into the transoceanic routes.[9]

The initial dismay was followed by rigid closure dictated by fear, the main victim being Sotelo's careerist ambitions.[10]

Developed and pursued in a context that was strongly hostile to the embassy's intended objectives, the Franciscan friar's legation project foundered once and for all when he returned to the East: arrested and imprisoned in the Philippines, Sotelo managed to escape and paid a Chinese captain to take him back to Japan. However, the favourable political climate of appeasement, dialogue and confrontation with the Europeans re-established after Hideyoshi's death, under the leadership of Tokugawa Ieyasu, soon changed with the rise to power of his son Hidetada, responsible for the first anti-Christian edicts and progressive closure to the European world. When Sotelo reached the Japanese coast, he was denounced as a Christian priest by the Chinese captain who had accompanied him. Locked up again in prison, he was found guilty and burnt alive in Nagasaki in 1624.

3. Recovering and rereading the past

The burning of the Sevillian friar was the extreme representation of Japan's definitive closure to the Christian religion. A few years later, in 1639, all Europeans would be expelled from the country and only the Dutch would maintain an entrepôt—subject to strict and severe controls—on the artificial island of Dejima (Iannello 2012).

For the next 250 years, Japan and Italy remained totally estranged worlds that almost lost all memory of these first contacts.

It was only in 1854, with the arrival of American gunboats commanded by Commodore Perry in Kanagawa Bay, that the archipelago was forced to reopen to the West and resume the contacts it had broken off more than two centuries earlier. From this moment on, and even more so with the fall of the shogunate and the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868, Japan took rapid and continuous steps to integrate itself into the existing network of international relations. In particular, in 1871 it became necessary to send a delegation with the task of re-

[9] Archivo General de Indias, Gobierno, Audiencia de Filipinas, 1, n. 150, ff. 1–3.

[10] Philip III's reaction was so harsh that not only did he initially deny the delegates an audience, but he also put a spanner in the works once they had left Madrid for Rome. There, in order not to risk Pope Paul V being persuaded to grant the two delegates what he had promptly denied them, he made sure that his ambassador in the city kept a constant watch on and informed him of every subsequent development. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Fondo Borghese, Serie IV, n. 65, lettere diverse, 1615 f. 56.

negotiating the terms of the "unequal treaties" stipulated by the archipelago with its western partners. Furthermore, the embassy was to collect useful and important information to facilitate Japan's entry into the restricted group of industrialized powers of the time.

The journey of the Iwakura delegation lasted several years and took the Japanese ambassadors to both the USA and the main European states. The stop in Italy, which lasted almost a month from 8 May to 2 June 1873, was one of the most prestigious on the journey (Nish 1998; Kunitake 2009). It was an opportunity to sew back together the threads of a relationship that had been interrupted at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The arrival in Italy of the first delegation truly expressing Japanese wishes and interests also brought the two modern-age embassies back into the limelight.

The focus on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missions was primarily based on documentary investigation, with the aim of reconstructing the material legacies produced by the two encounters. The task of bringing to light the events of that faded past was taken on by late nineteenth-century scholarship, in particular the Venetian Guglielmo Berchet (1877).

Berchet's work, published in 1877, is not only the first account of the two Japanese journeys almost three centuries apart, it also fits perfectly into the climate of his time: it was the inevitable consequence of the events that were taking place in that period. In fact, not only did Iwakura stop off in Italy in 1873, but only a couple of years later, in 1875, namely about a decade after the beginning of bilateral relations between the two countries, Rome and Tokyo began negotiations to create a permanent Japanese consulate on Italian territory, which was opened in 1876.[11]

The establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries generated extraordinary attention to all matters relating to Japan. Moreover, the fresh memory of the Iwakura mission provided a very close precedent to refer to in the study of the two modern-age missions.

The structure of Berchet's work betrays a purely erudite and descriptive interest: the sources recovered are not questioned, but simply presented to the reader as glimpses of a past reproposed in the present to arouse the curiosity of those who had only been aware of the existence of Japan for a few years. The same aim is also reflected in the meticulous attention paid to the more material aspects of these first encounters: the diplomas of Roman citizenship issued to the Japanese princes during their visits to the papal court, as well as the descriptions of the stuccoes and brocades in the rooms where they stayed, and the gifts brought from so far away to pay homage to the political authorities of the peninsula.

[11] The city originally chosen to host the consulate was Milan, as the Tokyo government considered it to be the most important economic centre in Italy. The initial aim, again on the Japanese side, was to boost trade relations between the two countries. The *Corriere della Sera*, established in 1876, gave a detailed description of the events of those years in its issue of 19 March 1882.

Berchet's work interpreted the climate of his time and was instrumental to the interests that saw Italy and Japan drawing ever closer together in those years: it was the result of the needs and ambitions of a political and cultural class that regarded the Land of the Rising Sun as a new "Eldorado" to reach out to, just as it had been for the Society of Jesus 300 years earlier.

In fact, at the same time as diplomatic agreements were being signed between the two countries, a pressing—and successful—advertising campaign was launched in all the main newspapers of the kingdom in order to convince Italian companies to invest in Japan, especially in the silk sector.[12] The interest of the Italian ruling class was to present the new relations established with the Asian country within a framework of continuity with the past. Through the constant reference to the precedents of the modern age, Japan could be defined as a "historical" partner of the peninsula. It is no coincidence that numerous newspaper articles were dedicated to the two modern-age embassies, both in the local and national press, when the Iwakura delegation was in Italy.[13]

The press benefited from the favourable climate that formed the backdrop to the resumption of official contacts between the two countries. Breaking the fourth wall, the two sixteenth- and seventeenth-century embassies went from being the subject of a narrative that had seen them as protagonists, to playing a passive role: a sort of mirabilia to be shown to the new guests arriving from the archipelago almost three centuries later.

> Questa mattina [gli ambasciatori giapponesi] si recarono a vedere l'Archivio generale dei Frari, e il portico del Seminario, dove si conservano memorie giapponesi, da essi esaminate col massimo interesse. Come abbiamo altra volta accennato, riportando i documenti dell'Archivio dei Frari, venne nell'anno 1585 da Roma a Venezia un'ambasciata preseduta dal signor Ito Mantio, e fu la prima venuta in Europa; poi nell'anno 1615 una seconda ambasciata, preseduta dal signor Nasekura. I documenti di queste ambascerie furono in parte pubblicati, e siamo informati che l'attuale ambasciata ne commisse la raccolta completa (*Gazzetta di Venezia* 1873).[14]

[12] For convenience, I have decided to refer to the issue of Turin-based newspaper *La Stampa* of 14 February 1877. The presence of three different advertisements within the same issue allows us to understand the pervasiveness, in the medium to long term, of an advertising campaign aimed at creating favourable conditions for the development of trade relations between Italy and Japan.

[13] In those weeks, the trip of the Iwakura delegation was one of the hot topics in the Italian press. Not only was there news about the various stages of the Japanese delegation's journey to Italy, but also in-depth columns were published on the customs and traditions of the archipelago, along with several articles recalling the centuries-old tradition of Italo-Japanese relations. These traced the roots of a renewed relationship of friendship and collaboration back to the two voyages that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. *Gazzetta di Venezia* 12 May 1873, 30 May 1873, 31 May 1873, 3 June 1873; *La Nazione* 10 May 1873, 13 May 1873, 15 May 1873, 20 May 1873, 26 May 1873, 31 May 1873, 5 June 1873.

[14] "This morning [the Japanese ambassadors] went to see the Frari general archive and the portico of the seminary, where Japanese memories are preserved, which they examined with

In rapid succession, in under 20 years, Italy welcomed the first official delegation from Japan (1873); authorized the establishment of a permanent consulate (by 1875); launched a widespread publicity campaign in all print media to encourage economic and trade relations with Japan; and started to build armaments for resale to Japan. From a propagandistic point of view, the two modern-age embassies undoubtedly played a central role in supporting the interests that linked Rome and Tokyo.

This unusual alliance held up well and indeed was further strengthened (and with it the interest in the two modern-age embassies) by the complicated evolution of the international framework as from the start of the new century Japan began to engage in a series of brazen and victorious military campaigns in Asia. The victims were mainly China and Korea, but it was clear to all that Russia was the real obstacle to Japanese interests. We can see the reaction of Italian public opinion as the tension between the two powers grew: conveyed by both the press and literature, with the publication of a new work dedicated to the two modern-age embassies, the peninsula looked upon the war exploits pitting the archipelago against its antagonists in the Far East with ill-concealed sympathy.[15]

It was in this climate that in 1904 Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi, a future senator of the Italian kingdom, published a second volume dedicated to the two delegations' journeys in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Boncompagni Ludovisi 1904). This work filled some documentary gaps in Berchet's essay, in particular describing the Roman sojourn of the two embassies in greater detail. Nevertheless, just like the text of the Venetian scholar, Ludovisi's work also veered towards uncritically chronicling the facts.

Although very similar in methodological approach to Berchet's previous work, owing to the calibre of its author and, above all, the debate it generated, Ludovisi's text marked a turning point in the reinterpretation of the two Japanese delegations' journeys during the modern age. At the same time, it also al-

the greatest interest. As we have already mentioned, the documents in the Frari archive reveal that in 1585 an embassy led by Mr Ito Mantio came from Rome to Venice, and this was the first to reach Europe; then in 1615 a second embassy was led by Mr Nasekura. The documents of these embassies were partly published, and we are informed that the present embassy commissioned a complete collection of them".

[15] The first news about the Japanese war effort in the Far East dates back to the summer of 1894. On 1 August 1894, the *Corriere della Sera* published an article referring explicitly to the conflict between China and Japan for the control of the Korean peninsula. The war, which lasted only a few months, saw the archipelago triumph over the Chinese Empire, creating the conditions for the subsequent war with Russia, which was worried about excessive Japanese interference on the continent. In this sense, the article in the *Corriere della Sera* of 15–16 March 1895 (*Corriere della Sera* 1895) is of great interest: "Le simpatie degli Europei sono tutte per i Giapponesi, perché si dimostrarono valorosi, coraggiosi, intraprendenti; e tutti augurano la vittoria finale al Giappone e la rovina dei Cinesi" ("The sympathies of the Europeans are all for the Japanese, because they are proving to be brave, courageous and enterprising; everyone [in Europe] hopes for a Japanese victory and a Chinese defeat"). See also Berryman, Neilson, and Nish (1994), Paine (2003), Zachmann (2009) and Fröhlich (2014).

lows us to take a deeper look at the motivations and interests that were at the basis of that particular turn-of-the-century rereading.

The first factor to consider is the origins of the author of the text. Francesco Boncompagni Ludovisi, born in the 1880s, was the young descendant of a noble Umbrian family whose origins date back as far as the sixteenth century (Re 1930). Going back in time, it is possible to note an interesting coincidence which, combined with the political contingencies of the young Francesco's time, may help to understand why he was interested in the two embassies that had arrived from Japan three centuries earlier. It is a coincidence that lies in his family origins, at least on the Boncompagni side, which can be traced back to Ugo Boncompagni, better known by the name of Gregory XIII.

It was precisely Pope Boncompagni who, in 1585, a few weeks before his death, had welcomed the first delegation from Japan to Rome with a solemn public consistory. This not only provides an instrumental explanation for the young Francesco's choice of subject for his work, that is, to pay homage to his illustrious ancestor, but it also helps to understand the methodological structure used throughout the text, with its attention to the cardinals' documentation and the notices composed by the papal secretaries. He had access to these documents, unlike Berchet 20 years earlier.

Moreover, the young Francesco was particularly attentive to the national and international political situation, both by personal inclination and family background. In the space of a few years, he embarked on a political career, becoming first a deputy and then a senator of the Italian kingdom (Margiotta Broglio 1969).

The specific interest in Japan shown by Boncompagni Ludovisi in his work can therefore—once again—be attributed to the "vibrations" produced by past events in the present. In this regard, the date of publication of the text is not at all accidental: 1904, during the most heated phases of the conflict between Russia and Japan in the East. It was precisely in those months that Italy risked becoming involved in the conflict.

The ill-concealed sympathy with which the Italian political tribune looked towards the Japanese triumphs in the East encouraged two of the most important Italian industrialists of the time, Giovanni Bombrini and Ferdinando Maria Perrone, to engage in building armaments to be resold to the Asian partner (*Corriere della Sera* 1904).[16] Both Bombrini and Perrone were closely involved

[16] The first news of the involvement of Italian industrialists in the construction of armaments for resale to non-European partners dates to an article published in the *Corriere della Sera* on 3 January 1902. On that occasion, the interests of Italian industrialists were linked to a conflict that had developed on the South American continent, between Argentina and Venezuela. Senator Bombrini expressly denied Italian involvement in the construction of armaments to be resold to the Buenos Aires government (*Corriere della Sera* 1902). However, on 10 January 1903 the *Corriere della Sera* again reported the launch of two battleships destined for Argentina from the shipyard of Sestri Ponente. Moreover, the article of 8 January 1904 goes on to report "strange" movements in the Spezia shipyards: it seems that munitions had been brought by an Italian navy ship to the two Ansaldo ships purchased by Japan (*Corriere della Sera* 1904). This umpteenth Italian involvement to the advantage of Japan confirms the entanglement between Italian industry and the Land of the Rising Sun.

in running the engineering and shipbuilding giant Ansaldo. The biggest problem, however, was that the projects for these armaments were executed by the Italian Ministry of the Navy; this put the Italian political authorities in a delicate position with respect to Russia, risking creating the conditions for Italy's involvement in the war. The disrespect towards the tsar was reported in the pages of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*, which had close ties to St Petersburg. These considerations were also quoted in their entirety in other newspapers, such as the *Corriere della Sera*:

> L'*Avanti!* protesta perché a Genova si è compiuto un contratto di vendita fra l'Argentina e il Giappone di navi costruite da una casa italiana, l'Ansaldo. Esso dice: "Le navi argentine avrebbero dovuto essere condotte in un porto argentino, oppure in qualsiasi porto estero e là si sarebbe dovuto conchiudere il contratto e cambiare la bandiera alle navi, ammainando i colori argentini e alzando il sole vermiglio del Mikado. Il far ciò all'ombra della bandiera italiana fu una sconvenienza verso la Russia. Non bisogna anzitutto dimenticare che queste due navi non sono creazioni della ditta costruttrice, ma che furono eseguite sui piani del nostro Ministero della marina. Tutte le tenerezze, tutti i riguardi per la Russia non esistevano che quando si trattava di giudicare i fischi dei socialisti, ma ora invece ogni riguardo per la Russia non esiste più. Ci sono di mezzo gli interessi degli industriali navali Bombrini e Perrone e quindi vada al diavolo la Russia e lo Zar e viva il Mikado!" (*Corriere della Sera* 1904).[17]

It was therefore fundamental for the political and cultural elite of the time to justify this choice, which had almost led to a diplomatic crisis with Russia, owing to the *longue durée* of relations with Japan. The concealed objective was precisely to trace back to the two modern-age embassies, on which Boncompagni Ludovisi's work intended to cast new light and greater notoriety, the reasons for an alliance that on the threshold of the new century was no longer only economic and cultural but evolving towards a political and military alignment.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, how should we consider Italian society's late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century reinterpretation of the journeys of the two embassies

[17] "*Avanti!* protested because a sales contract between Argentina and Japan of ships built by the Italian company Ansaldo had been concluded in Genoa. It says: 'The Argentine ships should have been taken to an Argentine port, or to any other foreign port, and the contract should have been concluded there and the flag of the ships should have been changed, lowering the Argentine colours and raising the vermilion sun of the mikado. To do this in the shadow of the Italian flag was improper towards Russia. First of all, it must not be forgotten that these two ships were not created by the construction company but built according to the plans of our Ministry of the Navy. All the endearment, all the consideration for Russia only existed when it was time to judge the socialists' whistles, but now consideration for Russia no longer exists. What is important here are the interests of the shipbuilders Bombrini and Perrone, and so to hell Russia and the tsar and long live the mikado!'".

that had arrived from Japan three centuries earlier? What were the aims of this political and intellectual process of reinterpretation? And finally, what consequences did it have on the intricate relationship between continuity and discontinuity at the basis of processes to reread the past?

Faced with a society that was ever more intimately connected to Japan, there was a clear need for the Italian elites of the time to explain the reason behind this connection to themselves and to the world. This need and purpose clearly emerge when consulting the digital archives of two of the main newspapers of that period: *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera*.

If we analyse the presence of the word "Japan" in the two newspapers year by year, we can see the exponential growth of the space occupied by this topic in Italian society: from a few dozen times in the early 1870s, to several thousand in the early 1900s. The increase remained almost constant, with two peaks: the first was around 1873–1878, while the second was reached in the first five years of the new century. The explanation is easy: in the first case it was due to the official resumption of relations between the two countries, the arrival of the Iwakura delegation and the creation of a permanent consulate in Milan. In the second case, the effects of the Russo-Japanese conflict that was raging in the Far East played a decisive role.

The newspapers of the time were a litmus test of the political and cultural interests of Italian society. The fact that Berchet's and Boncompagni Ludovisi's works saw the light precisely at the peak of Italian society's attention to the Japanese world encourages us to consider these rereadings of the modern-age embassies' travels as instrumental to a collective and national interest. Tracing the motivations for the increasingly pronounced partnership back to those early days was a strategy aimed at legitimizing the political, economic and cultural interests of the time. To use Croce's words, it was in essence the manifestation of how history becomes an instrument to refer to a present need.

On the other hand, this continuity, which found its greatest expression in the appearance of scholarly works dedicated to the long-standing relationship between Italy and Japan, needs to be compared to the appearance—at the very end of the conflict between the mikado and the tsar—of a scientific and intellectual debate in discontinuity with the narrative that had been offered until then.

In this sense, volume 35 of the prestigious journal *Archivio Storico Italiano*, published in 1905, contained a review of Boncompagni Ludovisi's work that deserves careful consideration. This was the first time that the focus on the two journeys made in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was taken out of the limited sphere of erudite and travel accounts, to instead concentrate on their real value:

> Dopo le opere del Gualtieri e del Berchet sulla prima ambasceria, e dell'Amati sulla seconda, e dopo quest'ultimo lavoro, dove si vedono raccolte, sopra entrambe, le notizie che fino ad oggi rimasero inedite, resta poco o punto a dire circa la venuta in Italia de' Giapponesi, e la dimora che vi fecero, le accoglienze che vi ebbero, e ogni altra particolarità di simil genere; ma resta molto a sapersi

> rispetto alla sostanza de' fatti. Intendo dire, che il leggitore europeo, il quale, da tutto quel che fu scritto, volesse, per esempio, farsi un'idea giusta del valore reale della prima ambasceria, non ne verrebbe a capo (Puini 1905, 468).[18]

The following pages describe the historical and political process that led to the organization and sending of the first delegation. From the arrival in the archipelago of the first Portuguese, who were soon joined by the first Jesuits, to the situation of political fluidity and instability in Japan at that time, and the convergence of interests between the *daimyos* and the Catholic avant-garde in the Far East: painted with rapid but precise brushstrokes, all this context was used for the first time to explain why the delegation was sent and to understand its objectives and results. It was also pointed out that "I PP. Gesuiti, che pensarono tale Ambasceria, ne esposero chiaramente il fine, e il modo che avevasi a tenere, modesto anzi che no, nel riceverla tra noi" (Puini 1905, 471).[19] What is more, the reasons for the erroneous conviction that "Que' giovani giapponesi […] furono aspettati ed accolti come se venissero a portare a' Principi d'Europa, specie al Pontefice, gli atti di devozione di tutto il Giappone, in nome del sovrano, o de' sovrani, che ivi allora regnavano" (Puini 1905, 471) were to be sought in European needs for greatness and splendour.[20]

Offspring of its time and of the needs of a political and cultural class that had become closer and closer to Japan since the 1870s, the attention paid in the first decade of the new century to the modern-age embassies created the intellectual conditions to break the continuity with the past and initiate a totally new phase. While starting from great nineteenth-century erudition, the new direction taken in the rereading of that distant past was one of progressive distancing from previous studies, creating the premises and the bases for a fruitful—and not yet fully concluded—phase of critical debate on the theme of the first Euro-Japanese contacts during the modern age.

Archives

Archivio Apostolico Vaticano (AAV), Fondo Borghese, Serie IV, n.65, lettere diverse, 1615 f. 56.

Archivio di Stato di Milano (ASMi), Prefettura di Milano, Gabinetto, Carteggio fino al 1937 - Serie I, 742.

Archivo General de Indias, Gobierno (AGI), Audiencia de Filipinas, 1, n. 150, ff. 1-3.

[18] "After the works of Gualtieri and Berchet on the first embassy, and that of Amati on the second, and after this last work, where we see collected hitherto unpublished information on both of them, there is little or nothing left to say about the coming of the Japanese to Italy and the stay they made here, the welcome they received, and every other detail of a similar kind; but there is much left to know about the substance of the facts. I mean that for instance, the European reader who should wish, from all that has been written, to form an accurate idea of the real value of the first embassy, would not be able to understand it."

[19] "The Jesuit fathers who planned this embassy clearly explained its purpose and the modest way in which it was to be received among us."

[20] "Those young Japanese [...] were waited for and welcomed as if they had come to bring to the princes of Europe, especially to the pontiff, the acts of devotion of all Japan, in the name of the sovereign, or the sovereigns, who reigned there at that time."

Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Jap. Sin. 12 II, ff. 191v-192.
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Lodovico Nocentini: A Rereader of Modern Italian Travellers to China

Aglaia de Angeli

Abstract: In 1882, Nocentini published *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci*. The first secular biography of the famous Italian Jesuit to China, it posed important questions about the origins of sinology and the role of Matteo Ricci as an early modern Italian traveller in Sino-western relations. Nocentini's rereading of Matteo Ricci and travel literature in Italy in the late nineteenth century is examined through theories proposed by Derrida, Barthes and Nabokov. These theories provide an interpretative approach to understand the rereading carried out in Nocentini's work, as they are intended as a process of interpretation and reinterpretation, as well as appropriation of the original meaning.

Keywords: Lodovico Nocentini, Matteo Ricci, sinology

> Curiously enough, one cannot read a book; one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, and active and creative reader is a rereader.
> Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (1980)

1. Introduction[1]

In 1882, Lodovico Nocentini published *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* (The First Sinologist: F. Matteo Ricci) in which he researched the historical figure of Jesuit father Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), who, alongside Marco Polo, received credit for the European discovery of China. Intended for an Italian readership, Nocentini's biographical work strove to reveal Ricci not only as a missionary figure, but above all as the first scholar to provide a bridge between Chinese and western knowledge. Nocentini's work on Ricci has long been forgotten, being regarded as of little scientific value. Yet, the text deserves our attention as it was the first to focus on the status of sinology in Europe, particularly Italy, in the second half of the nineteenth century, and more generally it explains the contribution of modern Italian travellers to Sino-western relations.

[1] I would like to thank Mauro Brunello, Maria Luisa Paternicò and Davor Antonucci for their help in identifying and checking the Jesuit sources. Any mistakes, however, are entirely mine.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Nocentini's remarks on Matteo Ricci and his contribution to the establishment of sinology as a field of study are reread in this paper through theories proposed by Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Vladimir Nabokov. Nabokov emphasizes that a good reader is someone who rereads. But rereading has two, non-exclusive meanings: to read again and to reinterpret. To reread and so to reinterpret an author, topic and publication such as Nocentini's *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* is a complex interpretative exercise that will be assisted by Derrida's and Barthes' theoretical approaches to rereading. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida affirms that rereading is a process corresponding to four actions: reinterpretation, new interpretation, appropriation and adding a new meaning. In his *S/Z* (1970), on the other hand, Barthes assumes a semiotic approach to rereading. For Barthes, rereading is a process of decoding in which the reader appreciates the plurality of meanings offered by the author right from the text's very drafting. Derrida and Barthes' quest for meaning will lead us to be rereaders of Nocentini, who in turn reread Matteo Ricci. By examining these rereadings over the long span of time between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, we find ourselves opening a long series of Chinese boxes. These boxes take us from philology to semiotics, to discover the meaning of rereading Italian modern travellers to China.

Ultimately, therefore, to analyse Nocentini is to understand his research as relating the legacy of Ricci to the formation of sinology as a field of study and to successive generations of sinologists. Furthermore, to discuss Nocentini's life and literary production is to acknowledge the journey in space and time and history that we are taken on when rereading *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci*, and to acknowledge what the re/reader of Nocentini's *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* is offered by travel literature more in general.

2. Rereader and author: Nocentini rereads Matteo Ricci and travel literature

Lodovico Nocentini was born in Florence in 1849, where he graduated in oriental languages in 1879. After a short period in the Italian diplomatic delegation to China, Nocentini began a long and successful career in academia and first became professor and chancellor of the University of Naples before moving to La Sapienza University in Rome.[2]

Nocentini was a prolific author and in a career lasting from 1878 to 1910 he produced more than 70 publications. He covered topics ranging from politics to languages and from social to cultural studies, regarding a vast area covering central, eastern and south-eastern Asia. In the early stage of his academic career, Nocentini dedicated most of his attention to China and Japan, with publications about social and cultural aspects of the two countries, including publications on the Chinese language and translated Chinese and Japanese historical texts, such as *La Ribellione di Masacado e Sumitomo* (1878) and *Il santo editto di K'anhi e l'amplificazione di Yun-cen* (1880).

[2] For a detailed biography of Nocentini, see De Angeli (2014).

A few years later, Nocentini published his first research monograph, which was not a translation of historical texts, but rather a work of research on Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci at the Ming court: *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci*. Nocentini conducted the research for this volume in the late 1870s and presented some partial results at the Fourth International Congress of Orientalists held in Florence in September 1878, before the full research results were finally published by Le Monnier in 1882. The text is a short monograph of only 59 pages, the first eight pages of which had been published in the records of the 1878 congress. The monograph is divided into three parts: the dedication, preface and text. In particular, the volume highlights that the research subject is Matteo Ricci, humanist, man of letters and science and sinologist; Ricci the missionary, on the other hand, only remains visible in the background, as his experience was nevertheless essential in enabling him to travel to China and relate to the Chinese literati and court. Nocentini was the first Italian secular author to write a biography of Ricci and his goal in compiling the work was to highlight the scientific and cultural dialogue between China and the West.[3] Today, Matteo Ricci is a well-known and widely researched figure, and the countless biographies and works assess his contribution to building a bridge between Chinese and western knowledge.[4] Yet, before Nocentini's publication in 1882, very little was written on Ricci and his legacy, a topic which was largely seen as falling within the competence of religious scholars. Therefore, Nocentini's work was novel in that he was a secular author and sinologist rereading Matteo Ricci and his legacy across the centuries: he was a young Italian academic trying to establish the role of post-unification Italy in the development of sinology, and proving the contribution of Italian genius to the world.

It is significant that the seventeenth-century boom in publications presenting Ricci's life and achievement in China was followed by a hiatus, until Nocentini's monograph. Literary productions focusing on Matteo Ricci started in 1610, the year of his death in Beijing. The first book about his work, entitled *Annua della Cina del 1606 e 1607 del padre Matteo Ricci della Compagnia di Giesu al molto R.P. Claudio Acquaviva generale della medesima* (Annuals for 1606 and 1607 by Matteo Ricci of the Society of Jesus to the Father Claudio Acquaviva General of the Same Society), was published by printer Bartolomeo Zannetti in Rome, followed in 1622 by F. Nicolas Trigault J.S.'s *Entrata nella China de' padri della Compagnia del Gesù. Tolta dai commentarii del p. Matteo Ricci di detta compagnia: dove si contengono il costume, le leggi, et ordini di quel Regno, ei principii difficilissimi della nascente Chiesa, descritti con ogni accuratezza, e con molta fede* (Entry to China by the Father of the Society of Jesus. Extracts from the Commentaries by F. Ricci of That Society Dealing with the Customs, Laws and Orders, and Very

[3] As far as I was able to establish at the time of this research, no other publication concerning Matteo Ricci was compiled by a secular author prior to Nocentini's (1882) work.

[4] Among the most important, albeit different contributions on the subject, see Spence (1984), Fontana (2005; 2010), Mungello (1989, 44–73) and Romano (2020, 105–166).

Difficult Start of the Newly Established Church, Described with Fine Details, and True Faith) by Neapolitan printer Lazzaro Scoriggio. Subsequently some extracts were published in *Regni Chinensis descriptio. Ex varijs authoribus* by Elzevir in Leiden in 1639. This was a reprint of the first book of the compilation put together by Nicolas Trigault in 1622. Finally, the Latin version of Trigault's book, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas ab Societate Jesu*, first issued in the 1610s, was republished in Cologne as late as 1684 by Wiedenfelt and de Berges.

Not one work on Matteo Ricci was published or reprinted during the eighteenth century.[5] Whilst the eighteenth century is known as the silver age of travel literature, it was also the century of the Enlightenment, the century of the Chinese Rites controversy and the century in which the old Society of Jesus was suppressed. It was a complex period, and the literary silence was a consequence of this complexity. In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV put an end to the Rites controversy with the *Ex quo singulari* bull. The bull affirmed that the "Chinese Rites", traditional Chinese practices of ancestor veneration which Ricci and his Jesuit followers accepted as cultural rather than religious, were in fact of a religious nature. Consequently, ancestor veneration was banned as un-Christian, dealing a major blow to the policy of accommodation implemented by Jesuit missionaries in China since Ricci. The Jesuits were also obliged to take an oath not to discuss the topic further.[6] The papal bull took the first step towards the suppression of the Society of Jesus by Pope Clement XIII in 1767, which initially targeted Jesuits in France, Spain, Portugal, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, and from 1773, through the *Dominus ac Redemptor* bull promulgated by Pope Clement XIV, everywhere apart from Russia. The suppression of the religious order in France was a facet of the entangled history of the Jesuits and the Enlightenment, as explained by Jeffrey Burson (2013) in his analysis of the polemic between Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier and Voltaire. France was the birthplace of the Enlightenment, and, as expressed in his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (Essay on the Manners and Spirit of Nations), it is well known that Voltaire was fascinated by China, so much so that he could be defined as a Sinophile. Voltaire was fascinated by Chinese antiquity and what he perceived to be China's supposedly superior moral and philosophical Weltanschauung. He admired China's enlightened absolutism and like Leibniz "maintained (at least nominally with the Jesuits) the Chinese were theists" (Burson 2013, 15).[7] While at the antipodes of Enlightenment thought, both Bergier and Voltaire were convinced that China was a theist country, as their respective Welt-

[5] There are no publications on Ricci during the eighteenth century except a republication in Chinese 经天该 (*Jing tian gai*) by 聽彝堂藏板 (Ting yi tang cang ban) published in Jiaqing between 1796 and 1819.

[6] For a comprehensive account of the Chinese Rites controversy, see Criveller (2012).

[7] Burson (2013, 17) explains that "Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* affirmed that the major discrepancy intimated in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament suggested that sacred history was no model for universal history, and that the Chinese tradition actually reflected an older and far superior tradition of ancient history."

anschauungen were "shaped by critical engagement with the very same travel literature about non-Western 'others'" (Burson 2013, 22), including Jesuit literature and the work of Matteo Ricci.

Religious accounts such those of Matteo Ricci belong to travel literature, a genre that evolved over the centuries and "attained much greater respectability, certainly a popularity and a usefulness" in the eighteenth century, even though in actual fact "many of the most readable, influential, and justifiably popular travel writers came before […] Defoe" (Adams 1978, 488). These included Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci. According to Percy Adams:

> the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [were] the Silver Age of Travel and Travel Literature; for from 1600, merchants, explorers, ambassadors, soldiers, scientists, Grand tourers, and missionaries roamed the earth and wrote their letters, journals, or other accounts in order to satisfy the demands of their superiors—as with East India merchants or Jesuit scholar-evangelists—to satisfy their own pleasure or vanity […] or, as with most, simply to profit financially from publishers eager to satisfy the great public demand for travel books of any kind (Adams 1978, 489).

Therefore, the absence of literature about Matteo Ricci is even more conspicuous in a century in which attention turned towards travel literature informed by non-western "others", particularly when one of its most prominent writers, Voltaire, was a Sinophile. According to Adams (1985, 147), it was "the influence of religion on the traveller's perception … [with its] pervasiveness and complexity" that discredited the Jesuits and led to the Chinese Rites controversy. For instance, "Jesuits in China—from Matteo Ricci in the late sixteenth century to Louis Le Comte at the end of the seventeenth century—made Confucius almost a Christ and often lauded the Chinese way of life over that at home" (Adams 1985, 147). Despite the Jesuits' influence over Enlightenment philosophers "with Voltaire and the *Encyclopédistes* still quoting Le Comte after mid-century" (Adams 1985, 147), these accounts tended to discredit the Jesuits in the eyes of the church. So, paradoxically, the Jesuits who were the source of inspiration for Enlightenment philosophers disappeared for the very reason that the church was uncomfortable with the implications of their ideas. Furthermore, the fact that historically, Voltaire's *Essai* is much better known than Bergier's *Traité historique et dogmatique de la vraie religion* (1780) highlights the linearity of narrative construction, which conceals an alternative point of view espoused by theists such as Bergier or the Jesuits who supported the French Royal family rather than Enlightenment-inspired reformists or revolutionaries. Burson explains that linearity belies a "more complex reality too often forgotten in the thick of historiographical controversy" (2013, 7), and so the eighteenth-century literary oblivion surrounding Matteo Ricci becomes the very embodiment of the association of the Enlightenment spirit with the Age of Reason, to the detriment of religion understood as a system of beliefs with a transcendental eschatology.

In contrast, the following century saw the reappearance of publications on Matteo Ricci, who has remained a subject of interest ever since. Nevertheless,

before Nocentini's publication in 1882, only three other works had appeared. The first of these was printed in Macerata and the title is self-explanatory: *Elogio di Matteo Ricci maceratese della Compagnia di Gesu recitato nell'adunanza dei Catenati la sera dei 3 settembre 1819* (Eulogy of Matteo Ricci Native of Macerata of the Society of Jesus Recited to the Assembly of the Academy of the Catenati on the Evening of 3 September 1819), by Giovanni Accoretti. Then two other publications, one by Michele Ferrucci, provided treatments of Ricci's own texts: *Dell'amicizia breve trattato del P. Matteo Ricci della Compagnia di Gesù* (On Friendship. A Short Treaty by F. Matteo Ricci of the Society of Jesus), published in 1825 to celebrate the marriage of Marquis Domenico Ricci Petrocchini and Ms Elisa Graziani from Macerata; and in 1853 the reprint of Ricci's *Trattato della Politica di Aristotele: Volgarizzato dal greco per Matteo Ricci con note e discorso preliminare* (Politics by Aristotle: Vulgarized from the Greek by Matteo Ricci with Notes and Preliminary Speech). The publications by Accoretti and Ferrucci came some years after the restoration of the Jesuit order in 1814,[8] and both were connected to local events: the former to the assembly of one of most prestigious and long-lived Italian cultural associations established in Macerata in 1574,[9] the latter to the marriage of a Ricci family descendant. Thus, Nocentini's publication was the first scholarly treatment of the figure and legacy of Matteo Ricci in over a century and can be seen as initiating the revival of interest in the figure.

3. The rereading theories of Derrida, Barthes and Nabokov

In his *Lectures on Literature*, Vladimir Nabokov asserted that "[c]uriously enough, one cannot read a book; one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, and active and creative reader is a rereader" (1980, 3). Nabokov stressed the characteristics of a rereader: someone who takes time to think, ponder, contextualize, that is, a reader who interrogates his or her own cognition of the text. But rereading also has another meaning: to reinterpret. In this specific case, we reread Nocentini, who rereads Matteo Ricci and all those who had written about Ricci before. And, in last instance, to reread means to reinterpret what was written in a different time, place or context. So, rereading means that we reconsider the text, the topic, the context and the author in a process of historical analysis. To facilitate engagement in this journey of rereading/reinterpreting Nocentini's work on Matteo Ricci, this study also uses Jacques Derrida's and Roland Barthes' theoretical approaches, as expressed respectively in *Of Grammatology* (1967) and *S/Z* (1970).

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida asserts that rereading is a process which comprises four actions: first, the reinterpretation of the text, that is, the same interpre-

[8] For a view on the restoration of the Society of Jesus and the role of Congress of Vienna, see Reinerman 1966.

[9] The Catenati academy for the study of letters and arts was established in Macerata on 2 July 1574, by a group of literati led by Gerolamo Zoppio. See "Academia dei Catenati" http://www.accademiadeicatenati.it/le-origini.html (Accessed October 6, 2021).

tation repeated one or more times (1998, 75), to be distinguished from; second, a new interpretation as rereading "past writing according to a different organization of space" (1998, 86). Thirdly, rereading includes "an act of appropriation" by the reader (1998, 180); and finally, it adds a new viewpoint, because "each time that I reread [the text] will give me new perspective" (1998, 312). Therefore, according to Derrida, rereading is a cognitive procedure that allows the reader to acquire and advance personal knowledge through the rereading process.

In contrast, Barthes assumes a semiotic approach to rereading. For Barthes, rereading is a decoding process which helps to explain how different codes of meaning work (1970, 3–4). Barthes affirms that "to interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it" (1970, 5). Barthes thus asserts the existence of plurality within the text itself: a plurality of meaning which is contained within the text from the moment of the author's first draft. Yet, Barthes also warns the reader that each text follows "a particular system of meaning […] based on connotation", which should not be "confused with association of ideas". In fact, for Barthes, "connotation is a correlation immanent in the text", while association of ideas "refers to the system of a subject" identified with the reader (1970, 7–9). Barthes underlines that the reader should appropriate the text in the awareness that his or her personal associations of ideas should not be mistaken for the author's connotations. Whilst the author's connotations within the text are evident for any reader, associations of ideas are exclusive to each individual reader as a consequence of his or her own personal experience and background. Developing his conception of the plurality of meaning within the text, Barthes explains that the "intellectualization of the text" through rereading helps to discover "not the real text, but a plural text: the same and new" (1970, 16). Whilst reading for the first time allows the reader to obtain knowledge of the story and protagonists, the reader only discovers associations on a second or further reading.

When rereading, already aware of the plot, the events and the protagonists of the text, the reader is at liberty to focus his or her attention on the emerging connotations. Freed from the need to acquire knowledge of basic facts regarding the story, the rereader is able to concentrate on the plurality of the text. Therefore, the more the reader rereads, the deeper the discovery of connotations and the larger the range of meanings that emerge, and so the reader acquires a plurality of possible text meanings.

Last, Barthes asserts that while rereading a text "multiplies the signifiers", this is "not to reach some ultimate signified" (1970, 165). This final point brings our attention to Barthes' special *summa*: semiotics.[10] Barthes reminds us that in rereading a text, the reader increases the number of connotations and expands the intertextuality. Barthes makes the reader consider how a text can convey more

[10] In linguistics, to "multiply the signifiers" means to multiply the physical forms of the sign, such as the printed words and images associated with the words, but not to reach some ultimate meaning or idea.

than one image and how reality may comprise a complex web of connections, facets and meanings, coexisting in complementarity rather than in contraposition. By reasserting the plurality of meanings within the text, Barthes denies any possibility of the reader reaching any ultimate meaning. For Barthes, there is no fundamental or absolute idea existing in a Platonic hyperuranion.

In the following sections, the theories of Derrida, Barthes and Nabokov are deployed to scrutinize *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* by Nocentini, which is approached through the following stages: interpretation and reinterpretation; explanation and contextualization; the restoration of connotations; the quest for meaning and the discovery of a plurality of meanings.

4. Interpretation and reinterpretation

This interpretative analysis is inspired by Barthes' understanding of rereading set out in *S/Z*, published in 1970. However, whilst Barthes applied his analysis to a novel, Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine*, published in 1831, I apply the techniques of rereading to a historical text, Nocentini's *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci*. Barthes teaches that the text needs to be decodified. In the case of Nocentini's text, three parts can be identified: the dedication, preface and text. Considering the text in its historical context, Nocentini compiled the work between the 1870s and the 1880s, as a secular author writing the biography of Jesuit father Matteo Ricci, using historical sources compiled by Father Bartoli, Father Acquaviva, Father De Petris, Father Cattanei, Father Costa, Father Bourgeois and Father de Magaillans.[11] It is evident that the sources available to Nocentini at the time were exclusively works compiled by religious scholars, who, in their turn, wrote biographies of Ricci focusing on his religious achievements, particularly the success of his proselytism. Although these works sometimes recognized his contribution to Sino-western relations, these aspects of his life were nevertheless placed in the background to the main theme. Nocentini reverses the focus of attention, putting Ricci's secular impact in the foreground and the religious aspects of his life in the background, while posing an important question: who launched the field of sinology, namely the study of Chinese language, history, customs and politics, in Italy?

5. Restoration and connotation

Nocentini's answer to his own question is apparent in his dedication: he dedicates his work as a disciple to his master, Professor Antelmo Severini, the first

[11] Most of these writers were contemporaries of F. Matteo Ricci, or part of the subsequent generation, the exception being Bourgeois, who lived in the eighteenth century: F. Claudio Acquaviva S.J. (1543–1615), F. Francesco de Petris S.J. who lived in China from 1563 to 1593, F. Lazzaro Cattaneo or Cattanei (1560–1640), F. Daniello Bartoli S.J. (1608–1685), F. Gabriel de Magalhães S.J. (anglicized as Magaillans) (1609–1677), F. François Bourgeois (1723–1792). I was not able to identify F. Costa.

professor of Chinese and Japanese languages in an Italian university. After graduating in Paris under the supervision of Professor Stanislau Julien, Severini was called to the Instituto di Studî Superiori in Florence where he started to teach in December 1864 (De Gubernatis 1876, 15, 381).[12] In the preface, Nocentini explains his dedication and the association of Matteo Ricci with Severini, the first chair of Chinese language in the Kingdom of Italy, as underlining the link between the origin of sinology with its development in post-unification Italy.

In his writing, Nocentini makes no mention of the Collegio dei Cinesi (Chinese College) in Naples, established by F. Matteo Ripa (1682–1746) in 1732 and officially recognized by Pope Clement XII. At the Collegio dei Cinesi, Chinese language was taught exclusively for the education of religious, who then were sent to missions in China. There are two possible reasons for Nocentini's exclusion of the Collegio dei Cinesi, forerunner of L'Orientale University in Naples, the first place in Europe where the Chinese language was taught, from his text. First, Nocentini expressly sought to compile a biography of Ricci which concentrated on his role as humanist and scholar (1882, 6), builder of Sino-western relations and promoter of knowledge of the West in China as well as knowledge of China in Europe. Secondly, Nocentini's exclusion of the Collegio dei Cinesi allowed him to abstain from involvement in the virulent ongoing discussion between the Italian state authorities and religious authorities responsible for the Collegio (De Gubernatis 1876, 403–4) in a historical context in which many educated Italians "desired to reduce the influence of the Catholic church and to laicize Italian life as rapidly as possible" (Halperin 1947, 18). It was a tendency that spanned party lines and as Halperin explained, it was argued that "the Weltanschauung of Roman Catholicism could never be brought into harmony with the values and needs of modern democratic society". The anti-clericalist educated classes in Italy "eulogized the progress of science and the forward march of secular scholarship as the harbingers of a better world", and denounced ecclesiastical obscurantism and opposition to liberal trends, because they "contended that the political weakness of the social backwardness of Italy could in considerable measure be ascribed to the influence which the church still exerted upon the masses" (Halperin 1947, 18).

According to Nocentini, Professor Severini delivered a lecture at the Circolo Filologico di Firenze (Florence Philological Society),[13] where he introduced Matteo Ricci as the scholar who opened Europe to knowledge of the languages spoken in East Asia and who made it possible to enjoy the vast literary production of that part of the world. Nocentini also remarks that Chinese only began to be taught in Italy in 1864, and "Chinese literature was ignored, as translated

[12] In 1876 the institute provided courses on Arab, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese (De Gubernatis 1876, 426).

[13] The Circolo Filologico was established in Florence in 1872 by Ubaldino Peruzzi (1822–1891), member of one of the most influential families in the city, twice mayor of Florence and president of the executive board of the Istituto di Studî Superiori.

texts were lost, or more precisely what remained available were simple extracts of Ricci's paraphrases of some Chinese classics" (Nocentini 1882, 6). According to Nocentini's preface,

> Il P. Ricci fu il primo ad estendere i vantaggi delle missioni alla scienza, divulgandola nel Reame di Mezzo: e sebbene egli vi si adoperasse solo collo scopo religioso, non gli vien meno per questo il gran merito di aver messo in una intellettuale comunicazione, come ci accingiamo a dimostrare, popoli che stanno ai lati opposti del nostro emisfero (1882, 6).[14]

The dedication and preface associating Matteo Ricci with Antelmo Severini, and their interpretation by Nocentini, underline the primacy of the Instituto di Studî Superiori in Florence in the teaching and study of Chinese language and literature in Italy. At the time, the institute was recognized as the best in the whole of Italy for the study of oriental languages (De Gubernatis 1876, 426). From 1866 to 1872, Nocentini himself studied at the Institute in Florence,[15] at a time when the city was the capital of the Kingdom of Italy.[16] Although the capital subsequently moved permanently to Rome, Florence remained the cultural capital and the main publishing centre in the Kingdom of Italy,[17] and it was in this environment that Nocentini spent his formative years.

In the preface, Nocentini goes on to explain how the missions contributed to bridging distant, unknown people and cultures. Nocentini quotes Abel-Rémusat, affirming that the missionaries "[cominciarono] a studiare i costumi, le credenze e gl'idiomi dei popoli che abitavano le regioni più ad oriente dell'Asia, e si trattò di stabilire una cattedra di lingua tartara nell'università di Parigi" (1882, 4).[18] Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), to whom Nocentini refers, became the first professor of Chinese and Tartar-Manchu languages at the Collège Royal, forerunner of the Collège de France, when the chair was established in 1814 (Will 2015).

[14] "Father Ricci was the first to extend the advantages gained by the missions to the sciences as he divulged knowledge of the Middle Kingdom: although he only identified with the religious goal, as we will show he did not lack the great merit of establishing intellectual communication between peoples who are at the opposite ends of this hemisphere."

[15] The institute was established in 1859 to group formerly dispersed disciplines taught in several famous academies such as the Accademia della Crusca (Crusca Academy) and the Accademia del Cimento (Academy of Experiment) and in various locations within the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. These disciplines were restructured within the Istituto di Studî Superiori Pratici e di Perfezionamento (Institute for Advanced Practical and Specialization Studies), formally recognized as the University of Florence when it was renamed in 1924.

[16] Florence was capital of the Kingdom of Italy for six years from 1865 to 1871.

[17] For more information about the role of Florence as the capital of culture and the publishing industry in the Kingdom of Italy, see Poettinger (2018).

[18] "[started] to study the customs, the religious beliefs and the languages of people living in East Asia, and so a chair of Tartar language was established in Paris".

6. The quest for meaning

The dedication and introduction set the tone for the content of the text. The following sections analyse the connotations of the text, using a selection of paragraphs to explore the meaning of Nocentini's research.

In the preface, Nocentini explains that studying languages is equivalent to rereading travels, making particular references to Marco Polo and the missionaries, Leibniz and Catherine II of Russia. Below, I explore why these examples provide support for Nocentini's connotation that the study of languages and rereading travel are related activities.

Nocentini examines Marco Polo's goals in studying the language spoken in China at the time of the *Pax Mongolica*,[19] and deduces that the language was a tool of communication in order to do business and deal with everyday tasks, assuming a utilitarian approach. Nocentini seems to tread the same path as De Gubernatis with regard to the primacy of proto-Italian merchant-travellers in East Asia, whom he credits with opening the road to Asia, soon to be followed by the missionaries. It follows that merchants were the first to acquire knowledge of the language (De Gubernatis 1876, 19). On the other hand, Nocentini compares the famous Venetian traveller with Ricci and the missionaries who followed in his footsteps, who saw the Chinese language as a tool of communication that should be fully mastered in order to proselytize and translate the Scriptures. Nocentini juxtaposes the medieval travellers and merchants with the Renaissance missionaries and humanist men of letters and science to underline how, for the latter, the language itself became a goal. Consequently, Nocentini argues, the Jesuit fathers mastered the language to a greater degree than anybody else. The credit Nocentini allocates to the Jesuits ignores the fact that they were not the first Christian missionaries in China. Both Dominican and Franciscan friars had travelled to China at the time of the *Pax Mongolica* and, like Marco Polo, were received at the Yuan court.[20]

Nocentini presents Marco Polo as a true example of a merchant and traveller, for whom language knowledge was a tool for conducting business and dealing with daily life. Nocentini suggests that the lack of high culture among merchants such as Marco Polo made them unable and unsuitable to transcribe other language sounds, such as those of Mongolian or Chinese, or to translate a foreign language. Nocentini argues that this lack of education was the primary reason why the notes and explanations in Marco Polo's *Il Milione* were so long and plodding (1882, 2).[21]

[19] The term *Pax Mongolica* indicates a period of time (c. 1280–1360) during which Mongol domination seemingly guaranteed security on the Eurasian commercial routes. See Di Cosmo (2010).

[20] For more information on Franciscan missions to China, see Dawson (1966); and on the Dominican Friars, see Marsh-Edwards (1937).

[21] Though it is impossible to establish with certitude which edition Nocentini consulted for his research, the following were available in Italian at the time and could potentially be identified with his judgement: Baldelli Boni (1827) or Marco Polo (1829). For other nine-

Therefore, we may conclude that, for Nocentini, the study of Chinese was not suitable for merchants and travellers, both because they lacked the necessary education and because their approach was utilitarian. Nevertheless, in placing the merchants first in the timeline, he may be seen as following De Gubernatis who explained that the study of Arabic and Turkish languages started in Italy as a result of commercial exchange between Italy and the Middle East (De Gubernatis1876, 19).

However, Nocentini ignores the fact that Marco Polo visited and resided in China during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) which was of Mongol origins,[22] and that consequently the language used at court during this period was Mongol and not Chinese.[23] Nocentini compares the travellers and merchants of medieval times with missionaries, without specifying whether he is referring to the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries who travelled to China during the *Pax Mongolica*, and were thus contemporaries of Marco Polo, or those who came later, following in the steps of Matteo Ricci. Regardless of this lack of specificity, in Nocentini's parallel, he sees a commonality between Marco Polo and the missionaries, in that both came from the Italian peninsula and travelled to China.

The other two examples provided are personalities with a very high cultural impact, but who never travelled to China.

The first of these is Leibniz. Nocentini writes that for Leibniz, "le lingue sono il monumento incancellabile della Storia, per le quali possono scoprirsi le migrazioni dei popoli e riannodarsi i fatti che essa narra staccati e confusi" (1882, 3).[24] Nocentini rereads Leibniz's conception of the history of languages in which he redefined the concept of *Ursprache,* which he had borrowed from Jakob Böhme (1575–1624). Böhme had defined the *Ursprache* as a single "radical and primitive" language associated with the shared origins of all nations. Leibniz accepted this concept, renaming it the *Lingua Adamica*. As Walker explains, Leibniz accepted "an ancient, but still living tradition, according to which the original primitive language of mankind, before the tower of Babel, was that in which Adam named the animals, giving them their true, natural names because, in his state of paradisiac universal knowledge, he knew their true natures" (1972, 299–300). Leaving aside Leibniz's *Lingua Adamica* theory, Nocentini rereads Leibniz, who in turn had reread the phonetic symbolism of Socrates and Plato (Walker 1972, 299–300), but in this case, he does not reinterpret or engage with the argument. Rather, he quotes it in order to establish his knowledge and authority on the subject. The topic of the *Ursprache* can be considered as having been fashionable at the time, as De Gubernatis (1876, 18), in the introduction of *Matériaux,* also writes about the search for a universal language.

teenth-century editions of *Il Milione* published in nineteenth-century Italy, see the essay by Laura De Giorgi in this volume.

[22] For a contextualizing reading, see Larner (1999).

[23] Larner (1999, 168) specifies that Marco Polo indicated the names of places in China using Mongol or Persian.

[24] "languages are an indelible monument of History and proof of the migration of peoples because languages help to trace those peoples' migration along their uneven and unlinked paths".

The last sample presented by Nocentini on this theme is the dictionary compiled at the behest of Catherine II of Russia.[25] According to Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, "Catherine the Great, a highly cultured and educated woman, planned the production of a universal and comparative dictionary of all languages of the world, hoping to find a primitive, original language" (2006, 196). This project was the first of its kind that attempted to relate European and Asian languages. The first edition, compiled under the supervision of Peter Simon Pallas,[26] consisted of two volumes appearing in 1786, while the second edition, compiled by Fëdor Ivanovich Yankovich in the years 1790–1791, also included African dialects (Nocentini 1882, 28–9; Pallas and Yankovich 1790).[27] Nocentini's discussion of this literature suggests that research into a universal language was still a topic of debate among linguists and philologists in the late nineteenth century.[28]

7. The plurality of meanings

Nocentini's text does not shed much light on the scientific value of Matteo Ricci's work, but it does shed light on events, contexts and situations surrounding the establishment of sinology as a field, and its development in Europe and in Italy in particular. By rereading Matteo Ricci as a modern Italian traveller, Nocentini sought to establish Italian primacy in the field, asserting that Professor Antelmo Severini was the first modern academic sinologist in the Kingdom of Italy.

The main text can be divided into a first part (1882, 7–40), in which Nocentini narrates the life and experience of Matteo Ricci and his closest Jesuit followers in China, and a second part (1882, 41–51), in which he focuses on the contribution made by Ricci to European knowledge of the Chinese language and the diffusion of western scientific knowledge in China. These two sections are of limited interest to this analysis because they offer little of value compared to present-day knowledge on the subject.

In contrast, the concluding part of the text (1882, 53–9) provides three listings that form the main focus of this analysis. This conclusion is explored below in order to reveal the connotations and their context and reveal the plurality of meanings. The records include 1) an inventory of lists of Matteo Ricci's publi-

[25] According to Anthony Cross (2014, 105) in the *Memoir of a Map of the Countries Comprehended between the Black Sea and the Caspian; with an Account of the Caucasian Nation, and Vocabularies of their Languages* (1788) attributed to George Ellis (1753–1815): "The specimens of the various languages were drawn from Pallas's universal comparative dictionary, compiled with the encouragement of the empress."

[26] Pallas was a German scholar and professor of natural history at the Academy of Science in Saint Petersburg. He was well known for his travel and discoveries in Siberia. See Pallas (1948), Urness (1967), Parker (1973), Brown (2006, 9: 146).

[27] Nocentini refers to him using the Italian transliteration Jankievitch, but he is also known as Theodor Yankievich de Mirievo, famous for developing and implementing educational reforms in the Austrian and Russian empires. For more information, see Okenfuss (1979).

[28] For a detailed analysis of research in Italy into a universal language, see Pala (2020).

cations by other authors; 2) an index of biographies and other published works on Matteo Ricci and his views on China; and 3) a list of influential sinologists since the time of Matteo Ricci as identified by Nocentini.

7.1 Matteo Ricci as an inspiring author for the history of China

Nocentini provides an index of authors offering Matteo Ricci as the source for their works on the history of China or dictionaries of the Chinese language. He remarks on the diversity of these bibliographical works compiled by different authors, and suggests that this was because each author made his own translation of Ricci's Chinese titles (1882, 54). These bibliographical works were compiled by Daniello Bartoli, S.J. (1608–1685) in *Cina*,[29] Athanasius Kircher, S.J. (1602–1680) in *Cina Illustrata*,[30] Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1622–1693), Pedro de Ribadeneira, S.J. (1526–1611), Martino Martini, S.J. (1614–1661), Francesco Predari (1809–1870) in *Origine e progresso dello studio delle lingue orientali in Italia* (1842), Augustin De Backer, S.J. (1809–1873) in *La bibliothèque des écrivains de la Compagnie de Jésus* (1853–1861) and Giuseppe Angelo De Gubernatis (1840–1913) in *Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire des études orientales en Italie* (1876).

Unfortunately, Nocentini does not provide any details as to where he found the bibliographical references for Couplet, Ribadeneira and Martini, leaving us to assume that he availed himself of somebody else's work. If this is the case, Nocentini rereads an unmentioned author, who in turn rereads the originals by Couplet, Ribadeneira and Martini respectively. Nonetheless, the authorship of the bibliographical works included in the list does provide us with some ideas on what sources were available to a scholar of Ricci in the second half of the nineteenth century in Italy. This includes the indices of Ricci's works compiled by other Jesuits, mostly published in the second half of the seventeenth century, and after the Enlightenment hiatus during the eighteenth century, three authors publishing from 1842 to 1876 whose studies Nocentini therefore considered the most recent and comprehensive. Consequently, we may agree with Nocentini's conclusion that regardless of the authors' religious or secular background, education, nationality, and the period they lived and published, all had reread Matteo Ricci's work in order to inform their own research on the history of China.

7.2 Biographies of Matteo Ricci and his views on China

A second line of research relates to works reading Matteo Ricci's life and his views on China. Nocentini writes that Giulio Aleni, S.J. (1582-1647) compiled a biography of Matteo Ricci that was published in Chinese, 大西西泰利先生行蹟

[29] Nocentini refers to the third volume (1663) of Bartoli's five-volume *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesu* (1653–73).

[30] Nocentini refers to *China Monumentis qua Sacris quà Profanis, Nec non variis naturae & artis spectaculis, Aliarumque rerum memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata* (1667).

(*The Life of Master Li Xitai from the Great West*) (1630), whilst two other Jesuit fathers, Pierre Joseph d'Orléans (1641–1698) and Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), authored a biography of the missionary from Macerata, published in German and entitled *Leben des P. Mathaeus Ricci, Missionärs in China, aus der Gesellschaft Iesu*, (The Life of F. Matteo Ricci, Missionary in China from the Society of Jesus), which was part of a series entitled *Leben des ausgezeichneten Katoliken der drei letzen Jahrhunderten* (The Lives of Eminent Catholics of the Last Three Hundred Years). D'Orléans published the very same title in French in Paris in 1693: *La Vie du P. Matthieu Ricci de la Compagnie de Jésu*s. D'Orléans being born in 1641, he was not Trigault's contemporary, as the latter died in 1628. Therefore, we may deduce that Albert Werfer— editor of the German series—reread and copied D'Orleans, who in turn had reread Trigault. Nocentini admits that he only consulted the publication by Trigault, excluding any others that may have been available, explaining his reasons as follows:

> In esso, come in tutte le biografie e scritti di missionari si tratta unicamente del Divulgatore della fede cattolica, dei resultati da esso ottenuti nell'adempimento della sua missione, dei mezzi impiegati per stabilirla, delle virtù e dell'ingegno di lui. È probabile per la qualità degli autori, che lo stesso sia degli altri scritti (1882, 54).[31]

Nocentini openly admits that he only reread one biography, as he considered Trigault the first in the supply chain and assumed that all of the deriving publications would be the same. He leads the reader to believe that the authors' common clerical origins left no room for the plurality of meanings that different kinds of authors from different backgrounds might have offered.

7.3 Inspiring sinologists since Matteo Ricci

The third and last task tackled by Nocentini's rereading of Matteo Ricci is to evaluate the legacy of the famous Jesuit father in the founding of sinology as a field of science. In so doing, Nocentini provides a handful of names: Thomas Hyde (1636–1703),[32] Theophilus Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738),[33] Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743), Étienne Fourmont (1683–1745)[34] and Antonio Montucci (1762–1829).[35] In Nocentini's publication, modern sinology is represented by a rose of five names, including four nationalities: English, German, French and

[31] "This, like all biographies and writings by missionaries, deals exclusively with the Disseminator of the Catholic faith, his accomplishments in the execution of his mission, the means used to establish the mission, his virtues and abilities. It is probable that due to the kind of authors, the other writings are also the same."

[32] For more regarding Hyde and the development of sinology, see Lehner (2010).

[33] For a comprehensive biography of Bayer, see Lundbæk (1986).

[34] For more about the roles of Du Halde and Fourmont, see Lehner (2010).

[35] For the history of the Montucci family and a biography of Antonio Montucci, see Cherubini (2017, 2018).

Italian. While Hyde in England, and Du Halde and Fourmont in France, were active in their own countries, Bayer made his career in Russia and Montucci first in England, then in Prussia and finally in Dresden. Whilst Bayer and Montucci, born respectively in pre-unification Germany and Italy, were important sinologists, they pursued their careers abroad due to a lack of opportunities in their home countries. Undoubtedly, Nocentini rereads their career paths through a nationalistic lens. Yet, this list of names is very peculiar for two reasons. First, in a book published in 1882 there were only references to authors writing during the period spanning the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. This is because Nocentini drew his information from the *Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises* published in 1811 by Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat. Nocentini cleanses his translation into Italian from any references to France's role in sinology and its primacy as the first country in Europe to have a chair of Chinese language and literature. Moreover, among those names quoted by Nocentini as inspiring sinologists, none had actually visited China.

Secondly, Nocentini rereads Abel-Rémusat and his dated publication, published more than 70 years before, and at the same time *Matériaux* by De Gubernatis (1876), which discusses the history of Italian sinology, because he wishes to credit Matteo Ricci as the creator of the discipline and to prove that Italy had been the first country in which modern sinology had gathered momentum.

8. Coda: rereading travels – a journey in history

Nocentini's rereading of Matteo Ricci concludes with a bitter dénouement. Nocentini comments:

> La Cina ha pubblicato più volte e anche in questi ultimi tempi gli scritti di questo straniero [Matteo Ricci], ha posto il nome suo insieme con quello degli uomini illustri, ha inalzato per regale munificenza un monumento, nel quale le sue ceneri riposano venerate. L'Italia, che dovrebbe far suo vanto noverar fra le sue glorie il nome di Matteo Ricci e trarre oggi più che mai dalla memoria dei suoi Grandi forza e coraggio a riconquistare nel mondo il posto che le spetta, come ha onorato questo suo figlio? Il suo nome è quasi sconosciuto, i suoi commentari furono dati in luce sotto il nome di un altro, le sue lettere sono o perdute o confuse con altre, e le sue traduzioni, nessuno sa dove sieno! (1882, 59)[36]

This statement looks flawed today, as Matteo Ricci is well known and his lasting influence is testified by the innumerable works on him, his writing and

[36] "Several times and also recently China has published the writings of this foreigner [Matteo Ricci]. It places his name alongside those of other illustrious men, by royal munificence it has erected a monument where his ashes rest venerated. How has Italy, which should boast of the name of Matteo Ricci, and today more than ever should draw from the memory of its Greats the force and courage to win back its rightful place in the world, honoured her son? His name is almost unknown, his commentaries published under the name of someone else, his letters either lost or confused with others, and his translations, nobody knows where they are!"

legacy. Nocentini's lament needs to be contextualized, however. It provides a useful insight into the perception of Italian sinology in the early 1880s as a discipline with great potential, but *only* if Italy and its institutions could prove that it was founded by Matteo Ricci. In Nocentini's eyes, this remaking of the genealogy of Italian sinology, acknowledging Ricci as its founding father, would help to reaffirm the primacy of Italian sinology and establish the importance of Italian genius to the world. Nocentini was the first secular author, a modern Italian academic, to remark on the contribution of Matteo Ricci to sinological studies; he identified the establishment of sinology as a discipline and traced it to the illustrious Jesuit father, and in so doing underlined the role of Italian travellers and modern sources as the origin of sinology in post-unification Italy.

Furthermore, to reread Nocentini with the help of Barthes, Derrida and Nabokov's approaches is to reinterpret the text. This method of analysis has provided Nocentini's *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* with explanations and contextualization, such as the eighteen-century hiatus in scientific production about Ricci due to the connection between Enlightenment ideals and the Chinese Rites controversy. The analysis has explained the paradox between the Sinophile position of Voltaire and the lack of reference to the Jesuits, and Matteo Ricci above all, during the silver age of travel literature, which was especially influenced by non-western "others". The historical contextualization has also provided an explanation of why the oldest and best-known sinological institute in Italy, the Collegio dei Cinesi in Naples, is not mentioned in the text.

Moreover, Nocentini's work on Ricci reveals a plurality of meanings within the text. On a number of occasions, Nocentini uses similitudes to validate his opinions and establish his academic authority. Nocentini equates Florence, the new capital, with Italy, seeing the city as the epicentre of the cultural life of the country. Consequently, Nocentini elevates the Instituto di Studî Superiori in Florence above the Collegio dei Cinesi in Naples and thus raises the secular approach to the study of Ricci pursued at the Instituto above the religious approach which predominated at the Collegio. Another example of the use of similitude is the association of Professor Antelmo Severini with Matteo Ricci. Nocentini portrays both—in different times—as masters of the Chinese language and the forefathers of sinological studies in Italy.

Finally, on the rereading of travel literature as a medium through which to interpret history, this study of Nocentini's *Il primo sinologo: P. Matteo Ricci* shows that for Nocentini, studying language was a way to reread travel. He rereads travellers—whether missionaries or merchants—as people learning a new language, but differentiates them according to the different goals pursued through their learning: utilitarian for merchants, scientific for Ricci and his missionaries.

At the same time, to reread Nocentini now means to reread Trigault, who in his turn reread and transcribed or translated Ricci; and Nocentini notices that Kircher reread Martini, who in turn reread Trigault. In these last rereadings, we also become aware that many seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries publications on China, as well as some early-nineteenth-century publications, were written by authors/rereaders who had never visited China themselves, but in

their turn relied on publications by the Jesuit Fathers of the seventeenth century, who had first-hand experience of both the journey to China and residence in the country, but who also copied from Matteo Ricci's earlier writings about his personal experience. Therefore, Nocentini is right to claim that all this rereading stems from Matteo Ricci, a modern Italian traveller and the first sinologist.

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Searching for 'Italianità' in the Dodecanese Islands (1912–1943). Some Considerations on Art, Architecture and Archaeology through the Works of Hermes Balducci

Luca Orlandi

Abstract : The rediscovery and promotion of fourteen islands in the Aegean Sea – renamed the Dodecanese Islands – annexed to Italy as a military possession while formally under the dominion of the Ottomans, might be considered another phase in the search for an Italian identity. From 1912 to 1943 these islands experienced Italy's ambiguous presence as invaders and colonizers. This paper aims to highlight the concept of *Italianità* through the works of Hermes Balducci, one of the protagonists of Italian colonial architecture in the Dodecanese Islands. To this end and using lesser-known material, this case study intends to recreate and redefine the past of the Italian presence on these islands and provide an interesting point of view in the search for a lost and rediscovered Italian spirit.

Keywords: Dodecanese, Italian possession, Italianità, Hermes Balducci

1. Introduction

The archaeological and architectural traces in the Dodecanese Islands are striking in the historical stratification that has formed since ancient times: Greek and Hellenistic temple ruins; palaces and mosaics from the Roman period; early Christian and Byzantine churches; walls, fortifications and houses from the era of the Knights of St John; Ottoman mosques with dome structures and slender minarets, baths and public fountains, are just some examples of the tangible richness of the islands' cultural heritage. How Italy dealt with this heritage is probably one of the most original stories in the colonial experience of the Kingdom of Italy and the Fascist empire in the Mediterranean. While partially drawing on already known material, this paper nevertheless aims to offer new keys of interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon from an architectural and archaeological point of view.

The cultural policies undertaken by the Italians in the Dodecanese Islands in the period 1912–1943 and their reflections on art and architecture have long been considered a marginal topic in Italian studies, and mainly perceived as part of an immensely uncomfortable past. This discomfort is unavoidably connected to the imperialist vision and policies of those years, both in the first period of

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Luca Orlandi, *Searching for 'Italianità' in the Dodecanese Islands (1912–1943). Some Considerations on Art, Architecture and Archaeology through the Works of Hermes Balducci*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.08, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 125-140, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

Italy as a new colonial power—as it rose up among the other European states—and later following the upsurge of Fascism with all its despicable consequences.

It is only in recent decades and with an open mind to understanding the inner contradictions, ambiguities and mistakes of the Italian policy of that period—especially in the dramatic years of the Fascist regime—that scholars from different disciplines have started to analyse this peculiar colonial past while considering the contributions of the Italians to the history of this area of the Mediterranean. Several researchers are trying to separate the ideology from the tangible remains of that time, namely cultural heritage that needs to be acknowledged and preserved today, to reframe the experience of Italy in the Dodecanese between the first decades of the twentieth century until the dissolution of the colonial empire. Moreover, many scholars, some of whom Greek, have analysed Italy's contribution to the islands' present assets from the point of view of urban planning, architecture and archaeology, highlighting its potentiality for tourist purposes. In general, in their opinion, the Italians' work on the cultural heritage did not just benefit the former occupiers but the present-day local communities of the Dodecanese too (Doumanis 1997; Antoniades 1994; Fuller 1988).

The recent research in this direction includes the significant work edited by Jones and Pilat on the legacy and reuse of Fascist-period architectural spaces (Jones and Pilat 2020), in which several authors make a wide-ranging analysis of concepts like *Italianità* and *Romanità*, while enquiring about the built legacy of the Fascist regime in the contemporary debate. Another important publication edited by prominent Italian scholars collects several essays on the concept of *Mediterraneità*, while exploring the many art-, photography- and architecture-related aspects of the Italian experiences in the Mediterranean Sea (Maglio, Mangone, and Pizza 2017). Furthermore, a new monographic work focuses exclusively on the presence of the Italians in the Dodecanese Islands. The book's author, Valerie McGuire, underlines the uniqueness of the Italian colonial experience and discusses the case of Italy and its overseas empire in terms of national identity, claiming that Italy's modern nation-state was "at the nexus of different imperial and cultural economies that emerged in and around the Mediterranean basin during its period as a colonial sea" (McGuire 2020, 9). In another very recent work, Troilo investigates the re-appropriation of all of those traces of the past—in this case concerning the Italian experience in Rhodes and the Dodecanese between 1912 and 1943—by analysing the contribution of Italian archaeology to the definition of the imaginary of European imperialist practice starting from the end of the nineteenth century (Troilo 2021).

In order to correctly frame the main topic of this paper about the search for *Italianità* during the Italian colonial experience, it should be said that the main motivations driving the scholars in that period were directly linked to the will to unearth common roots between the ancient Mediterranean civilizations and the modern European state of the 1920s and 1930s.

Indeed, at that time scholars were principally interested in the classical age in order to rediscover the ancient roots of western countries, the essence and authenticity of architecture and the whole culture developed by the Greek, Hel-

lenistic and Roman civilizations, especially in the Southern Balkans as well as in so-called "Asia Minor". On the contrary, very little effort was made to dig into and properly study the local art and architecture and the unwieldy "recent" Muslim past that characterized those regions.

If we keep a distance from the Euro-centric and nationalist visions that characterized that period, we can look at the dynamics of those years with different eyes. Today, with our increased awareness of the multifaceted and complex reality of the Mediterranean basin, its history and identity, it can be helpful to reread the written accounts and memories left by some scholars or travellers to better analyse the topic without any bias. As McGuire notices: "Studying the importance of empire during the Liberal period, and the continuities between nationalism and Fascism may also stand to reveal the complexity of contemporary postcolonial Italy's relationship to its imperial past" (McGuire 2020, 11).

2. Historical background

On 4 May 1912, the Italian troop landing on the island of Rhodes was a direct consequence of the war between Italy and the Ottoman Empire in Libya, known as the *Guerra italo-turca* (Italo-Turkish War). The islands of the southern Aegean Sea, renamed the Dodecanese to separate them from the Sporades, were occupied by the Italian forces as a military operation to keep the Ottoman army under pressure on the Libyan front. By occupying and claiming these islands as a temporary possession, under the name of the *Possedimenti Italiani dell'Egeo*, the Italians wanted to stop the flow of weapons and other war supplies from Turkey towards the Cyrenaica region in Libya, one of the last Ottoman outposts in northern Africa. From the perspective of a new colonizer, the Italians also saw the islands as a strategic foothold for their expansionistic policy, forecasting an enlargement of the Italian possessions along the Turkish coasts and the Anatolian hinterland. In the same year, the Ottomans were involved on another front in south-eastern Europe, which led to the First Balkan War, during which the western borders of the Ottoman Empire started to be redefined. Italy saw this event as an opportunity to further weaken the sultan's dominion over the Mediterranean lands.

From 1912 to 1943, the civic and public administration of the islands was taken care of by a series of military governors, whose political approach can be seen to change after the rise of Fascism in Italy.[1] The former ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Mario Lago, was governor of the Dodecanese Islands for 13 years (1923–1936), pragmatically showing some respect for the local nationalities and groups who inhabited the islands. As McGuire says in her analysis of the cultural achievements under Lago's administration:

[1] Listed in chronological order, the governors of the new Italian possessions were: Giovanni Ameglio (1912–1920), Felice Maissa (1920–1921), Alessandro de Bosdari (1921–1922), Ugo Sabetta (1922), Mario Lago (1922–1936), Cesare Maria De Vecchi (1936–1940), Ettore Bastico (1940–1941) and Inigo Campioni (1941–1943).

> Lago's cultural initiatives were by design complementary to the tourism program and the larger desire to preserve the Oriental aspect of the islands. [...] both historiography and local memory have tended to register Lago's rule as one of benign intervention and even cultural patronage (McGuire 2020, 204).

Things altered dramatically in the following years, however, owing to the authoritarian Fascist regime's desire to give the colonies a more "Italian" imprinting. From 1936 to 1940 the governorship was held by Count of Val Cismon Cesare Maria De Vecchi. He maintained a harsh rule over the Dodecanese possessions, imposing an exaggerated observance of Fascist ceremonial and showing little respect for the customs, habits, traditions and rights of the Greek, Turkish and Jewish communities, thus also prompting a break from the Ottoman tradition (Orlandi 2013).

This shift was marked by the gradual "optimization" of the archaeological excavations and architectural interventions for tourism purposes, and the symbolic and ideological use of monuments in order to evoke imperial Rome and exalt the regime. Considering the architectural style of the new buildings and those undergoing renovation, De Vecchi decided to remove all traces of "oriental and exotic taste" from the buildings built by his predecessor only a few years before (Pignataro 2013). As a consequence of this radical about-turn imposed by the new governor, the aim of the new architecture in Rhodes and on the other Aegean islands was to have a "strong" and "pure" Roman and Fascist imprint. This work of "purification" was emblemized in the dismantling of all the oriental decoration from the Grande Albergo delle Rose (Grand Hotel of the Roses) built in Rhodes by Michele Platania and Florestano Di Fausto between 1925 and 1927 (Orlandi 2010, 94).

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939 and until 1943, De Vecchi was replaced by new governors. In this delicate period the political and social conditions of the islands changed considerably. Italy and Germany entered the war on the same side and then in just under a year Mussolini declared war first against Albania and then Greece. After Italy signed an armistice with the Allies in 1943, Germany took control of the islands until the end of the war, defeating the Italians as well. After 1945 the islands came under British military occupation for two years, before the completion of their annexation to Greece.

3. Searching for *Italianità*

In order to strengthen the ties with the motherland and give an "Italian" imprinting to the islands during the occupation, many architects, engineers and planners were sent from Italy to the Aegean islands to work on several urban, infrastructural and architectural projects to plan, design and redesign the new possessions according to the government's ideas. Later on, during the Fascist *Ventennio* and when the control of the islands was sealed with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923–1924, the idea to revitalize this area of the eastern Mediterranean through a programme of new architecture and infrastructure, in order to

make it more "Italian" and realize the dream of a Fascist *modernità*, was placed high on Mussolini's agenda (Orlandi and Ivkovska 2020).

At the same time, scholars, restorers and archaeologists undertook missions to the Dodecanese Islands to study and restore what were then perceived as the ancient traces of "Italian civilizations" left prior to the Ottoman conquest. Their task was to document and potentially restore some early Christian, medieval and Byzantine architectural structures, as well as—though not so extensively—examine and analyse the Turkish and Muslim architecture left there by the previous conquerors.

In the name of the possessions' supposed past *Italianità*, not clearly identified but attributable to the period of the ancient Knights of Rhodes and the medieval allure of the islands, the Italians carried out an architectural programme of reconstructions based on historical remains and archaeological excavations on all the islands of the Dodecanese and especially in the city of Rhodes, seen as the new capital and centre of the eastern Mediterranean.[2] As pointed out by Troilo in her recent research:

> […] il terreno della mistificazione e della riscrittura simbolica ha reso evidente la strumentalità di operazioni volte all'appropriazione di oggetti e spazi che, in questo contesto specifico, portarono anche all'invenzione di una città, Rodi italiana, vetrina del paese nel Mediterraneo (Troilo 2021, 11).[3]

There is already an exhaustive literature on the contributions of Italian architects, engineers and archaeologists to the Dodecanese Islands. I will not go into the details of this research here, but for a correct and general overview of the covered topics, the principal texts are: Petruccioli (1992), Colonas (2002) and Maglio (2014).

Concerning the past of the Dodecanese, the Italian cultural policy dealing with the archaeological and monumental heritage started between 1912 and 1913, immediately after the occupation of the islands, and continued non-stop during the Fascist era until the German occupation in 1943. The investments

[2] Among the prominent Italians working in the islands at that time we can briefly mention the chief engineers of the public works management, Giuseppe Miari (1885–1969), chief from 1929 to 1937 and Giovanni Tacconi (1894–1954) who worked there first in 1921 and again in 1937, after his predecessor. The protagonists of the architectural scene were: Florestano di Fausto (1890–1965), Pietro Lombardi (1894–1984), Mario Paolini (1902–1954), Rodolfo Petracco (1889–1979), Armando Bernabiti (1900–1970), Giovanni Battista Ceas (1893–1975), Oriolo Frezzotti (1888–1965) and Vittorio Mesturino (1895–1979). The archaeologists and scholars who contributed to the studies about the past of the islands were: Amedeo Maiuri (1886–1963), Alessandro della Seta (1879–1944), Luciano Laurenzi (1902–1966), Mario Segre (1904–1944), Giulio Jacopi (1898–?), Hermes Balducci (1904–1938), Giuseppe Gerola (1877–1938), Federico Halber (1857–1930) and Luigi Morricone (1906–1979).

[3] "[…] The terrain of mystification and symbolic rewriting underlines the instrumentality of these operations whose aim was to take possession of objects and spaces, in this specific context leading to the invention of a city—Italian Rhodes—as a showcase for the country in the Mediterranean."

were mainly directed towards cultural activities leading to the establishment of the Italian Archaeological Mission; the realization of large excavation and restoration campaigns, surveys and measurements of the most important monuments; the creation of museums and archaeological sites; in-depth research on the artistic and architectural heritage; and the birth of important institutions, such as the Soprintendenza di Rodi (Superintendence of Rhodes) and the Istituto Storico-Archeologico FERT.[4] The name of the institution comes from a Latin acronym, for *Fortitudo Eius Rhodum Tenuit* ("His strength kept Rhodes"),[5] used as a motto during Fascism to further emphasize the connections and continuity of Italian culture in the islands from the period of the Venetian colonies through to the Knights of St John.[6]

At the beginning of the 1930s, a guide was prepared by the Touring Club Italiano in order to promote the islands to tourists. The preface of this important publication was written by none other than Governor Mario Lago:

> Gli italiani che visiteranno Rodi e le Isole minori non dovrebbero mai dimenticare che questo possedimento ha principalmente un valore morale e storico. È l'Italia stessa che ritorna in Oriente, riaprendo con vigore una tradizione che non è mai stata dimenticata. In qualche modo Rodi dovrebbe diventare - e in realtà lo è già di fatto - la capitale degli Italiani nel Levante (Touring Club Italiano 1930, 3).[7]

In 1912, the Ministry of Public Education assigned Giuseppe Gerola an important archaeological mission, which was followed by a second one in 1914:

[4] Over 20 years, these institutions collected and classified all the studies and research done during the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese Islands. After the war, part of this rich and incredible material was sent to be relocated in different state archives in Italy. Part was sent to Greece, where the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene (SAIA) still preserves a huge collection of these original materials in Athens, including pictures, drawings, sketches and diaries. In Rhodes, the Archaeological Institute of Aegean Studies (AIAS), under the direct supervision of the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Rhodes Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese, preserves part of the FERT archives and library. The AIAS building is still the same that the Italians used for FERT almost one century before, on the corner of the Strada dei Cavalieri and the square in the centre of the old town of Rhodes. On the history and the role of FERT in Rhodes, see Santi (2018).

[5] According to some sources and legends, the motto FERT belonging to the Ordine Supremo della Santissima Annunziata (Supreme Order of the Most Holy Annunciation) was adopted for the first time by King Vittorio Amedeo II (1666–1732) from the House of Savoy, to connect his name to that of one of his ancestors, Count Amedeo di Savoia, who in 1314 succeeded in keeping the Turks away from Rhodes and thus avoiding its conquest.

[6] For instance, the major restoration and "cleaning" works in Rhodes concerned almost all those buildings with references clearly oriented towards the "glorious medieval past", such as the Ospedale dei Cavalieri, Albergo d'Italia, Armeria, Albergo di Provenza and Palazzo Alvernia.

[7] "The Italians who will visit Rhodes and the minor islands should never forget that this possession has mainly a moral and historic value. It is Italy itself that comes back to the Orient, vigorously reawakening a tradition that has never been forgotten. Somehow Rhodes should become—and somehow it is already a reality—the capital of the Italians in the Levant."

the main purpose of these early missions was to make a study, census and survey of all the medieval buildings located in the islands. Through numerous studies, Gerola reconstructed the medieval and Christian image of the city, which contrasted with the "oriental" layout that had shaped the island for almost four centuries during the Ottoman era. As a result, he listed the entire urban fabric of Rhodes as monumental heritage. In the spring of 1914, Amedeo Maiuri was invited to Rhodes to replace Gerola as the general director of the restoration work for the Hospital of the Knights.[8] On that occasion, Maiuri was also appointed superintendent of the monuments to supervise and organize long-term archaeological missions on the island. At this point, the Hospital of the Knights was transformed into a museum, the Regio Museo dell'Ospedale dei Cavalieri, and Maiuri started to plan a precise programme to be followed in the following years. According to Troilo:

> […] l'accentramento in un'unica persona dei tre incarichi pose le basi per un'azione integrate che si tradusse nell'estensione delle ricerche già avviate, nell'allestimento degli oggetto in una sede adeguata, nel restauro di numerosi edifici presenti all'interno della cinta muraria (Troilo 2021, 150).[9]

As a consequence, in the following years research was carried out not only on the island of Rhodes but in all the Dodecanese, boosting the knowledge of the past of this area of the Mediterranean.

At the same time, considerable urban, infrastructural and architectural initiatives, like the construction of roads and bridges, hotels, summer resorts, sport facilities, golf clubs, thermal and bath resorts, were among the biggest achievements of a very ambitious project started by Governor Mario Lago to reshape the islands. In 1923, architect and engineer from northern Lazio, Florestano Di Fausto was appointed head of the Office for Architecture and City Planning in the Dodecanese. Due to his active role as a politician in the Catholic Popular Party and his relations as a technical expert and consultant for the Italian Foreign Ministry, Florestano Di Fausto soon became a leading figure in the Italian architectural panorama abroad. In his lengthy career, he designed and constructed several buildings all over Europe, in South America and in the Italian overseas territories around the Mediterranean, such as Albania and the North African colonial area of Libya (Miano 1992, 56; Godoli and Giacomelli 2005, 143–74).

In his Dodecanese period between 1923 and 1936, Florestano Di Fausto designed some of the most important buildings on the islands. He mixed architectural elements borrowed from the Italian tradition and medieval and Venetian references with modern features and both vernacular and Islamic

[8] Amedeo Maiuri (1886–1963) was a pupil of SAIA, an explorer in Crete and inspector of the Museo Archeologico in Naples.

[9] "The centralization of these three tasks in a single person laid the foundations for integrated action, resulting in the extension of the research that had already begun, preparation of the exhibition of the finds in a suitable location and restoration of numerous buildings found within the walls."

architectural language, reflecting his predilection for a historical and eclectic architectural language (Orlandi 2010). Among his architectural works in Rhodes, we can mention the Catholic cathedral of St John (1924–1925), the Palazzo del Governo (1926–1927), the Circolo Italia (1925–1927), the Regina barracks (1924–1926), the post office (1927–1928), the new market (1936), and the abovementioned Grand Hotel of the Roses (1925–1927). Di Fausto's predilection for a historical and eclectic language, inspired by the Gothic Palazzo Ducale in Venice and the medieval architecture of the Knights of St John can be seen in the architectural layout of the Palazzo del Governo in particular (Orlandi 2010, 94).

Throughout the Fascist period many other architects helped to find new—sometimes contradictory—architectural languages to encompass the Levantine heritage, modern Italy and the Mediterranean atmosphere (Rocco and Livadiotti 1996; Maglio 2014).

It must be underlined that all these urban transformations were a direct consequence of the ambivalent Italian policy in the islands. Constantly shifting between a sort of mystification of ancient Roman and medieval Italian roots, they literally reinvented a past for the sole use of propaganda and to conjure up a fascinating Levantine, Mediterranean and "oriental" atmosphere, kept alive mostly for tourist purposes. These contradictory aspects in the approach to urban planning and architecture were put in place at the same time and the Dodecanese became a testbed for new Italian colonial architecture.

By adopting several architectural languages, from oriental and "Moresque" to rationalist and "*Novecento*", Italian architects aimed to define a sort of *Mediterraneità* that could keep all of the different styles used glued together. On one hand, we can see how architects like Florestano Di Fausto or Pietro Lombardi dealt with the local culture and oriental traces, and from another point of view it can be observed how other architects—like Armando Bernabiti or Rodolfo Petracco in some important projects such as the Teatro Puccini (1936–1937) or the Thermal Hotel (1937)—developed the concept of *Italianità*, by combining cladding stones and reinforced concrete in the same building.

A similar approach, mainly used in archaeology, restoration and historical research, was introduced to some historical buildings to bring back the chivalric "spirit" of the islands. This is the case of the Palazzo del Gran Maestro, entirely rebuilt by architect Vittorio Mesturino between 1937 and 1940 from a few ancient ruins belonging to the medieval palace of the Grand Master Helion de Villeneuve (1319–1347), erected when the Crusaders conquered the island. As for the image of Rhodes that needed to be promoted in Italy, McGuire stresses that:

> In the final phase of their rule, the Italians no longer imagined Rhodes as a "home away from home," but as a facsimile of a forgotten Crusader era. The focus on archaeological projects in Rhodes and Kos in the late 1930s also helped to bring the wider rhetoric of a new Roman Empire in Africa and the Mediterranean into the urban fabric and cultural landscape of Italy's possessions in the Aegean (McGuire 2020, 138–39).

4. Hermes Balducci and his works in the Dodecanese Islands

A young scholar in the 1930s, here Hermes Balducci is considered a case study for his thought and vision, works and contribution to artistic, architectural and archaeological studies in the Dodecanese.[10]

Hermes Balducci (Figure 1) enrolled in the School of Engineering at the University of Pavia, where he graduated in chemistry (1925) and later in chemistry and pharmacy (1927). In the meantime, in 1925, he enrolled in the School of Civil Engineering, first in Padua, then at the Milan Polytechnic, where he graduated in 1928, and then acquired professional qualifications. He began his academic career as early as 1925, when he became teaching assistant to Professor Sebastiano Giuseppe Locati, lecturer in drawing in the School of Ornamental Design and Architecture at the University of Pavia. He kept this position until 1933, when he was appointed professor of applications of descriptive geometry; in 1934 he qualified as professor (*libera docenza*) in ornamental design and architecture and monument surveying, and the following year, due to the retirement of Professor Locati, he was appointed to teach drawing at the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences, a position he kept until his sudden, premature death caused by typhoid fever on 13 February 1938, at the age of just 34 (Orlandi 2013; Orlandi 2019).

Considering his short life, Hermes Balducci's interests branched out into many areas of knowledge, such as design and construction, geometry, photography, ornamental and technical drawings, mineralogy and geology. Moreover, he combined research and professional collaborations in the field of the restoration of monuments, particularly from the medieval and modern eras, with many works in Pavia—such as a design proposal for the southern wing of Palazzo Broletto; the restoration of Castello Visconti, the church of San Lazzaro and Teatro Fraschini; a survey of the crypt of St Eusebius; and the design for the monumental ossuary in the cemetery—as well as the rest of Italy. He was also author of several publications about survey techniques and the restoration of major monuments, like the monographic works on Castello Visconti and the churches of San Lazzaro and San Giacomo della Cerreta in Pavia (Orlandi 2013).

Hermes Balducci arrived at the Istituto Storico-Archeologico FERT in Rhodes as a fellow in 1930, appointed by the local Italian institutions to work on the archaeological and architectural heritage. Unlike many of his colleagues, he had no training as an archaeologist, but under the supervision of experts such as Giulio Jacopi and Luigi Morricone he soon became a prominent and trusted figure among the Italians working overseas.[11]

[10] Hermes Balducci was born in Fano on 27 October 1904, son of architect Giuseppe Balducci from the town of Forlì and Elina Omiccioli, daughter of a landowner. After the separation of his parents in 1914, he spent his childhood in a college in Switzerland, before returning to Italy to start and complete his education first in Pavia and later in Padua and Milan.

[11] A recent exhibition titled *Hermes Balducci Pinxit – Pavimenti a mosaico da Coo* was held at the Palace of the Grand Master in Rhodes from 27 July 2019 to 30 April 2020, promoted by

Figure 1 – Hermes Balducci (1904–1938). Private collection

In a period of almost eight years between 1930 and 1937, Balducci travelled several times from his hometown of Pavia to the Dodecanese Islands: he visited and worked on Rhodes, Kos and Samos to document the traces of previous civilizations, his major interests concerning classical architecture, the Byzantine period, the Middle Ages and the Knights of St John. During this work experience in the Levant, Balducci meticulously worked on numerous drawings, sketches, measurements and notes on the conservation and restoration of ancient monuments, making precise surveys and pertinent observations, often supported by astonishing photographic campaigns.[12]

SAIA, the Italian archaeological school in Athens and the Rhodes Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese (Michaēlidu and Papi 2019). The exhibition presented a collection of 55 mosaic watercolours painted by Balducci, relating to an archaeological campaign in Kos headed by Luigi Morricone between 1935 and 1937, highlighting Balducci's extraordinary talent as an engineer and archaeologist.

[12] The publications by Hermes Balducci on these topics are as follows: *Il santuario di Nostra Signora di tutte le Grazie sul Fileremo presso Rodi*, with preface by Giuseppe Gerola, Pavia: Tip. Edit. Artigianelli, 1931 (Balducci 1931); *Orme del Rinascimento italiano in Rodi al tempo dei cavalieri*, Pavia: Tip. Edit. Artigianelli, 1931; *Pianta del Teatro, frammenti e restituzione del*

His most relevant studies include the work under the direction of Giulio Jacopi between 1930 and 1931 on the remains of the proto-Byzantine basilica and the medieval church built on the site of the temple of Athena in the ancient acropolis of Ialyssos, on Mount Filerimos (Orlandi 2019, 23). Balducci's publications on archaeological excavations clearly state his intentions to revive the pure Christian spirit of the island, neglected for centuries under the "infidel" Ottoman domination and now unearthed, waiting to be studied and restored in a proper manner:

> Presso Trianda, dalla parte Sud Ovest, si erge il colle cosiddetto del Fileremo, il cui Santuario coi suoi ruderi giunge sino a noi dal Medio Evo pieno di una rinomanza mista di storia e leggenda. Era in una sua nicchia che veniva custodita una Santa immagine di Nostra Signora per più di due secoli, simbolo e baluardo avanzato di tutta la cristianità (Balducci 1931, 5).[13]

The leitmotiv of the reappropriation of the Christian past and symbols is also emphasized by Balducci in another publication about the survey of some ruins belonging to the church of Santa Maria del Borgo (Figure 2) in Rhodes town, an example of a unique artefact still existing of the glorious chivalric past of the island:

> È questa, dunque l'unica chiesa che, per quanto in rovina, ci possa dare nella maniera più sensibile, certa prova dell'esistenza in Rodi di una particolare Architettura Religiosa Cavalleresca, darcene le caratteristiche stilistiche e strutturali, e trasportarci idealmente a quei tempi di ardente Fede e di leggendario Valore che segnano le pagine più belle, gloriose nella storia dell'isola (Balducci 1933a, 68).[14]

In the conclusion of this very detailed essay on the state of art of the ruins of Santa Maria del Borgo, Balducci stated the idea that the Italians—as the new rescuers of the Dodecanese—were responsible for keeping the memory of the church alive and preserving this great symbol for the entire Christian community of Rhodes:

Tempio di Apollo Eretimio (Rodi): dieci tavole con breve testo esplicativo, Rhodes: Istituto storico-archeologico, 1932; *La Chiesa di S. Maria del Borgo in Rodi fondata dal gran maestro Helion de Villeneuve: la Cattedrale di Rodi, la Chiesa di Santa Caterina della Lingua d'Italia*, Pavia: Tip. L. Rossetti, 1933 (Balducci 1933a); "La casa dell'Ammiraglio Fra Costanzo Operti in Rodi", *Ticinum* 2, February 1933, 1–9 (Balducci 1933b) and *Basiliche protocristiane e bizantine a Coo (Egeo). Conferenza tenuta per invito del Reale Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in Roma, Palazzo Venezia, il 15 maggio 1936-XIV*, Pavia: Tip. L. Rossetti, 1936.

[13] "On the south-west side, near Trianda, is the hill of Filerimos, whose sanctuary with its ruins come down to us directly from the Middle Ages, filled with a mixed reputation of history and legend. It was in one of its niches that a holy image of Our Lady was kept, for more than two centuries, as a symbol and bulwark of all Christianity."

[14] "Therefore, this is the only church that, although in ruins, can most sensitively give us certain proof of the existence in Rhodes of a particular chivalric religious architecture, give us its stylistic and structural characteristics, and ideally transport us to those times of ardent faith and legendary value that mark the most beautiful, glorious pages in the island's history."

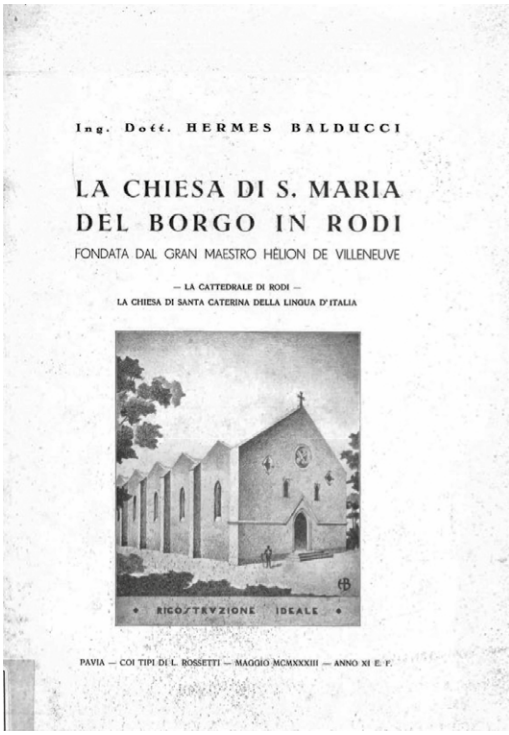

Figure 2 – Front cover of the book *La Chiesa di S. Maria del Borgo in Rodi* by Hermes Balducci (1933). Private collection

> Gli imponenti e venerandi avanzi di Santa Maria del Borgo sono per noi unico e chiaro, esempio, vero e prezioso cimelio di una produzione artistica religiosa, i cui termini erano fino ad oggi quasi del tutto sconosciuti in Rodi. […] [Bisogna] consolidarne le parti superstiti in modo che abbiano per secoli ancora a testimoniare visibilmente in Rodi dell'alta Pietà, dei suoi Cavalieri e della Loro edilizia Sacra, non meno che della Nostra reverente sollecitudine e gelosa cura (Balducci 1933a, 8–11).[15]

Wherever it was possible not just to recognize some vague Christian or medieval traces but actually pinpoint a specific building or artefact that belonged directly to an important Italian personality of the past, Balducci expressed himself

[15] "The important and venerable ruins of the church of Santa Maria del Borgo are for us a unique and clear, true and precious example of an artistic and religious production, the like of which was hitherto almost completely unknown in Rhodes. […] [It is necessary] to consolidate the surviving parts in such a way that for centuries they will bear visible testimony in Rhodes to the great piety of [the island's] Knights, their sacred building, and not least our reverent solicitude and jealous care."

with enthusiastic tones, emphasizing the idea of a strong Italian national identity through history with even more force. This is the case of the medieval-style restoration of quite a modest stone house belonging to a member of the Operti family, Costanzo Operti, an important figure of the early sixteenth century and admiral of the Christian fleet, who was directly connected to the Christian league for the defence of the Mediterranean coasts against the Turks.[16] The project for the restoration of this house is celebrated by Balducci in an essay on this building and his contribution to the survey and design process:

> Una nuova benemerenza si aggiungerà forse tra breve alle tante già guadagnate dal Governo di Rodi che con fervida ed operosa passione, regge S. E. il Senatore Mario Lago. E se essa è modesta in confronto alle altre magnifiche del recente passato, pure questa per noi italiani desta una particolare interesse, perché fa vibrare le corde del sentimento e del giusto orgoglio Nazionale (Balducci 1933b, 1).[17]

Further on, he continued in the same passionate way:

> [La casa di Costanzo Operti] porterebbe inoltre in Rodi un contributo di doveroso ricordo ad un Italiano che a sua volta fu d'onore alla Patria e renderebbe più evidente e decoroso questo lapideo testimonio, ora mutilo, ad ulteriore tangibile dimostrazione di un passato che tanto ci appartiene (Balducci 1933b, 9).[18]

Beside these interests relating to the revival of the ancient classical or medieval "Italian past", a considerable part of Balducci's research in Rhodes was dedicated to the study of the vernacular Turkish houses and Ottoman art and architecture,[19] showing his curiosity for "the other" culture, even though he still supported the ideology of the Italians' superiority over the Turks. However, his interest was genuine, and his work was careful and serious, using appropriate sources from other scholars, such as Albert Gabriel—who studied Rhodes a few years before

[16] The Operti were an important family from Fossano, of which Fra Costanzo Operti was undoubtedly one of the greatest exponents, certainly for his role in the Mediterranean as admiral of the Rhodian fleet against the Turks. See Adriani (1853, 450–56).

[17] "A new merit will perhaps soon be added to the many already earned by the government of Rhodes which, with fervent and industrious passion, is ruled by His Excellency, Senator Mario Lago. And if it is a modest [house] compared to the other magnificent ones of the recent past, this too for us Italians arouses particular interest, because it vibrates the strings of sentiment and the right national pride."

[18] "[The house of Costanzo Operti] would bring to Rhodes a contribution of dutiful remembrance to an Italian who was a man of honour to his homeland, and it would make this stone building—now in ruins—more evident and dignified as a further and tangible demonstration of a past that strongly belongs to us."

[19] On this topic, Hermes Balducci produced an exhaustive 190-page monographic work, accompanied by original drawings and pictures: *Architettura turca in Rodi*, with preface by Giulio Jacopi, Milan: Editore Ulrico Hoepli, 1932 (Balducci 1932); an article on the typology of the local Turkish houses: "Casa turca in Rodi", *Ticinum* 8, August 1933, 1–7; and another article on the ceramic crafts in another village on the island of Rhodes: "L'industria artistica che risorge in Rodi", *L'Artista Moderno* 5, 1931, 95–100.

him—or the descriptions of Ottoman Constantinople and its architecture left by the Sardinian diplomat Antonio Baratta a century earlier (Orlandi 2013).

By sharing interests towards Muslim-Turkish culture, and not only towards unearthing the "Italian" past, Hermes Balducci directly entered the debate about the role of the "oriental" and Muslim architecture in contrast to the concept of *Italianità* and *Romanità* in a conquered land like the Dodecanese. As pointed out by Colonas, during the 1930s, when the Fascist regime encouraged architects to "clean up" all the oriental or local formal architectural features of buildings from previous decades to replace them with a new style more appropriate for the propaganda and directly linked to the *Romanità* or to the Knights of St John, Balducci clearly declared:

> Bisogna in ogni modo riconoscere che cupole e minareti danno un'impronta tutta affatto particolare alla città; e se si crede che uno dei compiti principali dell'architettura, in un territorio di conquista, sia quello di esprimere tangibilmente e durabilmente la personalità del dominatore, dobbiamo pur riconoscere che queste semplici e se si vuole modeste costruzioni marchiano profondamente la città di Rodi. Onde se dallo studio del passato deve trarsi valido consiglio per l'avvenire, dobbiamo ancora giungere ad una conclusione che sbocca logica e a cui ebbi già per altra via ad accennare: L'arte edilizia odierna di Rodi deve essere sistematicamente di ispirazione, di sentimento prettamente italiani, dobbiamo darle un'impronta della più schietta Romanità (Balducci 1932, 190).[20]

Therefore, it has been seen how, as a young FERT fellow, Balducci wrote some sleek and peremptory words clearly opposing the idea of "assimilation" by adaptation to the *genius loci*, instead insisting on the need to shape the conquered territories to their own (alleged) image for political and colonial reasons.

5. Conclusions

Far from being an exhaustive essay on the architectural work of the Italians in the Dodecanese Islands, this paper wants to emphasize how in the Italian cultural milieu the image and perception of the newly acquired Mediterranean islands were manipulated and adjusted accordingly by the Fascist propaganda in seeking historical legitimization for their conquest. The efforts and results of the studies and works carried out by the Italians in those years are today to be necessarily reinterpreted and revisited from a different perspective, as evidence of a search for *Italianità* and *Romanità* in these islands. It can be seen how the

[20] Colonas presents a partial translation of the quoted excerpt from Balducci's *Architettura turca in Rodi* (1932, 190): "We should accept that domes and minarets convey an image that is anything but characteristic of the city. […] We believe that one of the primary duties of architecture in an occupied territory is to express the personality of the conqueror tangibly over a long term. The art of modern construction in Rhodes systematically must be purely of Italian inspiration and sentiment; it must promote the stamp of *Romanità*" (Colonas 2002, 56).

search for archaeological traces of the islands' medieval "Italian" past was one of the main issues pursued by Italy in those years—especially in the 1930s—both among scholars and in the practice of archaeology and restoration in the field, as the case study of Hermes Balducci testifies. In his essays and studies there are often references and insinuations about a sort of "Italian superiority" over the Levantine and Ottoman world of the past centuries and decades; steeped in rhetoric and nationalism, his works convey all his enthusiasm in searching for *Italianità* even in the most remote islands of the southern Aegean Sea.

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Medici Ambitions and Fascist Policies. (Re)reading the Relations between Italy and the Levant in the 1930s through the Historiography on Fakhr al-Dīn II

Davide Trentacoste

Abstract: On 13 April 1635, Druze emir Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn was executed in Constantinople, after years of ambiguous relations with the Ottoman sultan. Exactly three centuries later, a biography of the emir was published in Rome, edited by Maronite father Paolo Carali and financed by the Fascist government. The reason why Fascism was interested in his figure can be traced back to the policy implemented by Italy in the 1930s, which sought to penetrate the territories of Lebanon and Syria. However, these were regions in which Fascist Italy had no real interest or claim, and so it aimed to build a tie between the Levant and Italy by rereading the historiography of the relationship between "Faccardino" and Medici Tuscany at the beginning of the seventeenth century. By comparing the policies of the Medici and Fascism, it will be possible to highlight how, through Carali's work, the latter sought to construct a history that would support its ambitions towards the eastern Mediterranean.

Keywords: Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn, Lebanon, Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Fascism, Italian-Levantine relations

1. Introduction

There is a rather curious parallelism between the attempts at expansion in the "eastern" ambitions of the grand dukes of Tuscany, Ferdinand I (r. 1587–1609), Cosimo II (r. 1609–1621) and Ferdinand II (r. 1621–1670), and Fascist Italy's policy towards the Levant in the 1930s. This parallelism emerges clearly from the study of the story of a key figure in the history of relations between Italy and the Levant and, more specifically, from analysis of the historiography concerning him: Druze Emir Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn (c. 1572–1635), known in Italy as "Faccardino".[1] He ruled a broad territory including much of present-day Lebanon

[1] The figure of Fakhr al-Dīn is of primary importance in Lebanese history. He has long been regarded as the founder of modern Lebanon, although this image has been reconsidered in recent years and his role in this respect downgraded. Fakhr al-Dīn is periodically the subject of scholarly analysis and there are many studies on him, so I will only mention the most significant biographies and studies here: Mariti (1787); Carali (1936a, 1938); Chebli (1984); Olsaretti (2005); Olsaretti (2008); El Bibas (2010) and Gorton (2014).

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Davide Trentacoste, *Medici Ambitions and Fascist Policies. (Re)reading the Relations between Italy and the Levant in the 1930s through the Historiography on Fakhr al-Dīn II*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.09, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 141-160, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

and the north of today's State of Israel almost as an absolute ruler, while nevertheless under Ottoman authority, which extended throughout the Middle East. However, Fakhr al-Dīn resented the Ottoman yoke and during the first decade of the seventeenth century took the opportunity to rebel together with other local lords, the most important of whom was certainly the pasha of Aleppo, ʿAli Jānbulād (?–1610). The rebellion was quickly crushed by the Ottoman government and despite his involvement, Fakhr al-Dīn was able to obtain a pardon from the sultan thanks to the good relations he had established with the governor of Aleppo, Murad Pasha (1535–1611), who had defeated the rebels. Nevertheless, the Porte did not forget the emir's betrayal. In 1613 the sultan, also prompted by the emir's enemies and the death of Murad Pasha, decided that the time had come to punish his vassal and so he sent a large army to Lebanon, forcing him to flee. The decision as to where to take refuge fell on the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the European state that had helped the pasha of Aleppo at the time of his revolt and had also come into contact with Fakhr al-Dīn at that time. The emir was hosted at the Medici court for about two years, between 1613 and 1615. From there he then travelled to the Italian dominions of the Spanish crown and Malta before returning to Lebanon in 1618 where, having obtained the sultan's pardon, he resumed his position in the government of the province. Once he regained power, he did much to strengthen Lebanon, which, according to many historians, reached the height of its splendour and wealth during his rule. The emir maintained good relations with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, so much so that when Tuscany was struck with famine in the 1630s, he sent ships loaded with wheat from Lebanon. His reign was abruptly interrupted when it was decided in Constantinople that the emir had enjoyed far too much good fortune considering his past treachery, his continuing dealings with Christians and the ambiguous behaviour he had continued to maintain even after his comeback in 1618. Thus, in 1633 his lands were attacked by the Ottomans from both land and sea and after strenuous resistance, he was captured and taken to Constantinople, where he was executed on 13 April 1635.

Leaping forward exactly three centuries, we find ourselves in the midst of the Fascist era, when on 13 April 1935, Maronite father Paolo Carali (Bulus Qarʿali) wrote the introduction to his biography of Fakhr al-Dīn, which was to be published with the financial support of the Reale Accademia d'Italia (Royal Academy of Italy) the following year. The peculiarity of this work, however, lies not so much in the fact that it was completed in 1935, that is, exactly three centuries after Fakhr al-Dīn's death, nor in the fact that it was published under the patronage of the Reale Accademia d'Italia, but rather in its being dedicated to Benito Mussolini (Carali 1936a).

This suggests that for some reason the Fascist government was very interested in the issue of this text, despite its concern with a distant era and geographical area, outside the sphere of influence and the (at least direct) interests of Italy, and a figure, an eastern emir, who had had ties with Italy but not with the Italian state (which came into being much later). It therefore seems clear that if the historical parallels between the Fascist foreign policy and the Medici's policy

towards the Levant three centuries before were probably the result of chance, the Fascist government's direct interest in the story of this emir and the studies concerning him was not accidental. The explanation for this is probably to be found in the contemporary processes of reinterpretation of past historical events linked to what was to be conceived as the same national community/nation, so as to reconstruct or, better, construct a history able to justify national interests and ambitions that would otherwise find no plausible motivation. The "rediscovery" and consequent rereading of the story of Fakhr al-Dīn and his relations with Italy, in particular because of his journey first from the East to the West and then back to the East, served perhaps to link the Levantine region, and especially Lebanon, at least from a historical point of view, to Italy and the latter's alleged beneficial influence on the former. Thus Faccardino, an oriental emir and a traveller in spite of himself, could become an element of fundamental importance in both the Italian nation-building process and the reconstruction of an eastern Mediterranean historically and indissolubly linked to Italy.

By making a brief, step-by-step analysis of the history of Fakhr al-Dīn, the Medici and Fascist policies in the Levant, and the work of Paolo Carali, it will finally be possible to reconstruct the Fascist rereading of Faccardino's story and his links with Fascist interests in the Middle East. All of this will be done while bearing in mind that, by comparing the Medici and Fascist policy, I am myself making a rereading of the latter.

2. Fakhr al-Dīn Maʿn

Before analysing the parallelism between Fascist Italy and Medici Tuscany and Fascist era historiography concerning Fakhr al-Dīn, it is essential to first say a few words about him.

A very approximate summary of his history has been given in the introductory part of this text, while I will return to his links with Tuscany in more detail later. Here, however, I think it is important to talk, albeit briefly, about his ethnic and religious affiliation and his relations with the eastern Christians and in particular the Maronites, the largest Lebanese Christian community, to which his biographer Paolo Carali also belonged, as well as the origin of his relations with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

Fakhr al-Dīn's family, the Maʿn clan, settled in northern Syria from the Upper Euphrates region at the time of the Crusades as can be seen from chronicles recording the death of a Maʿn emir in 1147. After defeating the Mamluks of Egypt and finally occupying the Syro-Lebanese region (1516), the sultan recognized the existing power of the Maʿn family and confirmed its rule over the Shūf region (now part of the governorate of Mount Lebanon), to which he also granted a certain autonomy (Abu-Izzeddin 1984, 179).

The recognition by the Ottoman government was not only an acknowledgement of the importance of the Maʿn family and its centuries-old roots in the area, but also an implicit recognition of the Druze community to which the family belonged. The Druzes were, and still are, an ethnic-religious community settled

mainly between Syria and Lebanon, whose origin was for a long time so unclear that some believed them to be the last remnants descendants of ancient Persian rule, Egyptian refugees or even remnants of the Christian presence that survived the Muslim conquest of Acre in 1291 (El Bibas 2010, 60). Relatively more recent studies, however, have pointed out that ethnically the Druzes are a mix of various populations of which the Arab component is definitely the largest part (Firro 1992, 17–20). However, the essential component of the Druze community is not ethnic but religious. The origin of the Druze religion dates back to the beginning of the eleventh century, when there was a small schism from Fatimid Ismailism.[2] Due to the persecution to which they were subjected, the Druzes fled to Syria, where they laid the foundations of the future Druze community of Syria and Lebanon (El Bibas 2010, 61). Since the Druze religion originated from a schism within Ismailism, it developed independently from Islam. The doctrine is based on the writings that were made public around 1017 by the religion's founder, Ḥamza ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Zūzani, and was handed down by its custodians, the "wise" (*ʿuqqāl*), while the vast majority of the community, the "ignorant" (*juhhāl*), were not allowed access to most of the rituals and secrets of the religion (El Bibas 2010, 62, in particular note 10). This closure, both towards the outside and to a large extent within the community itself, preserved the "purity" of the religion to a certain extent, but at the same time prevented it from being known externally, creating an aura of mystery about the community which also gave rise to the various legends mentioned above.[3] In addition to the esoteric nature of their beliefs, the Druzes were able to survive in the midst of the Sunni majority by means of dissimulation, or *taqiyya* (Firro 1992, 20–3). As the Druzes had strayed far from traditional Islam,[4] they were at risk of persecution and so they continued to profess the Sunni faith in public, while practising their true faith at home in private. Being considered an integral part of the community of the faithful meant that the Druzes were never subjected to restrictive legislation, as was the case for other religious minorities within the Ottoman Empire, and they always enjoyed extensive privileges and self-government. These characteristics of their religion mean that the Druzes were very tolerant with the ethnic and religious minorities inside their territories and also explain, at least in part, the openness of the Europeans towards Fakhr al-Dīn and vice versa (El Bibas 2010, 62–3).

The fact that Fakhr al-Dīn belonged to a community that stood apart from Islam but at the same time was tolerant of other religions in its territories made

[2] For an overview on Ismailism, see Daftary (1998).

[3] The Druze community was so closed to the outside world that still in the eighteenth-century Tuscan traveller Giovanni Mariti (1736–1806), who journeyed extensively in the Levant and published a biography of Fakhr al-Dīn in 1787, wrote that the religion of the Druzes was a mystery, and all that was said about it was nothing more than fantasy. See Mariti (1787, 15).

[4] For instance, the so-called five pillars of Islam, namely the testimony of faith (*shahādah*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), legal almsgiving (*zakāt*), fasting (*ṣawm* or *ṣiyam*) in the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca, are completely absent in the Druze religion.

him a credible interlocutor in the eyes of European Christianity. Indeed, it seems that, well aware of how little Europeans knew about the Druzes and of the legends about their descent from Christian crusaders, Fakhr al-Dīn himself fed the rumour that he was somehow a descendant of Godfrey of Bouillon (El Bibas 2010, 60). Moreover, according to some biographies written decades later but certainly based on rumours already circulating at the time, Fakhr al-Dīn was raised by an uncle who belonged to the Christian Maronite community and it was he who taught the future emir respect and tolerance towards Christians.[5]

Fakhr al-Dīn was born around 1572, the son of Ḳorḳmaz, ruler of the Shūf region. His rule was ended however in 1585, when a caravan carrying tributes from the province of Egypt to Constantinople was raided in a port under his control. Some local rival lords accused Ḳorḳmaz of the attack before the sultan, who believed their claims and sent an army to occupy his lands. Ḳorḳmaz was killed in 1586 after putting up strenuous resistance. His children were then cared for, and probably hidden, by their maternal uncle who was also able to obtain a pardon from the sultan for his people and regain the territories previously under his family's rule (El Bibas 2010, 65–6).

In 1590, Fakhr al-Dīn came of age and took over as governor, his power being recognized by the same government in Constantinople which had ordered his father's execution a few years earlier. It should be noted that the young emir's seizure of power coincided with the peace between the Ottomans and Persians (Treaty of Constantinople) following the Ottoman victory after decades of harsh battle with Safavid Persia.[6] The peace probably also allowed the Ottomans to reaffirm their presence in Syria and Lebanon where, thanks to the help of Fakhr al-Dīn, the sultan was able to put an end to rebellions by the Shiite populations who, professing the same faith as the Safavid Persians, tried to undermine Ottoman rule in the region in the hope that the Persians would come to their aid. The repression of the Shiite revolts and his friendship with the powerful Ottoman governor of Aleppo, Murad Pasha, helped Fakhr al-Dīn to confirm his power over the region and in 1598 he became governor of the sanjak of Sidon (Kalibi 1988, 126).

A few years later, following the resumption of the war between the Ottomans and Persians, Fakhr al-Dīn allied himself with the pasha of Aleppo, ʿAli Jānbulād, who rebelled against the Ottoman government and sought to establish an independent Syrian state. The pasha also sought allies in the West and in early October 1607 concluded a treaty of alliance with the grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I.[7] At the same time, the grand duke also came into contact with Fakhr al-Dīn, establishing relations between Lebanon and Tuscany that last-

[5] In this case, it is interesting to note that this reconstruction was basically taken for granted by Christian scholars Giovanni Mariti and Paolo Carali, while Nejla M. Abu-Izzeddin, author of an important study on the Druzes, and a Druze herself, claims that this story is just a legend. See Abu-Izzeddin (1984, 180).

[6] On the Ottoman-Safavid war between 1578 and 1590, see Matthee (2014).

[7] On ʿAli Jānbulād's rebellion, see Griswold (1983), Brege (2020) and Brege (2021, 229–80).

ed until the emir's death in 1635. Some twenty days after the treaty was signed with Tuscany, ʿAli Jānbulād's revolt was crushed by Murad Pasha's troops and the pasha of Aleppo had to flee. On the other hand, Fakhr al-Dīn was able to obtain a pardon for having joined the rebels (Olsaretti 2008, 729) thanks to his friendship with Murad Pasha (and thanks to a large gift of 300,000 piastres).

As already mentioned, Fakhr al-Dīn kept up his contacts with Tuscany, which the emir had identified as an ideal partner, so much so that he asked Grand Duke Ferdinand I for a grand ducal passport to travel to Europe if things became too complicated with the Ottoman court. This actually came to be on 16 September 1613 when, forced to flee Lebanon, Fakhr al-Dīn took his family to safety, leaving the government to his brother, and sailed to Tuscany on a Dutch ship (El Bibas 2010, 84–5).

3. Tuscan ambitions in the Levant and the relations with Fakhr al-Dīn

The Mediterranean policy of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries has aroused the interest of historians in recent years, particularly with regard to Tuscan ambitions in the Levant.[8] The reason for this is that, with the exception of Venice (which, however, has its own peculiar history), Tuscany was the only pre-unitary Italian state to conduct an ambitious international policy and attempt to expand outside Italy and the Mediterranean (Marcocci 2014, 35). However, it is the Grand Duchy's oriental policy that has attracted the most scholarly attention as for a time Tuscan ambitions in the Levant seemed on the verge of being realized.

It all started at the end of the sixteenth century when grand dukes Francis I (r. 1574–1587) and Ferdinand I failed in their attempt to make peace with the Ottoman Empire and were thus cut off from direct trade with the eastern Mediterranean (Mercan 2020). As a result, Ferdinand I decided to change his strategy towards the Ottoman Empire and adopt a more aggressive stance. In 1599, for instance, his fleet attacked the island of Chios, not just looting it as was customary, but attempting to occupy the main city of the island (Trentacoste 2021b, 57). In 1601, having established stable relations with Shah ʿAbbās I of Persia (r. 1587–1629), the Florentine court became more confident and together with the papacy began to plan military actions against Ottoman targets, in particular the occupation of coastal towns or islands in order to use them as bridgeheads and bases for further actions against the Ottomans.[9] These plans culminated in the attack on the island of Cyprus on 24 June 1607, which failed for various reasons including Venetian counter-intelligence and the Tuscan incapacity to verify information and keep its operations secret (Trentacoste 2021a).

The purpose of this policy was not only to strike a blow against the Ottoman Empire but above all to carve out a position in the East, in (almost) direct com-

[8] On the Medici's Mediterranean and eastern policy, see Tamborra (1961, 69–82), Brege (2019; 2020; 2021, 211–319) and Trentacoste (2021a, 61–3).

[9] On Tuscan-Safavid relations, see Trentacoste (2021b).

petition with Venetian interests in the area. A few months after the defeat in Cyprus, Tuscan diplomats established the aforementioned treaty of alliance with the pasha of Aleppo and also started negotiations with Fakhr al-Dīn. In addition to the various points concerning exclusive access to certain ports and freedom of movement for the Tuscans, if the opportunity arose, it was also proposed to organize a great military enterprise in Palestine with the aim of liberating Jerusalem, which would have made the grand dukes the protectors—the liberators—of the Holy Places just as the glorious knights of the First Crusade had been.

The Grand Duchy of Tuscany sought to disguise its territorial and dynastic ambitions with idealistic and religious motives and tried to push the Catholic states to form a league to wage war against the Great Turk. A number of anti-Ottoman and pro-crusade propaganda booklets were published and a couple of pamphlets praising the crusade (Mossi 1603) and predicting the imminent collapse of Ottoman power in the region (Mossi 1604) were printed in Florence. It is clear that the grand ducal government had a certain interest in having these texts circulate among the various Catholic courts that might have joined its forces against the Ottomans.

Parallel to this anti-Ottoman propaganda, Grand Duke Ferdinand I had strengthened his relations with the Maronite community in Lebanon and these ties were also maintained by his successors Cosimo II and Ferdinand II: for example, in the 1620s, the Maronite bishop of Cyprus, Giorgio Maronio (in office 1614–1634), offered to keep two secretaries at his own expense who would constantly inform the Tuscan court of what was happening in the Levant (Trentacoste 2021b, 111). Moreover, since it was risky to intervene militarily without the support of others (as the expedition against Cyprus also demonstrated), the grand dukes tried to strengthen their presence and influence in the Levant by sending technicians (architects and engineers) and military advisers, while also trying to convince potential Muslim allies that they, and Christians in general, had no territorial ambitions in the Levant and would support their wars of independence from the Ottomans in exchange for mere commercial privileges.[10]

The defeat of ʿAli Jānbulād in 1607 and the death of Ferdinand I in 1609 put a stop to the Grand Duchy's ambitions in the Levant but did not make them disappear since Fakhr al-Dīn, as already mentioned, maintained relations with Tuscany and the new grand duke, Cosimo II.

[10] In 1983 William Griswold (1983, 84–5) wrote that one of Ferdinand I's objectives was probably the establishment of a puppet state between Syria and Lebanon. More recently, on the basis of documentation of the negotiations between Florence and Aleppo, Brian Brege (2021, 247–51) stated that the grand dukes' objectives stopped at obtaining extensive trade privileges and the exclusive use of certain trading ports. Brege's reasoning is likely to be more solid and credible than Griswold's, since Tuscany alone would never have been able to maintain its control over Syria or Lebanon. However, it is also true that if ʿAli Jānbulād and/or Fakhr al-Dīn had been successful in obtaining independence from the Ottoman Empire, they would have been dependent on western allies for trade and especially military supplies and this would have allowed the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, as their main ally, to exert a strong influence on the two Levantine princes.

During his stay at the court of Cosimo II between 1613 and 1615,[11] Fakhr al-Dīn came into contact with one of the most sophisticated courts of late Renaissance Italy, but above all with European techniques and technology. Indeed, there is much evidence of his numerous visits to Livorno, a rapidly expanding town whose fortifications were being built according to the most modern military standards. It seems that the emir was also very interested in the commercial traffic for which the port was a fundamental stopover, as well as the ships that visited it (El Bibas 2010, 104–6).

While he was in Tuscany, as well as taking part in great feasts and visiting Tuscan naval and military shipyards, along with Cosimo II, Fakhr al-Dīn continued to negotiate—and plan—possible military actions aimed at restoring his power in Lebanon and bringing the Tuscans directly into the region, although in the end nothing ever came of it. So, after about two years, the emir left Tuscany for Naples where he hoped to obtain the powerful help of the Spanish forces.

Cosimo II died in 1621 and was succeeded by his son, Ferdinand II (r. 1621–1670), still a child at the time. In his early years, the new grand duke was assisted in the government by a regency council that maintained good relations with Fakhr al-Dīn, who in the meantime had returned to Lebanon (1618) and regained power, taking Lebanon to what was for a long time considered its zenith.

The emir's departure from Tuscany in 1615 and his return to Lebanon in 1618 did not put an end to relations between Florence and Beirut. Although there is a gap between 1615 and 1629 in the relevant documentation, some relations continued all the same: there is at least one letter from Khasikiyya bint Zafir, the emir's wife, to the grand duchess of Tuscany, Maria Maddalena of Austria (Carali 1936a, 282–83), that bears witness to this continuity.

Between the end of the 1620s and the early 1630s, relations revived and Fakhr al-Dīn repeatedly requested that architects and engineers be sent from Tuscany to Lebanon—military for the restoration of fortresses and civil for the construction of palaces, bridges and irrigation works—as well as bakers, farmers and stockbreeders (El Bibas 2010, 156–61). In addition, as already mentioned, the emir supplied loads of wheat to Tuscany during the famine years. However, as said, all this came to an end with the sultan's decision to crush Fakhr al-Dīn's power and execute him in 1635.

4. Italian and Fascist interests in the Levant

About three centuries later, Fascist Italy pursued a policy towards the Levant, and in particular towards Syria and Lebanon, comparable to the one adopted by the Medici towards the pasha of Aleppo and Emir Fakhr al-Dīn. As we shall see, albeit in short, like Tuscany, Italy was aware that it could not obtain what it wanted with weapons alone, and was less motivated by immediate concrete interests than political and economic considerations in a long-term perspective.

[11] On Fakhr al-Dīn's stay in Tuscany, in addition to the works already mentioned in other footnotes, see Alberti (1997; 2016) and Cuffaro (2010).

In fact, it was the Balkan regions bordering the Adriatic and the regions bordering the Red Sea, in particular Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen, that played a major role in Fascist Italy's Mediterranean policy.[12] The Balkan coastline—a region over which Italy had historically exerted its dominance and cultural influence through Venice—was to be Italy's reward for participating in the First World War alongside the Allies, while hegemony over the Red Sea region and control of its southern access would effectively put Italy in a position to compete with Britain for control of the routes through the Suez Canal (Quartararo 1979). In this context, the Levant was a secondary sector, but the Fascist government was determined not to neglect any area of the Mediterranean region, especially by virtue of the idea that the Mediterranean should essentially be an Italian sea, as the *Mare Nostrum* had been for the Roman Empire.

Interest in the Levant was therefore already well established before the 1930s. In fact, it was precisely one of the regions in which Italy should have obtained territorial compensation for its participation in the First World War alongside the Allies: after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Italian government expected to obtain concessions in Anatolia, Syria and Lebanon.[13] However, the advent of Kemalist Turkey prevented Italy from taking possession of the Antalya region, while the entrusting of Syria and Lebanon to the French in the form of a League of Nations mandate precluded Italian access to those regions as well. Consequently, first for liberal Italy and then Fascist Italy, abdicating its claims in the eastern Mediterranean region meant once and for all giving up what it considered to be its right.

However, as already stated, the military option was not viable since France, backed by the British, would never have allowed it. France had always been hostile to any attempt at Italian either eastward or westward expansion in the Mediterranean, while Great Britain was more in favour of a policy of balance between powers. The French-Italian rivalry had several causes, such as the proximity of Corsica (still considered part of Italian territory) or the fact that France had occupied regions that the Italians considered part of their sphere of influence, such as Tunisia.[14]

[12] The "natural" objectives of Fascist foreign policy were Africa and Asia, and to reach both without problems it was necessary to control the Mediterranean. On Fascist policy towards Asia and Africa, I refer to the classic De Felice (1988), and to the more recent Williams (2006) and Arielli (2010), which deal with the issues of Fascist propaganda in Africa and Asia.

[13] In fact, according to the Pact of London (1915), Italy should have received various territorial compensations, especially in the Balkan area (articles 5–7), in Anatolia (articles 8–10, 12) and possibly also in the German colonies (article 13). However, the opposition of the United States, as well as France, which did not look favourably on Italy's international expansion, prevented the country from obtaining what had been promised. With the subsequent Treaty of Sèvres (1920), Italy was in fact forced to renounce all its claims in the Levant: the region of Antalya remained with Turkey and Syria and Lebanon came under French control.

[14] Besides the fact that, being so close to Sicily, it was considered a natural part of the Italian sphere of influence, Tunisia had also been the protagonist of strong Italian immigration flows: indeed, there were about 100,000 Italians there. Other areas of conflict were the port of Tangier and Morocco, where some 100,000 Italians were also present and where France had also prevented Italy from strengthening its presence. See Williams (2010, 33–4).

Since at the time it was impossible to establish a position in the West, Italy turned more decisively towards the eastern Mediterranean, which was already part of the Fascist horizon. In this region, unlike in the West, the Italian government knew that it had no real interests on which to base its claims: the only two places were Egypt, where there was a large Italian community, and Palestine, where Italy was making specious claims linked to its alleged role as protector of the Holy Places (Carocci 1969, 204–10; Arielli 2010, 32–3). With regard to Syria and Lebanon, however, it had no basis upon which to lay a claim. Nevertheless, it was in these two places that Italy made considerable efforts to assert its presence. In fact, Egypt seemed too difficult an objective, while Palestine was a region with a complex situation, in addition to being the destination of sizeable Jewish immigration (Nava 1931, 146). Moreover, British control appeared to be fairly firm, in spite of the numerous rebellions that took place between the 1920s and 1930s. On the other hand, the situation in the regions under French control seemed precarious for the latter and, consequently, favourable to Italy.[15]

As already mentioned, the Italian strategy in Syria and Lebanon was a long-term one, aimed at preparing the Italian "entry" to the region once the time was ripe. The Italian entry to the Levant had to be prepared, but how? As early as 1928, the former undersecretary for the colonies, Roberto Cantalupo (1891–1975), wrote that it was necessary to strengthen ties between the Levant and Italy by increasing the volume of trade and above all by intervening on the Italian communities present in the *outremer*, encouraging immigration to those regions and implementing policies aimed at preserving their national identity, cohesion and, in essence, culture (Cantalupo 1928, 372–73, 389–90). Cantalupo was also convinced that trade and culture were the easiest way to enter the Muslim-inhabited lands, and thus the Levant (Cantalupo 1928, 393). This, in the East, seemed to be relatively easy: in fact, it was believed that, unlike the Italian emigrants in America, the Italian communities that settled in Egypt, Syria or Lebanon did not integrate with the local population by Arabizing their names (as they had been Anglicized in the USA), but tenaciously maintained their national and cultural identity, almost forcing those who came into contact with them to speak Italian in order to communicate (Nava 1931, 34). Given this attitude, in Italy it was believed that the Levant could be the ideal destination for the emigration of Italians, who were not only farmers and workers but also skilled technicians (Nava 1931, 35).

The project to increase the Italian demographic presence was, however, a long-term one, given that at the beginning of the 1930s the Italian presence in Syria and Lebanon was not particularly great, as it instead was in Egypt: for example, in Beirut there were about 1,000 Italians, while in Aleppo there were about 500 (Nava 1931, 180). In the immediate future, it was necessary to strengthen the Italian cultural presence and national prestige. On the one hand, therefore, the government tried to encourage the teaching of Italian and the establishment of

[15] For a general history of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon, see Khoury (1987).

new Italian schools both in Syria and Lebanon (Parini 1934, 174; Dueck 2010, 123 ff.), while on the other hand, it financed anti-French newspapers, regardless of whether they were Muslim or Christian.

In this way, it was hoped at least to penetrate the Christian communities in the region, particularly the Maronite one. Indeed, historically, the old Italian states had enjoyed excellent relations with the Maronites, who, however, from the middle of the seventeenth century, became closely linked to France, which guaranteed security for them and the other Christian communities living in areas with a large Muslim majority, particularly in Lebanon. However, in Mussolini's view France was a power in decline, both economically and demographically, and this was evident in the difficulties it had in maintaining control over its Levant mandates. Thus, the Fascist government sought to expose French weakness and decline, as opposed to the rise of Italy which, by virtue of its exuberant growth, could present itself as a power capable of replacing France, both in governing the mandates and as protector of the Christians of the East. The link between France and the Levantine Christian communities dated back to the seventeenth century and the strong French presence linked to the issue of protecting eastern Christianity was also the basis of French claims on the Levant (Longrigg 1958, 41–2).[16]

Mussolini pursued a twofold policy in the Levant: an "Arab" policy, aimed at fostering the construction of a pan-Arab, anti-British and anti-French identity (throughout the Levant), and a "Christian" policy, presenting Italy as a Christian power capable of protecting Catholic, Orthodox and Maronite communities amidst the Muslim majority (Zamir 1985, 159).

Although the "Christian" policy was directed towards all communities, it was in the Maronite community that the Fascist regime found its main interlocutor. As already mentioned, the Italians financed various newspapers which, however, required a certain level of literacy to be read, something that differed greatly from community to community according to some estimates at the beginning of the 1930s. The rate was highest in the Maronite community (Vacca 1931, 94).

Italy granted large subsidies to the Maronite patriarch, who was in personal conflict with the French high commissioner in the Levant, in the hope of encouraging him to implement a more anti-French attitude and policy. However, the French managed to interfere in the Italian manoeuvres, succeeding in protecting their "special link" with the Maronites. Not only that, they also reasserted their power over Syria and Lebanon, showing themselves capable of dealing with all the various communities in the region by signing treaties with their representatives (Zamir 1997, 183–213).

However, this setback did not stop Italian attempts, particularly towards Lebanon and the Maronite community. And so, between 1935 and 1937, the Fascist government decided that, in addition to more or less direct actions in the field (es-

[16] Although they were already present, it is interesting to note that the role of the French in Lebanon increased considerably after the death of Fakhr al-Dīn and the loss of Tuscan influence.

sentially funding and subsidies to schools, newspapers and local community representatives), it was necessary to show the historical links between these territories and Italy and how much these places owed to the latter. At this juncture, the story of Maronite father Paolo Carali and his biography of Fakhr al-Dīn come into play.

5. Rereading the history of Faccardino

At the meeting of the Reale Accademia d'Italia Moral and Historical Sciences class on 12 May 1933, it was decided to publish the monograph "sull'emiro Fahr Eddin, che nel secolo XVII favorì alla sua corte artisti e commercianti toscani" in the academy's series of *Studi e documenti* (Reale Accademia d'Italia 1934, 318).[17] The publication of Carali's book was recommended, among others, by prominent Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino, director of the Rome-based Istituto per l'Oriente. The quoted sentence is probably the reason why Carali's book was strongly encouraged, and financed, by the Italian government through the Reale Accademia d'Italia. In accordance with the tradition, adopted by the academy, Tuscany, that is, "Italy", had had a great influence on the development of Lebanon and, according to the Fascist government, this fact needed to be highlighted. It is no coincidence that Carali's work bears this dedication: "Al fondatore dell'impero italiano Benito Mussolini con viva gratitudine e alta ammirazione dedico quest'opera sul fondatore dello stato libanese Fakhr ad-Din II" (Carali 1936a, I).[18] It is clear that the juxtaposition of founders is not accidental and must be read in the light of the political events in the Levant in the 1930s, when Italy sought to foster the emergence of a Lebanese identity that would stand in opposition to the French mandate (Benigni 2014, 109–10). It was the same in a sense as what had happened at the time of Fakhr al-Dīn when his "Lebanon" sought to carve out independence from Ottoman rule with Tuscan help.

The whole story of the relationship between Fakhr al-Dīn and the Medici, his journey to Italy and his subsequent rule as a Renaissance prince in Lebanon, was reinterpreted by Paolo Carali through the prism of the political context of his time. The very structure of the work invites us to reflect on how important it was to link Lebanon and Tuscany. In the section on method, Carali explains that the work is divided into two volumes, the first of which contains the European documents and the Italian translation of the eastern documents, while the second includes the Arabic translation of the western documents (Carali 1936a, 17). This may not seem particularly noteworthy, but it means that the work was also intended to be read and circulated in Levantine cultural circles.

In this introduction, Carali repeatedly emphasizes the direct involvement of the Italian government, which strongly encouraged the drafting of the work

[17] "on the emir, Fahr Eddin, who in the seventeenth century favoured Tuscan artists and merchants at his court".

[18] "To the founder of the Italian empire, Benito Mussolini, I dedicate this work on the founder of the Lebanese state, Fakhr ad-Din II, with great gratitude and admiration."

and did its utmost to facilitate Carali's work by having the folders containing the most important documents brought to Rome, where he resided, from the Florence archives (Carali 1936a, 17–8).

The first chapter is devoted to providing a rich review of the most important aspects of Fakhr al-Dīn's rule, such as administration, finance, commerce, justice and the army. Although Carali makes a great effort to show how trade between Europe, Italy, Tuscany and Lebanon was mutually beneficial, a certain bias in favour of the former is evident, while the Druze emir's Lebanon owed its prosperity in the 1620s and 1630s to the positive influence of contacts with Tuscany. I will mention but a few examples: the improvement of the Lebanese cattle breeds thanks to the introduction of Tuscan ones (Carali 1936a, 53), the magnificence of the emir's palace in Beirut as a result of the work of Tuscan artists (Carali 1936a, 52), the introduction of flax cultivation in Lebanon (Carali 1936a, 51) and the continuous requests that Fakhr al-Dīn sent to the Tuscan court regarding the sending of technicians (mostly artillerymen) and military architects to Lebanon (Carali 1936a, 75–6) or workers, gardeners and peasant families to teach the Lebanese how to work "*all'italiana*" ("in the Italian way") (Carali 1936a, 53–4, 125). It should be noted that most of these requests date back to the second period of his rule, that is, after his stay in Tuscany, where he had the opportunity to observe the military and naval shipyards in Livorno, Tuscan farming and breeding techniques and the magnificence of the Medici court (Carali 1936a, 126).

The second chapter, devoted entirely to both domestic and foreign policy, several times stresses the close ties that Lebanon had with Tuscany and how jealous France and Spain, the major Mediterranean powers of the time, were of this special relationship between the emir and the grand dukes (Carali 1936a, 110–2). Interestingly, however, Carali begins this chapter by emphasizing the fact that since Lebanon had been unified by Fakhr al-Dīn, the latter was to his state what King Vittorio Emanuele II had been to Italy (Carali 1936a, 84). This parallel can also be associated with Mussolini as founder of the empire, as if to suggest that Fascism and the foundation of the empire were in continuity with the Risorgimento and the unification of the Italian state.

Faccardino's biography ends on page 131, when the most conspicuous part of the work (pages 131–460) begins, that is, the series of documents collected, transcribed and published by Carali himself. Carali states the criteria used to choose which documents to publish and which not in the introduction:

> […] i nostri documenti autentici e contemporanei […] scelti fra i molti in ragione della loro importanza storica, piuttosto che per scopo apologetico, proveranno che mai il Libano fu sì potente e prospero come durante i quarantacinque anni di regno di Fakhr ad-Din II […] (Carali 1936a, 24).[19]

[19] "[…] our authentic and contemporary documents […] chosen from among many because of their historical importance, rather than for apologetic purposes, will prove that Lebanon was never so powerful and prosperous as during the 45 years of the reign of Fakhr ad-Din II […]."

With this statement, Carali almost seems to assert that the only documentation with real historical value was that which confirmed his predetermined assumption of a prosperous Lebanon under Fakhr al-Dīn, thus almost denying the importance of any documentation that did not support this idea. Indeed, in all likelihood, this is what was discarded. Then, in the same sentence, Carali states that the selected documentation served to show how prosperous Lebanon was under Fakhr al-Dīn. As Paolo Carali repeats in an essay published in the *Annali dell'Istituto Superiore Orientale* of Naples in the same year in which the first volume of Faccardino's biography came to light, this situation was substantially due to the beneficial influence that the Druze traveller had been subject to during his trip to Tuscany, that is Italy. I quote Carali's words below:

> Fu, quindi, questo suo soggiorno una sorgente di bene, che dall'Italia riversò nel Libano e nel resto del Prossimo Oriente; sicché possiamo dire, a giusto titolo, che l'Oriente deva la sua rinascita attuale all'Italia, culla delle belle arti e focolare del pensiero umano (Carali 1936b, 25).[20]

This is the conclusion reached by Paolo Carali regarding the story of Fakhr al-Dīn and his journey to Tuscany which, it should be stressed, lasted no more than a year and a half (November 1613 to July 1615), and to which perhaps too much importance is given. Bernard Heyberger has observed that the evidence of the emir's journey to Tuscany is the documentation most studied both by European and eastern historians, so much so that one almost has the impression that Fakhr al-Dīn only visited Tuscany during his western journey.[21] It is evident that Maronite-Catholic priest Paolo Carali was keen to please the Fascist regime which hosted him in Italy and financed his research. Not only that, he was also the director of the *Rivista Patriarcale*, which received funding from the Italian government with the approval of Galeazzo Ciano from 1937 onwards.

The reinterpretation of the story of Fakhr al-Dīn as the founding father of the Lebanese nation and the importance of contacts with Tuscany for the prosperity of his dominions was constructed through the works of European travellers such as Giovanni Mariti and especially Lebanese scholars such as M. Jouplain (Bulus Nujaym).[22] Nevertheless, it was the work of Paolo Carali that established the story once and for all. However, as Bernard Heyberger well points out, Tuscany's influence over Lebanon is but a myth and even the narrative of Faccardino as the

[20] "His stay was, therefore, a source of good, which he poured from Italy into Lebanon and the rest of the Near East; so that we can rightly say that the East owes its current rebirth to Italy, the cradle of the fine arts and the heart of human thought." This consideration concludes the introductory pages to a broader essay on the emir's stay in Italy.

[21] Bernard Heyberger cites in particular Adel Ismail (1955) and Richard Van Leeuwen (1992). See Heyberger (2009, 431), in particular footnote 13.

[22] In Paris in 1908, M. Jouplain, the French pseudonym of Bulus Nujaym, published his doctoral dissertation entitled *La Question du Liban, étude d'histoire diplomatique et de droit international* (Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1908) which identified the Maronite community as the heart of Lebanese democracy. On the issue of Lebanese national identity, see Firro (2004, 15).

founding father of modern Lebanon can no longer be deemed valid (Heyberger 2009, 430–32).[23] Consequently, the idea that modern Lebanon owes something to Italy ceases to have any value—if it ever had any beyond propaganda speeches.

6. Conclusions

As I said in the introduction, I am aware that I have analysed a rereading of historical events by making a rereading of the past myself. However, this very rereading made it possible to clearly show that Paolo Carali's work had ulterior motives in conducting a historical study of Fakhr al-Dīn since his story lent itself so well to a historical rereading, especially through an ideological prism.

Fakhr al-Dīn was not exactly a traveller, at least not in the classical sense of the term. The emir travelled westwards to escape his enemies in the East and this made him more of a fugitive or exile than a traveller. Nevertheless, the experience of the journey was certainly important, although perhaps more so for historians than for him, which is why its importance should not be exaggerated. In fact, the overstatement of its importance, and especially the part of the journey concerning Tuscany, has certainly been part of all historiographical reinterpretations of the life of the Druze emir. The reason for this is easy to understand: many words of support were spoken for the emir in Rome, Naples and Sicily without anything ever materializing, however. Tuscany, instead, was the only state visited by Fakhr al-Dīn and which implemented, at least partially, a real policy of support for him.

The fact that the Grand Duchy was home to one of the richest and most sophisticated courts of the late Italian Renaissance certainly played an important role in creating the later myth of Tuscan influence on the lands of Fakhr al-Dīn: indeed, all the "modernization" works of his state (construction of bridges, irrigation works, increase in trade and restoration of fortresses) were possible thanks to the beneficial Italian influence, to quote Carali (1936b, 25) once again.

Although it was the ties with Tuscany and his journey there that gave rise to this myth, it must be stressed that the Tuscan grand dukes did not pursue a different policy towards Fakhr al-Dīn than they did towards other Muslim states with which they established relations. For instance, with regard to Fakhr al-Dīn, that Tuscan technicians were sent to Lebanon has always been mentioned as something unusual and particular. In reality, the grand dukes of Tuscany, in particular Ferdinand I, always sent their technicians to the allied courts: thus, Ferdinand I sent some to ʿAli Jānbulād and both he and Cosimo II planned to send some to Persia, to mention but two examples (Trentacoste 2021b, 118–20).

Therefore, it appears that we need to play down the importance of Fakhr al-Dīn's travel to Tuscany and the Tuscan presence in Lebanon, and to reread all this in the context of relations between Tuscany and the Levant (but not only), without giving it more importance than it deserves. However, it is true that his travels gave me the excuse to deal with him and his story, in the light of which

[23] On this issue, in addition to Heyberger, see also Hazran (2009).

the analysis and parallel between the Medici and Fascist policies towards the same region, even if three centuries apart, are much more interesting.

In the introduction I wrote that the fact that Fascist policy in the 1930s followed the Medici policy of three centuries before was certainly a coincidence, but is this really the case? Rereading the story of Fakhr al-Dīn may help to clarify the perhaps somewhat confused course of relations between Italy and the Levant, which has nevertheless retained, I do not want to say a linearity, but perhaps a certain coherence.

Let us begin with the geopolitical situation in the Syro-Lebanese region. Both in the first 30 years of the seventeenth century and in the 1930s, the situation seemed to favour the intervention of a foreign power. The dominant power seemed to be in a predicament: just as the Ottoman Empire looked as if it were in crisis against the pasha of Aleppo and the emir of Lebanon at the beginning of the seventeenth century, so France appeared to be struggling to maintain its control over these territories. The temporary difficulty in controlling the region was seen in the West as a clear sign of the Ottomans' inexorable decline, and in the same way as between 1601 and 1604 propaganda texts were published in Florence explaining how the Ottoman Empire was on the brink of collapse, three centuries later anti-French propaganda was published in Italy, claiming that France was a power in decline (Piras 2011, viii, 114).

A declining power but still a great power: in 1607, the Ottoman forces were able to crush the rebellions of the local princes and again in the 1930s France managed to crush the revolts in the region. This show of force demonstrated that the adversary still had the capacity to react and was still too strong to be openly challenged by a "second-class" power, as Tuscany certainly was in relation to the Ottomans and as Italy was also in relation to France.

This situation left the Italian players of both periods unperturbed. Renouncing direct intervention, momentarily at least, and preferring to support revolts and strengthen ties with the Levant, the long-term plan did not aim for territorial occupation, but nevertheless strove for indirect control of the region. However, the Tuscans/Italians did all this while trying to present themselves not only as ideal partners of these eastern polities in the struggle for independence but also as the potential liberators of Jerusalem and protectors of the eastern Christians.

The latter, and in particular the Maronites, were identified as the main interlocutor by both the Tuscans and the Fascist Italians, especially in Lebanon. Moreover, they were a possible "bridgehead" to increase Tuscan/Italian influence in the region. Giorgio Maronio, who proposed himself as Cosimo II's informer, was a Maronite religious man like Paolo Carali, on whom Fascism relied to create a narrative that bound the Levant to Tuscany and Italy. The sending of technicians, peasants, soldiers and gifts was also intended, again in the long term, to increase Tuscan/Italian cultural and economic influence, as well as the prestige of the Tuscan/Italian state in the eyes of the Levantines.

This last aspect has perhaps fostered the most speculation regarding relations between the Levant and Tuscany/Italy. In fact, there is no doubt that some, perhaps more than a few, Tuscans went to the Levant, and in this case to Lebanon, but it is not possible to quantify the real influence that their presence had. Ar-

chitecture is one of the fields in which this alleged influence has been most debated: Giovanni Mariti, a Tuscan traveller who visited Lebanon at the end of the eighteenth century, claimed that the palace of Fakhr al-Dīn in Beirut was built according to oriental taste and only partially restored by Tuscan workers who did not have time to decorate it according to Italian Renaissance influences (Mariti 1787, 234). On the other hand, Paolo Carali, who unlike Mariti had a clear political objective, wrote that this lack of visual evidence of Tuscan influence on Lebanese architecture was nothing more than proof that the Tuscan craftsmen had worked to please the emir's oriental taste (Carali 1936a, 126).[24]

In short, I could go on and on listing the similarities and parallels between the Medici and Fascist policies: parallels that at this point were no longer accidental but dictated by a geopolitical situation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Levant that did not allow for any other course of action, either during the Renaissance or during the 1930s. However, once the impossibility of occupying the Levant was realized, one perhaps fundamental difference came to light. The effort made by the Medici was a "classical" one, that of an early modern state that wanted to expand its commercial outlets and bind lands to itself not culturally but economically and, why not, also dynastically, linking the name of its ruling house to the crown of Jerusalem and Cyprus. I do not want to say that there were ideal motivations behind it, far from it, but there was something more than just economic reasons or conquest. On the other hand, having lost the opportunity to occupy the Levant in the short term, Fascism tried to carry out a different operation, of a cultural nature, with which it sought to bind to Italy, and thus to itself, the history of a region that in reality owed no more to Italy than it did to other countries. And this is where the experience of Fakhr al-Dīn's journey to Tuscany and his ties with the Medici fit in perfectly. If we consider the fact that for decades Lebanese historians themselves have attributed a much greater importance to this journey and these relations than they actually had, it can be said that their rereading in a strongly ideological way has enjoyed a certain success.

I would like to comment on this last aspect, namely on how hard it is for this myth to die, even today. The idea that Fakhr al-Dīn owed a great deal to Tuscany (and therefore to Italy) can still be found in narratives of his story on some Italian nationalist and even extreme right-wing websites. Here, the story of the Lebanese emir merges into a wider, equally "mythical" discourse on the special relationship between Mussolini and Muslims who, according to a fairly common narrative, saw him as a model to follow.[25]

[24] On this aspect, see Hadad (2007) and Scham (2015).

[25] Here are just a couple of examples. The first is an article on the website "L'intellettuale dissidente" (Mariani 2016), a tendentially right-wing but not extreme website which slavishly repeats the classic narrative about the close friendship between Tuscany (Italy) and Lebanon and how much the latter owes to its relations with the Medici. The second is instead an article that appeared on the openly right-wing nationalist site "Il primato nazionale" (Rossiello 2017), which revives the rhetoric of Islamic admiration for Mussolini and Italy although there are no references to Fakhr al-Dīn.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the last parallelism between these two stories. When Lebanon was invaded in 1633 by forces loyal to the Ottoman sultan, Fakhr al-Dīn asked for the grand duke to send him the Tuscan fleet to support his resistance from the sea while he fought on land. However, the fleet did not show up in Levantine waters: aware that he could not do much and pressured by the Tuscan commercial circles to resume good relations with the Ottomans, Ferdinand II abandoned his ally Faccardino to his fate. Similarly, when France reacted more harshly to anti-French unrest, Fascism limited its involvement in support of the Lebanese and Syrians in the Levant, thus showing that realpolitik was ultimately more important than the alleged friendship with Islam.

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An Italian Hero for China. Reading Marco Polo in the Fascist Era

Laura de Giorgi

Abstract: This article offers an overview of the readings of Marco Polo's ventures offered to the Italian public opinion during the Fascist era. Marco Polo's image was adapted to the needs of patriotic pedagogy, propaganda of Fascist values and colonial aspirations, and the attempt to redefine Rome's political, economic and cultural role in the world. In a complex mix of academic and popular readings, the official discourse transformed the Venetian traveller into a symbol of Italianness in China in order to legitimize Fascist Italy's ambitions and expectations and stress its distinct identity in comparison with the other western powers. Although Chinese reception of this discourse was limited by several factors at that time, this process certainly helped establish Marco Polo's iconic significance in Sino-Italian cultural diplomacy well into the twentieth century.

Keywords: Marco Polo, China and Italy, Fascist propaganda, Italian travel literature, Italian nationalism

In 1881, when the Third Congress of the Italian Geographical Society took place in Venice, visitors had the chance to admire a statue imported from Canton in China, supposedly portraying one of Venice's most famous personalities, Marco Polo. The statue, currently in Museo Correr in St Mark's Square, was a copy of the original one kept and used as an object of worship—a westerner among the *arhats*—in the Hualin Buddhist temple in Canton, known in the West as the Temple of the Five Hundred Gods.

While the statue seemed to portray a westerner, it had no specific features proving that it was in fact the Venetian traveller. However, the assumption that Marco Polo was considered a local god in China was appealing to Italian nationalist sentiment. And so the *Gazzetta del Regno d'Italia* proudly reported the following description from the *Gazzetta di Venezia*:

> Il nostro famoso viaggiatore è vestito alla cinese col manto però e col cappello alla foggia europea. Egli è seduto, ha i mustacchi e la barba a collare, dipinti in bleu scuro, e la sua fisonomia dimostra evidentemente di non avere il carattere mongolo, sebbene l'artista cinese vi abbia naturalmente impresso un tono e un'impronta particolare. Davanti al seggiolone rosso sul quale Marco Polo è seduto, c'è un vaso di porcellana dove si depongono i profumi, perché egli è

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

 DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.10, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 161-180, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

> venerato come un genio tutelare della Cina nel tempio di Canton; e sotto vi è l'iscrizione in lingua cinese (*Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* 1881).[1]

Nonetheless, its attribution already carried some doubt. As early as the 1870s, western observers in China had reported the information with scepticism. In his *Walks in Canton*, published in 1875, John Henry Gray, archbishop of Hong Kong, affirmed that this story had been told by a "writer", but that the information was not grounded on any evidence (Gray 1875, 206). French Orientalists were sceptical as well (*Revue de l'Extrême-Orient* 1882). In Italy, doubts among experts on China were reported by the press. For example, the *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* (Protonari 1882, 380) mentioned the opinion of Samuel Beal, professor of Chinese at the University College of London and expert on the Silk Road. According to Beal, the statue was rather the effigy of Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (Francesco Saverio), who had died on Shangchuan Island, close to Guangdong, in 1552 before managing to touch Chinese soil.

In spite of all these scholarly discussions, in Italy, the idea that Marco Polo was considered a divinity in Canton was echoed in travelogues and reports about China for a long time, with voices in support of this theory reported as evidence (*Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 1891, 608). Indeed, this notion mirrored the importance symbolically attributed to Polo's legacy and fame as an auspicious omen for the Italian presence in China and a heroic symbol of Italianness in the East.

A few years before the arrival of the statue in Venice, the Italian colonial enterprise had been extended to China, with disappointing results. After the conclusion of a commercial treaty in 1866, Italy's trade with China had not increased as hoped, and the kingdom's diplomatic power had remained marginal, as shown by its incapacity to affirm its role in protecting Catholic missions to the Chinese Empire. In addition, at the end of the nineteenth century, Italy's request for a concession in Sanmen Bay was refused by the Qing Court, marking a great diplomatic defeat. The perspective was only changed by Italy's participation in the Boxer Expedition in 1900, when it obtained its only colonial outpost in East Asia, in the Port of Tianjin (Francioni 2004; Samarani and De Giorgi 2011). In the search for an auspicious omen in the midst of these mixed fortunes, the name of the Venetian merchant was inevitably connected to Italy's enterprise in the East: the first armoured cruiser of the Regia Marina destined for East Asia in the 1890s and launched in 1892 was named "Marco Polo". The warship served along the Chinese coast for 20 years before being decommissioned in the early 1920s. Similarly, during the Tianjin concession, Marco Polo's

[1] "Our famous traveller is dressed in the Chinese style, but he wears a mantle and a hat in the European style. He is seated, he has a moustache and a collar beard, painted in dark blue, and his features are evidently not Mongolian, although the Chinese artist has naturally given it a tone and a particular imprint. In front of the tall red chair on which Marco Polo is sitting, there is a porcelain vase where a visitor can put incense, because he is revered as a tutelary genius of China in the temple of Canton: and below there is an inscription in Chinese."

legitimized presence was immediately recalled at the spatial level, as the main street was named after him in the first regulatory plan of 1905.

The symbolic importance attributed to Marco Polo in the context of Italy's expected role in China comes as no surprise. Rather, it is just one facet of the complex spread of his fame in western Europe and Italy after he wrote *The Travels*. As one of the most iconic books in European cultural history for centuries, Marco Polo's work had had a profound effect on western geographical knowledge and its approach to the world since the end of the Middle Ages (Larner 1999). His *Travels* had helped to establish the European genre of travel writing, with its emphasis on the heroic individual's ordeals and triumphs (Kennedy 2013, 3). In the age of European imperialism, through the convergence of racial ideologies, colonial policies, Orientalism and the emerging mass culture, Marco Polo was increasingly evoked as a model and precursor of the western modern self's relation with the Orient.

Part of the afterlife of *The Travels* is constituted by the Italian discourse on Marco Polo during the Fascist era. The process to make him a fetish of Italy's primacy and peculiarity in western relations with the "Orient" marked a step towards Marco Polo's transformation into one of the main and most popular icons in cultural diplomacy between Italy and China.

1. The Italianness of Marco Polo

The cultural history of Marco Polo's *Travels* in the West is deeply intertwined with its textual history, and the complex mix of languages and versions addressing different audiences in Europe (Larner 1999). Although Rustichello's original manuscript was lost, it is known that the first version of Marco Polo's narrative was written in Franco-Venetian, probably in 1298–1299. As early as the beginning of the fourteenth century, the book was translated into Old French—in 1307, a copy was donated to the nobleman Thibault de Chepoy, who passed through Venice as part of Prince Charles de Valois' envoy to regain control of Constantinople—as well as into Latin by Pipino, in order to satisfy the interest expressed by Dominican monks.

Several copies of manuscripts in Latin, French, Tuscan and Venetian have been preserved in European libraries, but it was the invention of the press that widened the book's diffusion and prompted the production of critical editions by humanists, such as Giovanni Battista Ramusio's Italian translation in the second volume of his *Delle Navigationi et Viaggi* (1559). From the early modern era onwards, editions in multiple western languages were printed and began to circulate in Europe. At once a romance, book about the wonders of the world, geographical treatise and trade manual, over time, the reading of *The Travels* has not only reflected different needs but has also raised divergent feedback, ranging from celebration of its inspiring usefulness as a geographical source, to a kind of disdain and consideration as a work of fantasy and invention.

Its relevance in the development of modern geographical knowledge and exploration is often acknowledged as it was among the books read by Christopher Co-

lumbus. At the same time, in the seventeenth century, when the Jesuit missionaries became the principal suppliers of information about the East in Europe, doubts were cast on the factuality of Marco Polo's presence in China, as it was pointed out how many important features, such as the Great Wall, had apparently not been noticed by the Venetian merchant during his long stay there (Larner 1999, 171–75).

Though the importance of Marco Polo's *Travels* as a primary source of geographical information apparently began to wane after the development of stronger contacts with China in the modern period, the appeal connected to his experience in alien and exotic lands remained. As "exploration came to assume a mythic status in the European mind, serving as the harbinger of Europe's triumphal entry onto the world stage" and "became bound up with European notions of the modern" (Kennedy 2013, 1), Marco Polo's fame was destined not to fade. For example, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European exploration of the remote areas of central Asia still made reference to the information conveyed in his book (Larner 1999, 179; Stewart 2013).

Nevertheless, modern readings of Marco Polo's *Travels* were becoming increasingly connected to other fields of study, such as philology and sinology, too (Lanciotti 2004). Since the Renaissance, the book had never stopped being the object of literary and philological studies that sought to reconstruct its textual history, understand the context behind its production and verify the credibility of the experiences told in its pages—in what Larner calls the "Polo-scholarship industry" (Larner 1999, 171). At the same time, modern western sinology looked towards studies on Marco Polo as a field in which it could display its role in multidisciplinary research on China (Lanciotti 2006).

As has been the case since its origins, and in the age of competing European nationalisms and imperialisms, however, approaches to Marco Polo's book were shaped by factors different from pure scholarly curiosity and engagement. From the nineteenth century onwards, "each of the states involved in this enterprise had its own explorers to honor and celebrate" and "claim as their own" (Kennedy 2013, 1). While the academic study of *The Travels* remained transnational, it was not exempt from perhaps not always explicit nationalist bias. The lasting fortunes of *The Travels* have been tied to the subtle self-identification with the author that colonial officers, ethnographers and explorers of Asia were able to produce through their own readings of the book. As Larner noticed, their works on the text made "everything in the Book still alive and in some way contemporary" (1999, 180), in the manner of erudite translations often aimed at assessing the geographical truth of what Polo wrote. However, the actualization of the book also resulted in the projection of modern identities onto its author. If Polo's true voice as a medieval man was absent from the book, this offered the possibility of creating a modern Marco Polo, mirroring different concerns each time.

Daniela Rando's research on the construction of medieval Venice in modernity (Rando 2014) offers a compelling portrait of the complex and often contradictory interpretations of Marco Polo's "western" identity produced in the field of Orientalism between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.

Basically split between the image of an explorer and scientist on the one hand and an administrator and officer on the other, these representations of Polo reflected the impact of colonial ideology on European Orientalism. Thus, the reading put together by Frenchman Guillaume Pauthier in his 1865 work (Polo 1865) emphasizes Marco Polo's experience and talent as an administrator for the Chinese emperor (also highlighting his "Frenchness", rational attitude and bureaucratic *habitus*). However, a few years later, in his 1871 English translation, which would also be a great success in Italy, long-serving colonial officer in British Asia, Colonel Henry Yule, preferred to underline Polo's role as a precursor of the great explorations of the modern and contemporary age and proto-ethnographer in spite of the errors and evident gaps in his report.

It is worth noting that Yule actually completed the second edition of his work in 1875, during a long stay in Palermo (after having left active service in India due to his wife's illness), dedicating the volume to Queen Margherita di Savoia. In the words of the editor, the book concerned "the life and work of a renowned Italian" (Polo 1875, XX). Later, Yule's version was used by sinologist Henri Cordier for his edition (Polo 1903).

In Italy, however, textual and literary research on the book also served to affirm its importance in the Italian literary tradition. The profile of Polian studies was basically shaped by the philological and textual interests in national literary history of mainly Florence- and Venice-based scholars. To mention just some of the authors: in 1827, in Florence, Giovanni Battista Baldelli Boni (1776–1831) edited his *Viaggi di Marco Polo illustrati e commentati* based on a Tuscan version (Baldelli Boni 1827); in 1847, in Venice, Ludovico Pasini edited Vincenzo Lazari's translation and critical edition (Polo 1847); later in 1863, Adolfo Bartoli (1833–1894) published his *I viaggi di Marco Polo secondo la lezione del codice magliabechiano più antico reintegrati con il testo francese a stampa* (Polo 1863), which was dedicated to Nicolò Tommaseo.

Italian philological research on Marco Polo's book actually reached its peak in the twentieth century. This culmination was represented by the authoritative edition of *The Travels* by Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (1886–1966), who had worked on more than 70 manuscripts, consulted in libraries in Italy and Europe, and based his reconstruction on a manuscript recently discovered in Milan. An eminent scholar of French literature who became president of the Accademia della Crusca after the Second World War, Benedetto published his critical edition *Il Milione di Marco Polo* in 1928 (Polo 1928a), an English translation (*The Travels of Marco Polo*) in 1931 and a modern Italian translation in 1932, titled *Il libro di messer Marco Polo cittadino di Venezia detto Milione dove si raccontano le meraviglie dei mondo* (Polo 1931, 1932).

Benedetto's work was explicitly promoted as both a "national" and "scientific" milestone in the affirmation of Italy's centrality in Polian studies. Benedetto's approach to *The Travels* was focused on the search for the original text, but was also imbued with patriotic feelings, celebrating the "scientific" quality of Polo's approach to the subject, but also his "virility", "sober heroism" and "boldness" (Rando 2014, 377).

The Italian discourse around Marco Polo and his enterprise in Asia actually developed at the crossroads of academic research, popular and educational literature, travel journalism and political propaganda, each area being contaminated by the others.

While the cultural climate surrounding the academic study of Marco Polo's book in Italy was mainly shaped by its intellectual importance in the Italian literary tradition, there was also a broader concern about his legacy as a model of Italian virtues and an inspiration for nationalist pride. In the Venetian Republic, the diffusion of the book and the fame of its author had already received official support from the local educated and political elites as a marker of the city's identity since Renaissance times. In nineteenth-century Italy, both before and after unification, Marco Polo was one of the many names included in the patriotic pantheon as a model of national virtues and a new hero of the nation.

The process of the divulgation of Marco Polo's ventures in literary anthologies, popular literature and the press shifted attention away from the book's importance as a description of exotic places to the celebration of the figure of Marco Polo himself. These publications include Placido Giacinto Zurla's short biography of Marco Polo included in the 1841 edition of *Iconografia italiana degli uomini e delle donne celebri* (Zurla 1841), or the biography in *Il libro dell'emulazione. I fanciulli celebri d'Italia e l'infanzia degli illustri italiani*, edited by Francesco Berlan in 1875 (*Libro dell'emulazione*, 156), which mentioned Marco Polo as a navigator and underlined his young age at the time of his travels as an inspiration for Italian youngsters.

2. Fascist discourse on Marco Polo and Italy's role in China

In the Fascist era, the myth of Marco Polo as a heroic symbol of Italianness was also shaped by new political and ideological concerns. Increasingly imbued with nationalist feelings and not devoid of a sense of retaliation towards the cultural, political and economic hegemony in East Asia of other western countries such as the United Kingdom and France, the book began to be read and its author appreciated in new forms in the context of popular education, travel journalism and propaganda. Besides the nationalistic pedagogy, the cult of the new Fascist man and the claim to Italy's primacy in western culture and relations with the Orient contributed to Marco Polo's romanticized role as a heroic representative of the destiny of the Italian race in the Far East.

It goes without saying that the book continued to be read as an adventure tale and, at the same time, an educational work. Popular books published in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, suggest that its appeal was still tied to its exoticism as well as its supposed value in offering a virtuous model for the Italian youth.

The book on Marco Polo in the series *I grandi viaggi di esplorazione*, edited by Ettore Fabietti (1876–1962) for Paravia in 1924, is a perfect example of this. Fabietti had a long career in the popularization of literature and knowledge, beginning in the early twentieth century. In his words, the series had to address the interests of youths and common people, who had a preference for adventure

and the exotic, since "l'esploratore è l'eroe popolare per eccellenza" (Fabietti 1924, 1).[2] The first volume was dedicated to Marco Polo and written by Ranieri Allulli, a prolific writer whose speciality was biographies and didactic literature (Allulli 1924). In 1928, the author also edited Marco Polo's book for a popular series on *Viaggi e Scoperte di Esploratori e Navigatori Italiani* published by Alpes (Polo 1928b). Both books were reprinted several times even after the end of the Second World War.

Allulli dedicated his biography of Marco Polo to his son Enrico "capo pattuglia nel sodalizio milanese Ragazzi Pionieri Italiani", while defining the Venetian as "italiano grandissimo esploratore degli esploratori" (1924, I).[3] The biography was essentially a romance, focusing on the adventurous life of Polo in China and the fabulous Orient. It told all the traditional anecdotes, including the popular story of the banquet organized for his sceptical relatives and friends after his return to Venice, an unproven tale which was actually relayed by Ramusio.

Similarly, in 1931, Vallardi published a richly illustrated edition of *I meravigliosi viaggi di Marco Polo* by Luigi Rinaldi, whose writing career was focused on popular adaptations of travel literature and novels. Rinaldi's book was again in fact just a tale of adventures in exotic lands, flavoured by a sentimental emphasis on the hero's nostalgia for Venice and his homeland (Rinaldi 1931). As an aside, Rinaldi was also author of a biography of Christopher Columbus, another explorer whose Italianness began to be heavily reclaimed as instrumental to patriotic pedagogy in the nineteenth century (Rosso 2021).

In line with the regime's propagandistic readings driven by mass nationalistic pedagogy, Marco Polo's ties to his homeland were an important facet of the popular narratives. This was also linked to the new Fascist foreign policy, which sought to expand Italy's culture abroad and include migration in the definition of Italy's global role. This new attitude also affected the strategy towards China. In this context, the celebration of Marco Polo—the first westerner in China able to build a special and friendly relationship with the empire for the sake of his Venice—was connected to the hope of strengthening Italy's position in East Asia.

In the late 1920s and the 1930s, Mussolini's government attempted to redefine Italy's role in the world geopolitical landscape by changing the perception of Italy not only in the region of the Mediterranean Sea and Africa, but also in China and East Asia, where it promoted a more intense diplomatic activism. The goal was to target the Chinese public opinion's perception of Italy as occupying a marginal position in comparison with the other European powers, in spite of it being one of the countries benefitting from the "unequal treaties" after the Opium War which had led to the legal foundation of western imperialism in the area. Moreover, if Italy's foreign policy in the area had been traditionally aligned with Great Britain's approach to all issues concerning East Asia, at the

[2] "[…] the explorer is the popular hero par excellence".

[3] "[…] patrol leader of the Milan's Young Italian Pioneers […] a great Italian, the explorer among the explorers".

end of the 1920s Mussolini aimed to shift Rome's attitude and pave the way for more intense, though short-lived, cooperation with China (Samarani and De Giorgi 2011; Lasagni 2019).

This change of attitude also derived from a perception of crisis in old European colonialism due to rising Chinese nationalism. In 1928, Italy and the Republic of China signed a new treaty in which Italy recognized China's customs autonomy and agreed to a future abolition of extraterritorial rights, which had been the most significant provision made by the unequal treaties. However, in the same year, the establishment of a new government in China under the leadership of the Nationalist Party unified the country, offering new challenges and opportunities. The Chinese Nationalists, whose main leader was General Chiang Kai-shek, looked abroad for technical advice in terms of modernization plans but at the same time decided to restore China's sovereignty in economic and cultural affairs. In this context, Rome gained greater room for manoeuvre due to the diplomatic activism of Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, first consul and then minister in China from 1930 to 1933 (Moccia 2014). In 1934, the relationship between the two countries entered a new stage with the elevation of the respective legations to the rank of embassies.

At the same time as cooperation between nationalist China and Italy set out to boost Italian industry's support of Chinese development, some Chinese intellectual and political circles showed a political and ideological interest in Italian Fascism, as Mussolini's Italy posited itself as a model for modernity based on a strong state, authoritarian nationalist culture and state-organized mobilization. This nourished some Chinese interest in Fascist corporatism and traced a pathway for more intense cultural diplomacy between the two countries. Small Italian communities in Chinese cities were invited to play their part, as shown by the establishment of Fascist Party associations and branches there (Lasagni 2019). The goal became to regain primacy in cultural relations with China vis-à-vis other western powers and expand Italy's economic presence. In 1933, Italian cultural diplomacy towards Asia was specifically enhanced by the foundation of the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) in Rome. IsMEO, directed by Giovanni Gentile, aimed to become a scholarly and educational institution in the field of oriental studies, as well as an instrument to improve Italy's capacity to weave cultural relations with governments in that area (Ferretti 1986; Crisanti 2020, 178–210). Not surprisingly, considering the importance attributed to geographical and ethnological explorations in its mission, Polian studies became a topic of interest for IsMEO (Almagià 1938).

In this context, Marco Polo was attributed new meanings as a role model. The first westerner in Asia, his legacy could not be downplayed now that Italy was launching new explorations of those remote areas, such as those organized and led by Giuseppe Tucci (Crisanti 2020, 211–300). But Marco Polo was also to be the symbol of a distinct Italian attitude towards Asia, presented as being based on cooperation and peaceful relations. The historical experience of the "Italian" Marco Polo was to help legitimize Italy's claim to be a friendly and supportive western power in the eyes of the Chinese nationalists too.

The speeches given at the inauguration of IsMEO offer some insights into this new approach. On this occasion, for example, Mussolini himself emphasized the connection between culture and trade in Italian relations with the Orient, suggesting that Rome's new political strategy in the area was founded on the acknowledgment of the Asian people's dignity and traditions (V. V. and U. F. 1934: Crisanti 2020, 198–99). Similarly, when addressing Asian students from European universities invited to Italy in December 1933, the Duce stressed how Italy's relations with Asia were historically successful as they were based on mutual equality and respect (Lasagni 2019). In his words, Fascist Italy was different from the western materialist and capitalist countries that the Asian nationalists hated, since it had inherited the spiritual and cultural qualities of ancient Rome. It was thanks to this tradition that Italy would be able to develop stronger political relations and create a new unity between Europe and Asia.

In the context of this new engagement in Asia, functional to projecting an image of a civilizing colonialism inherently different to that of the old western powers such as the United Kingdom, Marco Polo was evoked by Fascist propaganda as a powerful symbol of Italy's historical capacity to weave dialogue and cooperation with the East. Giovanni Gentile himself, speaking at the IsMEO inauguration, mentioned how the institute had to serve the Italian youth's outlook towards "l'Oriente antichissimo e sempre attuale, di cui un Italiano mercante ardimentoso e geniale, scrittore mirabile d'ingenuità e di prudenza, fu primo a scrivere in Occidente" (V. V. and U. F. 1934, 18).[4] With these words, he recalled old tropes and stereotypes about Marco Polo as a champion of trade and science, while also connecting his example to the need to expand Italy's global economic and cultural presence.

During the Fascist era, Marco Polo's portrait was often based on a prototype of the "Italian expat". This had a double meaning, as the regime saw Italians abroad as "explorers" and "migrant workers", both characterized by their "audacity" and their indissoluble link with the motherland (Pretelli 2008).

In fact, since the early years of the Fascist regime, travel literature and political propaganda had portrayed Marco Polo as a hero embodying all the qualities of the new Italians: ready to conquer the world and find their place in China thanks to their capacities and values, and not military and economic power (De Giorgi 2010; Basilone 2019).

A perfect example is the chapter dedicated to Marco Polo by Mario Appelius (1892–1946), one of the voices of the regime, but also a restless traveller, in one of his several travel reports on China and Asia (he lived in China for almost two years in the mid-1920s). In his book published in 1926 (Appelius 1926) and dedicated to Nicola Bonservizi, a regime journalist and exponent of the Fasci killed by an anarchist two years earlier in Paris, Appelius describes his visit to the temple of Canton where the original statue of Marco Polo was "venerated" by the Chinese. Contemplating the statue of his compatriot in that exotic temple, the

[4] "[…] an ancient and still present Orient, of which a brave and smart Italian merchant, and talented writer full of ingenuousness and foresight, was the first to write in the West."

journalist let himself "assaporare il fascino dolce di questo ambiente d'Estremo Levante […] in compagnia di messer Marco Polo" and offered his readership a flowery Orientalist fantasy, filled with nationalist pride:

> Scrittori stranieri si sono recentemente dati la pena di sottoporre questa statua di Marco Polo ad un rigoroso esame di sartoria storica, per contestare l'autenticità del personaggio e svalutare così l'omaggio reso dall'Estremo Oriente attraverso Marco Polo alla razza italiana. Dottissimi tedeschi hanno dimostrato con una critica serrata delle cuciture e delle bottoniere che l'abbigliamento di questo Marco Polo non è veneziano ma corrisponde al vestito adoperato dai portoghesi nel XVI secolo. Bravissimo, "her [*sic*] Professor"! Ciò non toglie però che le cronache antiche di Canton e gli inventarii imperiali parlino chiaramente di una statua di Marco Polo nella pagoda dei Cinquecento Genii e che il Buddha dell'Occidente sia venerato proprio sotto tal nome dal popolino di Kuang-Ceu-Fu. Io che non m'intendo né d'occhielli trecenteschi né di risvolti dei seicento, sono con la leggenda dei secoli e con la tradizione delle genti. Italiano, m'inchino riverente dinanzi all'effige di questo grande uomo della mia terra, divinizzato dalle razze dell'Oriente. […] I suoi scritti sono tuttora il più grande documento che il mondo occidentale possegga sull'antica Cina. Ed il suo libro ha un contenuto così universale che ancora oggi la Cina parla al nostro spirito come i suoi occhi la videro e come la sua anima la sentì: un miraggio di ricchezza, uno scenario di raffinata bellezza, un caos di umanità! (Appelius 1926, 131–33).[5]

Appelius's polemical argument against the "foreign scholars" underlines the hyper-nationalist discourse on Marco Polo typical of the age. In his words, Polo embodies Italian identity as a "complessa figura di navigatore e di mercante, di diplomatico e d'artista, di gran signore e di uomo politico" (Appelius 1926, 135), summing up all the features of

> [la] nostra gente avventurosa e abile, audace e positiva, sempre signorile anche nella povertà; gente che il difficile attira ed il complicato seduce, che sempre ha offerto il suo braccio ad ogni impresa temeraria e sempre ebbe per confini ai

[5] "[…] enjoy the sweet charm of this Far Eastern setting […] in the company of Messer Marco Polo! […] Recently some foreign writers have taken the trouble to submit this statue of Marco Polo to a rigorous examination of historical dressmaking, in order to contest the authenticity of the character and thus devalue the homage paid to the Italian race by the Far East through Marco Polo. Closely criticizing the seams and buttons, German scholars have shown that the clothing of this Marco Polo is not Venetian but corresponds to the dress used by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Very good 'Herr Professor'! However, the fact remains that the ancient chronicles of Canton and the imperial inventories clearly speak of a statue of Marco Polo in the pagoda of the Five Hundred Gods and that the Buddha of the West is venerated by that name by the populace of Canton. I, who do not understand either fourteenth-century eyelets or seventeenth-century lapels, am with the legend of the centuries and the tradition of the peoples. As an Italian, I bow reverently to the effigy of this great man of my land, deified by the races of the East. […] His writings are still the greatest document on ancient China possessed by the western world. And his book has such a universal content that China still speaks to our spirit as his eyes saw it and how his soul felt it: a mirage of wealth, a scenery of refined beauty, a chaos of humanity!".

> suoi voli i limiti stessi del mondo. Il suo spirito proteiforme, capace di sentire il linguaggio divino della poesia e nello stesso tempo d'afferrare il lato pratico della vita, era tipicamente italiano. Quelle svariate doti che caratterizzano la sua personalità straordinaria sono in fondo le medesime qualità fondamentali dei mille e mille italiani che ieri ancora s'avventuravano oltre le frontiere della patria col semplice patrimonio delle loro risorse spirituali per farsi largo in mezzo al tumulto delle genti, che oggi partono pei mari e per le terre con una visione radiosa d'imperio nei cuori e nelle fronti. Sotto tale aspetto Marco Polo meriterebbe di essere maggiormente celebrato dalla nostra razza, perché veramente egli riassume nella sua sagoma ciclopica parecchie delle virtù basilari della stirpe! (Appelius 1926, 136).[6]

At the same time, Marco Polo became the symbol of migrants, emphasizing the Italian entrepreneurial and adventurous spirit, as well as the indissoluble bond with the motherland (Appelius 1926, 138).

At any rate, in Fascist discourse, the construction of Marco Polo as an icon of Italian identity founded on its people's capacity to expand outside the national borders was often matched by stress on the Venetian merchant's "Fascist" qualities of boldness and audacity. For example, in the same year, when Appelius fantasized about Italy's destiny before the statue of Polo in the Canton temple, the far more powerful Venetian Count of Misurata Giuseppe Volpi (1877–1947), and then minister of finances, did not refrain from celebrating Marco Polo on the occasion of the commemoration of the Colombian enterprise in Genoa. Volpi's speech was duly publicized by the press. The literary journal *L'eloquenza* provided it with a telling introductory note by the anonymous editor:

> Alla gloria del grande Cristoforo è stata unita anche quella di un altro famoso irrequieto, uno di quei fantastici vagamondi che, nei secoli passati, a cominciare dall'alba della civiltà, hanno portato il nome italiano fin nelle contrade più ermetiche e lontane, fra genti misteriose e favoleggiate: vogliamo dire Marco Polo, l'autore del *Milione*, lo scopritore della Persia, l'amico del Kan dei Tartari, il più grande viaggiatore del mondo (*Conferenze, discorsi e prolusioni* 1926, 663–64).[7]

[6] "[…] a complex figure of navigator and merchant, diplomat and artist, gentleman and politician […] our adventurous and skilled, daring and positive people, always noble even in poverty; a people that attract difficulties and seduce the complicated, who have always offered their hand to every daring undertaking and whose flight has always been limited by the bounds of the world itself. With his protean spirit, capable of hearing the divine language of poetry and at the same time of grasping the practical side of life, he was typically Italian. These various qualities that characterize his extraordinary personality are basically the same fundamental qualities as the thousands and thousands of Italians who yesterday still ventured beyond the frontiers of their homeland with the simple wealth of their spiritual resources in order to make room among the tumult of people, who today set out by land and sea with a radiant vision of empire in their hearts and minds. In this respect Marco Polo deserves to be celebrated more by our race, because his cyclopean profile truly summarizes many of the essential virtues of our lineage!"

[7] "The great Christopher's glory has been matched by the glory of another great restless personality, one of those fantastic wanderers who, in past centuries since the dawn of civili-

And, as Appelius rejected any scientific considerations as to the attribution of the westerner's statue in Canton, Volpi himself was also vocal in emphasizing how the patriotic significance of Marco Polo made any literary or academic discussion irrelevant:

> Cosa ci interesse se il testo originale del 'Milione' sia stato scritto veramente in lingua d''oil' da Rusticiano, od in veneto dal Polo stesso [...] od in latino, purché ci abbiano tramandato così grandi cose? Cosa ci interessa che i ritratti che si trovano di Marco Polo non siano veri [...]? Cosa ci interessa il giorno preciso della sua morte [...]? Sappiamo che ha testato nel 1324 ed accettiamo reverenti nel suo assieme tutto quello che c'è, anche di leggenda, nella sua storia, perché è storia di un grande pioniere, di un'epoca, di una vittoria italiana (Volpi 1926, 528).[8]

Whereas Volpi's choice to focus on Marco Polo could be read as a historical claim to the special role of Venice in Italian modernization and expansion in the Mediterranean and the East (Sarzani 1972; Donadon 2019), his rhetoric mainly set out to make Polo a reference for modern Italian explorations:

> Questo è Marco Polo, audace veneziano, intrepido italiano di questa nostra Italia che ha saputo e saprà nei secoli tenere dovunque il pallio, in ispecie dove sia necessario ardimento, cuore saldo, genialità, devozione illimitata alla Patria. È per la sua Venezia che ha scritto da Genova Marco Polo, e l'Italia ha mantenuto le sue tradizioni intatte adattandole ai tempi, ma con lo stesso pensiero e con lo stesso cuore. Marco Polo, Cristoforo Colombo, Amerigo Vespucci [...] non disdegnate chi vi ha sostituito nel portare il nome d'Italia attraverso il mondo. Questa nostra gente, dopo la più grande guerra che il mondo abbia sofferto e che ha saputo vincere per le sue virtù, ha lanciato nello spazio la sua fede, la sua bandiera. Giovani aviere veneto, Arturo Ferrarin, tu hai portato sulle ali nuovamente il ricordo di Marco Polo a Cambaluc e laggiù hanno posto il tuo ricordo vicino al suo. Francesco De Pinedo, sulla tua piccola nave, con le ali, tu hai segnato in brevi memorabili giorni alcune delle tappe che Marco Polo dovette segnare in lunghi anni. Tu, Umberto Nobile, hai per ultimo reso attonito il mondo con la tua doppia audacia di costruttore e di conduttore, ed hai violato l'immensità dei ghiacci artici (Volpi 1926, 529).[9]

zation, have borne the name of Italy even in the most hermetic and distant places, among mysterious and fabulous people: we mean Marco Polo, author of *The Travels*, discoverer of Persia, friend of the khan of the Tartars, the greatest traveller in the world."

[8] "What interest is it to us if it was actually written in the 'Oïl' language by Rusticiano or in Venetian by Polo himself [...] or in Latin, as long as he has handed down such great things to us? What interest is it to us that the portraits that are found of Marco Polo are not true [...]? What interest is it to us the precise day of his death [...]? We know that he made his last will in 1324 and we reverently accept as a whole everything there is in his history, even that which is legend, because it is the story of a great pioneer, an era and an Italian victory."

[9] "This is Marco Polo, a daring Venetian, an intrepid Italian of this Italy of ours that has and will be able to hold the flag everywhere over the centuries, especially where it is necessary to have a steadfast heart, genius and an unlimited devotion to the homeland. It was for his home Venice that Marco Polo wrote in Genoa, and Italy has kept his legacy intact by

Both popular literature and Fascist propaganda discourse converged in the actualization of Marco Polo's figure as a heroic model for Italians, emphasizing his love for adventure but also for the motherland and his will to serve it. The Venetian merchant's heroism could certainly have been the primary quality of the modern explorers mentioned by Volpi, the audacious protagonists of Italy's international competition in the age of modern travel and discovery. Not only that, it was to be the primary quality of the migrants and colonial expats who were called to play a fundamental role in Italy's projection abroad. In this sense, the evocation of his memory served to give them a historical identity and include them in the great national community within and outside Italy's borders.

In some cases, Marco Polo's legacy was deliberately connected to the experience of Italian pioneers on the African continent and the need to spread popular awareness and support for Italy's colonial enterprise as inscribed in the nation's historical destiny (*Rassegna d'Oltremare* 1942). In this respect, it is interesting to note the attempt if not to attribute the label of "colonial literature" to Marco Polo's *Travels*, but at least to list the book—like all of the works of other Italian explorers, such as Columbus and Pigafetta—in the cultural genealogy of the development of the so-called Italian colonial literature (Tomasello 1984). As writer and literary critic Alfredo Panzini (1869–1939) wrote in a debate on the topic hosted by the magazine *L'Azione Coloniale* in 1931:

> E quanto a letteratura coloniale non si potrebbe anche leggere il *Milione* di Marco Polo, i viaggi del Pigafetta, e le relazioni dei nostri viaggiatori e scopritori d'Africa del secolo scorso? E navigatori polari? E transvolatori oceanici? La storia comincia domani. Siamo d'accordo, ma le sue radici devono essere profonde nelle tradizioni e nel passato (Tomasello 1984, 122).[10]

The status of Marco Polo's book as "colonial literature" and of Marco Polo as a precursor of Italian civilizing colonialism is certainly highly debatable. However, just its mention was evidence of a political and cultural climate where reading *The Travels* could not be confined to the endeavours of philologists and literature scholars or to the pleasures of the lovers of exotic adventures and romance.

adapting it to the times, but with the same thought and with the same heart. Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, [...] do not disdain those who have replaced you in taking the name of Italy throughout the world. After the greatest war the world has suffered and was able to win thanks to his virtues, these people of ours have launched his faith and his flag into the space. Young Venetian airman, Arturo Ferrarin, on your wings you once again took the memory of Marco Polo to Cambaluc, and there they placed your memory close to his. Francesco De Pinedo, on your little winged ship, in short memorable days you traced some of the stages that Marco Polo had to trace over many years. And you, Umberto Nobile, last but not least, you stunned the world with your double audacity as a constructor and a conductor, and violated the immensity of the Arctic glaciers."

[10] "And as for colonial literature, could we not also read Marco Polo's *Travels*, Pigafetta's travels, and the reports of our travellers and discoverers of Africa in the last century? And the polar navigators? And the aviators across the oceans? History begins tomorrow. We all agree, but its roots should be deep in tradition and the past."

It is no coincidence that one of the best-known cases of Fascist censorship, from 1939, concerned a Hollywood film on Marco Polo directed by Archie Mayo, starring Gary Cooper in the role of the hero. The Italian version of the film titled *The Adventures of Marco Polo* became the bizarre "*Uno scozzese alla corte del Gran Kan*" (*A Scotsman at the Court of the Great Khan*). The change was imposed by the Fascist censors because the portrait of the Venetian traveller in the film was reputed not appropriate for Polo's heroic image. In the plot, he falls in love with Princess Kukachin, whom he had to take to Persia to meet her new husband, something that was indeed also suggested in popular narratives. But it was not a tolerable story in a popular film, and only after the end of the war was the original title restored (Brunetta 2014).

The ideological dimension of the readings of Marco Polo in connection with the representation of Italian modern identity in the world was also evident in fields of academic research more closely connected to the regime's colonial enterprise, such as geography. The biography of Marco Polo written by Giotto Dainelli (1878–1968), an eminent personality in the field of geographical and geological research, reflects the penetration of propaganda discourse, even in scholarly and scientific works. Dainelli was an academic and explorer, with extensive experience in Africa, central Asia and Tibet, who was very close to the Fascist regime and active in academic divulgation. His biography of Polo was published in 1941 and included in an educational series titled *Biographies of Great Italians*, which began with Scipio the African and ended with Mussolini.

Dainelli's knowledge of Marco Polo's book was that of a geographer, and his biography was undoubtedly based on accurate philological works, such as Benedetto's edition of *The Travels* published in 1928. However, his narrative of Marco Polo's life was punctuated by considerations about his subject's character as a symbol of the best Italian virtues. In spite of his intention to offer a sober portrait of the Venetian traveller, Dainelli did not refrain from the rhetoric of Italianness so dear to the regime. His Marco Polo is a merchant driven by curiosity, endowed with physical strength, courage and practical sense, and a fine observer, a portrait matching the national pride for the figure. Framing his judgment of Marco Polo in a scholarly discussion that had developed one century earlier, Dainelli argued against the scepticism of German medievalist K. D. Hüllman, who in 1829 had affirmed that the book was just "an ecclesiastic fiction" (Larner 1999, 175). Conversely, he complacently reported Alexander von Humboldt's admiration for the Venetian. In Dainelli's words, Marco Polo was the "Italian" pioneer of the discovery of Asia as well as paving the way for other Italian travellers and explorers, from Columbus to Pigafetta, whose Italianness he also celebrated.

> [Marco Polo] deve essere esempio a quanti sappiano, o sentano soltanto—ma senza praticare quanto sentono o sanno—che gloria e potenza, ricchezza e fama, a se stessi ed alla propria terra, si acquistano non col vivere quieto e inoperoso, ma con una intraprendenza, magari un poco avventurosa, ma sorretta da una volontà salda e intelligente. Dice, in sul principio—il libro di Marco—dei suoi

maggiori: "erano senza dubbio alcuno nobili, savi e prudenti." Degnissime qualità anche queste, certamente: non sufficienti, però, per raggiungere quella gloria che a Marco è venuta—e per Marco a Venezia e all'Italia tutta—per l'eternità (Dainelli 1941, 236).[11]

3. Marco Polo's ghost in Sino-Italian relations

The Fascist regime's discourse about Marco Polo and his legacy in terms of Italy's destiny in China was essentially aimed at the domestic public opinion. It was a self-referential reading, consistent with the mass nationalist pedagogy, colonial aspirations and the cult of heroes promoted by Fascism.

During these decades, Marco Polo remained a vivid presence and ghost haunting Italian nationalist dreams in China. His name still punctuated the attempt to provide evidence of Italy's colonial identity there. In 1929, a monumental fountain dedicated to the Venetian traveller and the "pioneers" of Italianness in the world was built in the Tianjin concession's main square, Piazza Regina Elena, a place dominated by the monument to the victory and Italian casualties of the First World War (Marinelli 2008). After a few years, Italians in China chose to christen their magazine published in Shanghai during the Second World War as *Il Marco Polo*. The magazine's cover features the image of Polo beside a portrait of the emperor he served, Kublai Khan, maybe wanting to suggest a privileged friendship and collaboration between Italy and China. *Il Marco Polo* published essays on eastern culture and politics and information on Fascist Italy but does not seem to have had any significance in the cultural relations between the two countries, not least because at the time of its publication Italy was allied with the occupying Japan.

However, if observed from the perspective of Rome's expectations of gaining a stronger and more distinctive role in China, the celebration of the Venetian merchant as a model for Italy's attitude towards China was destined to remain empty rhetoric. The glorious historical memory of Marco Polo hinted towards an Italian destiny in China and Asia, but it actually clashed with the reality of Italy's weak position in the economic and cultural geopolitics of the region, something that the goodwill of Fascist diplomacy was not able to change.

During his travels to China in 1932, writer and journalist Giovanni Comisso (1895–1969) bluntly pointed out the reality of the situation, describing the same statue that, a few years earlier, had inspired Appelius's dream of greatness:

[11] "[Marco Polo] must be an example to those who are aware, or at least feel—but without putting these feelings and awareness into practice—that glory and power, wealth and fame for the sake of themselves and their homeland, cannot be acquired through quiet and idle living, but only through initiative, maybe a little adventurous, but supported by a strong and intelligent will. At the beginning of his book, Marco says of his elders that 'they were noble, wise and prudent without doubt'. These are very worthy qualities too: however, they certainly are not sufficient to achieve that glory that came to Marco, and through Marco to Venice and all Italy, for eternity."

> Sembra fatto di pietra serena, un po' impolverata: due grandi divinità dorate e dipinte di verde e di rosso stanno elevate tra le colonnine della tettoia a guardia della porta. Il bonzo apre. Nella fresca penombra appaiono allineati e seduti su sopraelevature di pietra lungo le pareti innumerevoli gli iddii dorati o rossastri dalle larghe facce sorridenti, dai ventri ampi, segno di saggezza, in attitudini estatiche, affabili o minacciose. Marco Polo è un po' dietro all'altare, il primo d'una fila. Eccolo, tarchiato, col cappello di feltro all'europea e mantello sulle spalle, le mani in atto di spiegare. Un bel volto massiccio di viaggiatore a piedi, con la barba ricciuta che gli circonda il collo come un collarino. Gli hanno orientalizzato naso e orecchi. Davanti a lui bruciano i bastoncini di sandalo offerti dai fedeli. Come non compiere con devozione pure noi quest'offerta? Ma come non sentir pena? Nessun commerciante italiano in questa Canton famelica di merci europee: solo lui della nostra razza, qui da secoli ad attendere nella sua serena, sorridente, dorata imagine di iddio. Egli il primo europeo in Cina, amato per le sue opere, viceré imperiale, maestro di pazienza e di sicurezza nelle sue marce infinite, pare che dica: 'Venite, la strada è dura, ma vi farò da guida' (Comisso 1930).[12]

Fascist propaganda hoped that the memory of Marco Polo could inspire Italians' entrepreneurial spirit in China as well as offer a shared historical legitimacy to Rome's plan to strengthen Sino-Italian relations. But was the image of Fascist Italy as a good and friendly colonial power somehow more legitimized in China by the recognition of Polo's legacy? Was Rome's diplomatic activism symbolically perceived as a modern re-enactment of a historical role in China too? Were the Chinese sensitive to Marco Polo as an inspiring model for Sino-Italian relations? The truth of the matter is that Marco Polo's memory and image could hardly work as an instrument of Italian cultural diplomacy in China, where the cultural and intellectual meaning of *The Travels* in the history of the relations between Italy and China had only just begun to be understood (Gu 2006).

In spite of the Italian assumption that he was venerated in the Canton temple, the Venetian was unknown in China until westerners told of his travels and experiences in the second half of the nineteenth century (Vinci 2018, 2020), and

[12] "It seems to be made of stone, a little dusty: two great gilded divinities painted in green and red stand tall between the columns of the canopy guarding the door. The bonze opens. In the cool twilight countless golden or reddish gods with broad smiling faces, broad bellies, a sign of wisdom, in ecstatic, affable or threatening attitudes appear lined up and seated on stone elevations along the walls. Marco Polo is a little behind the altar, the first in a row. There he is, stocky, with a European hat and cloak over his shoulders, his hands in the act of explaining. The good, sturdy face of a foot traveller, with a curly beard that encircles his neck like a collar. They have orientalized his nose and ears. Before him the sandal sticks offered by the believers burn. How can we too not make this offering with devotion? But how can you not feel sorry? No Italian merchant in this Canton hungry for European goods: only he of our race, here for centuries waiting in his serene, smiling, golden image of god. He was the first European in China, loved for his works, imperial viceroy, master of patience and safety in his endless marches, and he seems to say: 'Come, the road is tough, but I will guide you'."

for a long time afterwards, he essentially only remained a topic of interest for a few scholars educated in the West.

The first translation of *The Travels* was published by Wei Yi in 1913. Other editions followed from French and English translations, such as those by Pauthier and Yule, in the 1920s and 1930s. Reflecting Italy's weak position in the Chinese cultural environment, Italian Polian studies played a minor role in this enterprise. When one of the main Chinese translations of *The Travels* was published by Zhang Xinlong in 1937, the Italian community in Shanghai commented in this way:

> Recentemente è stata pubblicata una traduzione in cinese di quest'opera che già godeva una larga popolarità tra i lettori di tutto il mondo. Seppure l'edizione non ha pretese tipografiche tuttavia il volume è dotato di belle fotografie ed è corredato di ampie notizie e riferimenti sugli studiosi italiani e stranieri delle vicende avventurose del primo e grande messaggero dell'Italianità in Estremo Oriente (*Il Marco Polo* 1939, 169).[13]

Actually, in his introduction, Zhang fully acknowledged the work of Luigi Foscolo Benedetto, whose translation into English—together with Yule's—had been the basis of his own translation into Chinese. Zhang, who had been educated in the West, even mentions his contact with Italian scholars and some discussions on textual and translation issues (Zhang 1937), but it was a transnational academic dialogue which had little to do with the acknowledgment of Marco Polo as "primo e grande messaggero dell'Italianità in Estremo Oriente".[14] China's main interest in *The Travels* was connected to its usefulness as a source regarding the country's own history and the history of Christianity in China (Gu 2006). Chinese travellers in Italy, and in Venice, may have been aware of the Venetian's experience, but in the age of colonialism and imperialism, the primacy of Italy in Sino-Western relations could not really imply a special relationship. Moreover, after the Japanese occupation of China in 1937, the alliance between Italy and Japan negatively impacted on any developments in this field.

The foundation of the People's Republic in 1949 and the anti-imperialist turn in Chinese historical studies did not help to consolidate the fame of Marco Polo's book in China. In the 1950s, the impression of Italian travellers visiting the People's Republic was that Marco Polo, proudly celebrated by so many as their tutelary deity in the (re)discovery of the East, was barely known to their hosts (Cassola 1956). It was only in the 1970s, with China once again eager to develop its contacts with the West, and Italy, that the academic study of *The Travels* in China resumed (Gu 2006) and Marco Polo also began to settle into the Chinese popular imaginary as

[13] "A Chinese translation of this work was recently published and had already enjoyed wide popularity among readers around the world. Although the edition has no typographical pretensions, the volume has beautiful photographs, and it is accompanied by extensive information and bibliographical references to Italian and foreign scholars of the adventurous events of the first and great messenger of Italianness in the Far East."

[14] "[…] the first and great messenger of Italianness in the Far East."

"the" icon of relations with the West and Italy in particular. Indeed, in 1982, the first television co-production between Italy and China (among others), directed by Giuliano Montaldo, was the series *Marco Polo* (Vicentini 1992)—a sign of the new actualization of this historical figure for the sake of Sino-Italian diplomacy.

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The Idea of Italian Travellers to Iran. Scholarly Research and Cultural Diplomacy in Post-war Italy

Emanuele Giusti

Abstract: This essay discusses the formation of "Italian travellers to Iran" as both a popular idea and scientific category. In the three decades after the Second World War, Italy and Iran were going through deep transformations and entered a phase of intense political, economic and cultural relations. In this context, scholarly interests and political agendas jointly contributed to a representation of past travellers as the manifestation of an imagined and almost eternal connection between the two civilizations. This narrative served to rhetorically enhance the role played by both countries in the history of mankind, and the contribution they could still give to humanity as nations among nations. However, these events may have also left their mark on how the history of connections between Italy and Iran, and the history of Iranian studies in Italy, are represented in scholarly milieus.

Keywords: Italy, Iran, travellers, oriental studies, cosmopolitanism

> J'aime encore imaginer l'humanité comme une sorte de société chorale, dans laquelle, grâce à ce dialogue affranchi et sincère dont je viens de parler, à travers la connaissance des autres, chacun se retrouve soi-même.
> (Giuseppe Tucci, inaugural speech for the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Tehran, 20 December 1963)

1. Introduction[1]

All researchers interested in Iran and its history are well aware of the utility of the prestigious *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, a use that extends to the history of the political and cultural relations between the lands of Iran and the rest of the world. To look at Europe, for example, the *Encyclopaedia* offers a wealth of thoroughly researched articles under separate headings, each dedicated to a major country: Great Britain, France, Russia, even Poland. The list of European countries also includes Italy, which did not exist as a unitary state before 1861.[2] As

[1] I would like to thank Professor Angelo Michele Piemontese for having generously discussed with me the topic of this essay.

[2] The same remark may be made about Germany (e.g., see Bast 2000).

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Emanuele Giusti, *The Idea of Italian Travellers to Iran. Scholarly Research and Cultural Diplomacy in Post-war Italy*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0.11, in Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, pp. 181-210, 2022, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

is well shown in the sub-entry "Italy ii. Diplomatic and Commercial Relations" (Casari 2007a), this conundrum is solved by incorporating all information on the relations between Iran and the pre-unitary states of the Italian peninsula, with discussions in separate entries in only a few cases (e.g., Bernardini 2000).

Such an arrangement is clearly the result of an editorial choice implemented consistently throughout the *Encyclopaedia* and, from an organizational point of view, it is as valid as the Europe-wide framing adopted by the *Cambridge History of Iran* (Lockhart 1986) as well as by more recent scholarly literature (Rota 2021). In this regard, the national framing has many advantages: uniformity, readability and usability. Researchers will probably thank the editors for this policy, as I have done countless times. However, it is arguable that by adopting present-day states as categories, the articles of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* belie a tendency to mould a multifaceted history of fragmentary connections into a uniform past. Of course, the very long resulting histories are rarely presented as coherent and continuous; nonetheless, they run the risk of appearing to be linked, chronologically, by the supposedly ongoing identities of Iran and its European counterparts. Reading the very first words of the first sub-articles about Italy gives a glimpse of the clash between such overarching concepts and the implacable elusiveness of a complex past. In "Italy i. Introduction", the author uses geographical categories, stating that "[d]irect commercial and political relations between the Italian peninsula and the Iranian plateau date at least from the Parthian period" (Cereti 2007a); the above-mentioned article by Casari, shifting from geography to modern diplomatic standards, opens by saying that "[the] privileged relationship between Iran and Italy dates back to the age of the ancient Roman and Persian Empires" (Casari 2007a); the entry "Italy iii. Cultural Relations" strikes a different note, stating that "Italy and Persia have hardly ever had a direct and continuous cultural exchange" (Casari 2007b), while the entry "Italy iv. Travel Accounts" informs us that "[c]ollections of Italian travel accounts, together with biographical and bibliographical details, have been published from the Renaissance up to the present day" (Bernardini and Vanzan 2007).

In addition to their fundamental unimportance, experienced researchers will recognize these statements as mere preliminaries and will be able to see the rather more nuanced picture just by keeping on reading. However, they may rise their eyebrows when confronted with the consonance between this national framing and the rhetoric often found in Italian-Iranian public relations. A recent example of this is the letter sent by the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hamid Bayāt, to the editor-in-chief of the daily *La Repubblica* on 1 March 2021.

> Caro direttore, un proverbio persiano recita: "Ogni cosa nuova è buona, tranne l'amicizia." L'amicizia tra l'Iran e l'Italia affonda le radici nella storia antica di due grandi civiltà. Radici di secoli in cui le due civiltà persiana e romana interagendo tra loro, hanno tessuto la trama e l'ordito della storia. Le relazioni di queste due civiltà sono lo specchio delle interazioni umane, nonché della storia delle

> relazioni tra l'Occidente e l'Oriente del mondo; una storia lunga più di 20 secoli. Il primo patto culturale tra i due Paesi fu siglato nel 533 d.C. tra il re sassanide Anushirvan e l'imperatore romano Giustiniano (Bayat 2021).[3]

The emphasis on long-term historical continuity seems to serve the purpose of explaining the good relations between the two countries while, at the same time, justifying their preservation. The letter was published for the 160th anniversary of the 1862 treaty of friendship and commerce between the newly established Kingdom of Italy and Qajar Iran. It is easy to see how such a discourse can contribute to the projection of national identities into the past and, consequently, to processes of nation-building in the public sphere on both sides of the relationship. We are thus presented with two entities that defy the boundaries of time—thanks to the fundamental "idea" that brings them to life— yet are embodied by historically contingent forms. While the idea of Italy and Iran has been the subject of extensive research[4] and, in the latter case, fierce debates (Ansari 2020), what we are interested in here is the encounter between them, in itself an idea made out of the constant rereading, rewriting and retelling of historical experiences of encounter.

In this paper, I will discuss travelling and travellers as one of the expressions of this idea. In other words, I will analyse how a set of early modern travel-related sources and experiences came to be reread and reused in order to more or less explicitly embody the idea of the continuous cultural and "civilizational" exchange between Italy and Iran. Furthermore, I will try to show the fundamental intertwining of very different uses of the same sources, examining how this process played out through both the scholarly appraisal of these materials and their uses as instruments of cultural diplomacy against the backdrop of a phase of extraordinarily intense Italian-Iranian political, economic and cultural relations between the 1950s and the 1970s.[5] These decades, commonly connected to the rise and demise of the Italian "economic miracle", were when both a new foreign policy orientation in Italy was formed, aimed at achieving a greater autonomy on the international stage vis-à-vis the constraints dictated by post-war

[3] "Dear Editor, A Persian proverb says: 'Everything new is good, except friendship.' The friendship between Iran and Italy has its roots in the ancient history of two great civilizations. Centuries-old roots in which the two civilizations, Persian and Roman, interacted with each other, weaving the warp and woof of history. The relations of these two civilizations mirror human interactions, as well as the history of relations between the West and the East of the world; a history spanning more than twenty centuries. The first cultural pact between the two countries was signed in AD 533 between the Sassanid king Anushirvan and the Roman emperor Justinian."

[4] A topic worth studying in connection with the problem of "Italian travellers to Iran" would indeed be the "Italian" contribution to the debates on the idea of Iran, well represented in the seminal essay by Gherardo Gnoli (1989). On this topic, see at least Shahbazi (2005) and, for an overview, Ashraf (2006). As for the idea of Italy, see the introduction to this volume.

[5] Although a comprehensive history of this period has yet to be written, the work of Tremolada (2011) and Milano (2013, 2020) are fundamental contributions. The PhD dissertation by Coliaei (2016) is especially useful for the extensive visual documentation collected.

Atlantic and European politics, and a time of deep political, economic and cultural transformations in Iran, spanning from Moḥammad Reżā Shah Pahlavi's (1919–1980) restoration to power in 1953 to the 1979 revolution.

It is worth stressing that this work is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of cultural and diplomatic relations between Italy and Iran in that period. In the first place, my work mainly rests on published documents: a more in-depth analysis of the motives moving many of the actors discussed here can only result from further research of the relevant archives. Secondly, my focus is restricted to the Italian-speaking side of the question. Iranian views on and contributions to the matter are considered insofar as they were expressed in Italian and were thus able to have a direct impact on the Italian public. In turn, while a diverse range of Italian experiences are discussed, the bulk of the research has been conducted on the activities of one of the main Italian powerhouses of twentieth-century oriental studies, the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente of Rome (IsMEO). While IsMEO has only recently started to draw the attention of scholars, the perspective adopted here may offer some new insight into its postwar history. Despite these limitations, this paper may still offer an invitation to reflect on the consonances between scholarly research, economic interests and international diplomacy, as well as their impact on subsequent research.

2. Italian travellers to Iran

First of all, it is essential to point out who the "Italian travellers to Iran" were, namely, how this category is brought to life by scholarly reference to past experiences and available sources. To this end, I will summarize the most recent and authoritative synthesis on the subject, the sub-article "Italy iv. Travel Accounts" in the "Italy" series of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (Bernardini and Vanzan 2007). The first travellers we encounter are Ascelino and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, respectively a Dominican and a Franciscan friar sent by Pope Innocent IV to the Mongols in the late 1240s.[6] Then it is the turn of Marco Polo, who travelled through Iran after 1271–1272, followed by a drove of obscure Genoese travellers. As we enter the fourteenth century, another batch of travelling friars are presented, among whom we find the Dominican Ricoldo da Montecroce (1243–1320), and the Franciscans Giovanni da Montecorvino (1247–1328) and Odorico da Pordenone (1286–1331). The latter's journey relates to the establishment of archbishoprics in Iran, which in turn played an important role in the cultural relations between Europe and Iran, notably at the linguistic level, through the production of the so-called *Codex Cumanicus*, a multilingual dictionary of Latin, Persian and Cuman (a Turkic language) (Piemontese 2001; Schmieder and Schreiner 2005). We are then briefly introduced to some other travellers—

[6] Ascelino and Giovanni da Pian del Carpine are also among the very first protagonists of the history of the relations between the Catholic Church and Iran as recounted by Bugnini (1981, 66–98).

such as the Franciscan Giovanni de' Marignolli and the Venetian ambassadors Giovanni Querini and Giuffredo Morosini—before encounters between "Italians and Timur" are discussed. Niccolò de' Conti (1395–1469) is the last to be mentioned before we enter the first of two periods particularly rich in Italian travellers to Iran, the century and a half between the reign of Turkman leader Uzun Ḥasan (1423–1478) and ʿAbbās I (1571–1629), the greatest of the Safavid shahs. Venetian envoys Caterino Zeno, Giosafat Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini are followed by Venetian merchants Lazaro Quirini, Giovanni Dario and Francesco Romano (also known as the "Anonimo Mercante"), by the Genoese Girolamo da Santo Stefano, and Florentine astronomer and geographer Andrea Corsali. All of them travelled to Iran between the reign of Uzun Ḥasan and the establishment of the Safavid dynasty by Shah Esmāʿil (1487–1524) in 1501. References are made to some other Italian reports by Venetian "diarist" Marin Sanudo the Younger before mention of travellers relevant for the reign of Shah Ṭahmāsp (1514–1576), such as Venetian envoys Michele Membré and Vincenzo Alessandri, and merchants Luigi Runcinotto, Cesare Federici (1521–1601) and Gasparo Balbi. As for the long reign of Shah ʿAbbās I (1587–1629), the Italian travellers mentioned by Bernardini and Vanzan are the Vecchietti brothers (Giovan Battista and Girolamo), Roman nobleman Pietro Della Valle (1586–1652), and Venetian consul Gian Francesco Sagredo. The late Safavid period still saw many Italian travellers, especially Carmelite friars (Filippo della SS. Trinità, Giuseppe di S. Maria from Caprarola, Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina, Francesco Maria di S. Siro and Fulgenzio di S. Giuseppe), but also laymen such as Venetian nobleman Ambrogio Bembo, Venetian physician Angelo Legrenzi and Naples-based Calabrian lawyer Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri. After the collapse of the Safavid dynasty in the 1720s, the only well-known Italian traveller to Iran was another Carmelite, Leandro di S. Cecilia. Following a long hiatus, Italians started visiting Iran again in the Qajar period, all the more so in the second half of the nineteenth century (I will discuss some of these travellers in the next section).

As an encyclopaedia entry, "Italy iv. Travel Accounts" may easily exert an influence over subsequent research, but what is more important here are the foundations on which it rests. If we take as a time span the period between the unification of Italy and the date of publication of the entry (1860–2007), a quantitative analysis of the scholarly literature cited shows that 34% was produced in the relatively short period between 1945 and 1979, with 15% of the total being produced in the decade from 1965 to 1975. While these data encouraged me to focus on the 1960s and the 1970s, a qualitative analysis of the very wide-ranging scholarly literature cited brings to light the importance of the work of geographer Pietro Donazzolo, bibliography and bibliothecography researcher Olga Pinto (with three mentions each) and, most of all, Angelo M. Piemontese (eight mentions), now emeritus professor of Persian language and literature at the "La Sapienza" University of Rome. This comes as no surprise since Piemontese is the author of a monumental *Bibliografia Italiana dell'Iran (1462-1982)*, whose chapter on travellers (Piemontese 1982, I: 131–77) Bernardini and Vanzan de-

scribe as "the most accurate bibliographical list of such sources, containing all the printed material from the 15th to the 20th century". Piemontese's *Bibliografia* was published at the end of the period discussed here, and the research underpinning it was started around 1960 (Piemontese 1982, I: 16). Issued in the *Series Minor* of the Seminario di Studi Asiatici at the Neapolitan Istituto Universitario Orientale, where Piemontese had studied, the *Bibliografia* was also the result of a collaboration network which included IsMEO. In 1975, its partial dissemination in Iran was guaranteed by the managing director of the Pahlavi Library,[7] Shojāʿ al-Din Shafā (Piemontese 1982, I: 17). In the prefatory materials, authored by the director of the Seminario, Adolfo Tamburello, and Piemontese himself, it is made clear that the work illustrates the encounter between Italy, seen as a separate entity as well as a part of Europe, and Iran, itself existing both separately and as a part of Asia (or the Orient), both of which are integral parts of Eurasia (Piemontese 1982, I: 7, 13–14). While this wider perspective shaped both the scholarly discussions and diplomatic uses of early modern travellers in the 1960s and 1970s, it is the long-running dialogue between Iran and Italy, as nations among nations, that is consistently put to the fore. This also holds true for an essay published by Piemontese some years later in a special issue of *Iranian Studies* on Iranian studies in Europe and Japan, whose adopted chronology spans the last five centuries (Piemontese 1987). The idea of continuity underpinning this literature was the result of long-standing trends as much as of the special historical conjuncture mentioned in the introduction. For these reasons, it is essential to discuss two moments in the diplomatic relations between Italy and Iran in order to evaluate their potential impact on the scholarly assessment of their history as expressed by the experience of travellers. The first moment is the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Italy and Qajar Iran; the second is the transformation of these relations brought about by the consolidation of the Fascist regime in Italy and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran in the mid-1920s.

3. Italy and Iran: from unification to the Second World War

If there is a sense in which relations between Iran and Italy undoubtedly predate the political unification of Italy, it is with regard to diplomatic relations. The already mentioned treaty of 1862 closely followed the treaty signed in Paris between Iran and the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1857. The new treaty of friendship and commerce was signed in Tehran at the height of a diplomatic, military and scientific mission led by Marcello Cerruti (Piemontese 1968, 1969a; Fiorani Pia-

[7] The Pahlavi Library (*Ketābkhāneh-ye Pahlavi*) was established in 1965 with the aim of gathering "all literature on Iran in one place to provide 'the vastest source of documentation on the Iranian culture and civilization, for the benefit of those who study such matters all around the world as well as in Iran itself'" (Steele 2021, 73–76). The quote within the quote is from an undated document in the Shafā archives, held in the Bibliothèque Universitaire des Langues et Civilisations (Bulac) in Paris. See Steele (2021, 171n30).

centini 1969; Clemente and Pirjevec 1980) and documented by the well-known photographic album of Luigi Montabone[8] (Bonetti and Prandi 2010). The only difference between the two treaties concerned the right now granted to Italian merchants to export silkworms from the Iranian region of Gilān, which would have greatly benefited Piedmont's silk industry, periodically struck by devastating epizootic diseases (Piemontese 1968, 540, 558–60).

However, trade relations between the two countries did not develop after the treaty, also because the costly embassy was generally perceived as a completely inappropriate venture during the tumultuous years following the unification (Piemontese 1968, 542). Despite Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār's visit to Italy in the summer of 1873, it took the newly created Italian state almost 25 years to establish a permanent diplomatic presence in Iran, while an Iranian counterpart only arrived in Rome in 1896 (Piemontese 1970, 81; 1990). Before the first Italian chargé d'affaires was sent to Tehran in 1886, the gap was filled by Enrico Andreini from Lucca, a high-ranking officer of the Iranian army who sent detailed reports to the Italian government from 1871 to 1886 (Piemontese 1972). Andreini was one of several soldiers who had left different states of the peninsula during the nineteenth century and found employment in Iran, especially as military instructors (Piemontese 1984; see also Galletti 2008).

At the scholarly level, the mission may have had a greater impact (Piemontese 1970, 80–1; Piemontese 1987, 103). Undoubtedly, one of the foundational works on the diplomatic relations between Iran and the pre-unitary Italian states, *La Repubblica di Venezia e la Persia* by Guglielmo Berchet (1833–1913), originated directly from the preparation of the mission. Berchet was given this research assignment by a prominent diplomatic official, Cristoforo Negri (1809–1896), who saw such works as also a way to "illustrare la storia nazionale" (Berchet 1865, iii–v). Negri, who played an important role in the development of diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Italy and several Asiatic countries, also served as the first president of the Società Geografica Italiana[9] from 1867 to 1872 (Maggioli 2013). Another member of the mission, philologist Giacomo Lignana (1827–1891), later helped lay the foundations for the traditions of Iranian studies in Rome and Naples (Fatica 2005; Lo Turco 2021). While describing the most recent development in oriental studies in Italy, the great orientalist Angelo De Gubernatis (1840–1913) also mentioned Lignana in connection with the embassy (De Gubernatis 1876, 309–10).

[8] The photographs are available on the website of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana of Venice (https://bibliotecanazionalemarciana.cultura.gov.it/eventi/un-italiano-persia/ricordi-del-viaggio-persia), where the best-known copy of the album is held (inventory number: 87266; shelf mark: 138.C.88.).

[9] The Società Geografica Italiana, founded in Florence in 1867, just a few years after the political unification of the peninsula, was closely connected with the Risorgimento at the political and cultural level. In the following years, it played an important role in the formation as well as expansion of Italian colonialism in Africa. On this topic see at least Del Boca (2002, 51–6, 127–46, 418–29), Labanca (2002, 36–9), Monina (2002) and Natili (2008).

While the origin of Berchet's research suggests that the mission of 1862 encouraged the establishment of a long-term historical connection between Iran and the pre-unitary states, from the viewpoint of travel and travellers no similar link was stably formed at either a scholarly level or in a broader sense. Giuseppe Anaclerio, who spent three years in Iran working in the army (1862–1865), and published a travelogue dedicated to Cristoforo Negri, evoked the activities of many "distinti italiani" who left Italy "rattristati del cattivo esito della rivoluzione nel 1848", going to work in the Iranian army (Anaclerio 1868, 134).[10] The Italian identity of these officers rested either on their participation in the Risorgimento or their subsequent reintegration in the Italian military and was not compounded by a connection to potential forebears (Anaclerio 1868, 134–9). A further and more important example is given by *Note di un viaggio in Persia nel 1862*, the account of the mission published in Milan in 1865 by Turin-based zoologist Filippo de Filippi (1814–1867), one of the scientists attached to the embassy (De Filippi 1865; Cimino 1987). The only reference by de Filippi to a potentially "Italian" tradition of travel to Iran is a fleeting remark about "l'italiano Della Valle" (De Filippi 1865, 224). This is not surprising, since the name of Pietro Della Valle had recently been brought back into the limelight by the edition of his *Viaggi* printed in Turin in 1843 by Brighton-based bookseller G. Gancia (Della Valle 1843).

Some years later, in 1880, jurist and historian Ignazio Ciampi (1824–1880) published an important biography of Della Valle. In the introduction, he remarked that "nella risvegliata operosità degl'Italiani, i viaggi fatti in Persia hanno però alquanto rifiorito anche presso di noi il nome e la gloria del Pellegrino",[11] as Della Valle was also known (Ciampi 1880, 7–8). Ciampi provided a lengthy discussion of Della Valle's activities in Iran (Ciampi 1880, 45–88) and, while underlining that the most valuable section of the *Viaggi* was the Iranian one, stated that "gl'Italiani" had helped develop knowledge about that country through "viaggi non privi di utilità",[12] such as the embassy led by Cerruti and recounted by de Filippi. Ciampi also told his readers, in a footnote, that his research on Della Valle almost pushed him to write a bibliographic essay about European travellers to Iran; however, he had abandoned this project for fear of going off-topic (Ciampi 1880, 135–6). In the end, Ciampi's work was about a great Italian traveller and an eclectic Roman nobleman, and not specifically a traveller to Iran, even though the importance of this connection was already apparent (Ciampi 1880, 3–9).

In the decades immediately following the unification, many Italian researchers undertook to build a scholarly tradition about Italian travellers. Two researchers closely connected to the Società Geografica Italiana, Pietro Amat di San Filippo (1822–1895) and Gaetano Branca (1833–1871), played an important

[10] "distinguished Italians […] saddened by the negative outcome of the Revolution of 1848".

[11] "in the reawakened industriousness of the Italians, the journeys made to Persia have, however, greatly revived the name and glory of the Pilgrim among us too".

[12] "the Italians […] journeys not devoid of usefulness".

role in this regard. In 1873, Branca's *Storia dei viaggiatori italiani* was published posthumously (Branca 1873), while Amat di San Filippo published three bibliographic works about Italian travellers between 1874 and 1885 (Amat di San Filippo 1874; Amat di San Filippo and Uzielli 1882–1884; Amat di San Filippo 1885). Amat di San Filippo's most important work is arguably his *Studi biografici e bibliografici sulla storia della geografia in Italia* (1882–1884), which was published by the Società Geografica Italiana on occasion of the Third International Congress of Geography, held in Venice in 1881. In the *Nota preliminare* to the first volume, Amat di San Filippo traced the outline of a unitary history of "Italian" travellers (Amat di San Filippo and Uzielli 1882, I: 3–44). Entries on travellers were arranged chronologically; Branca's framing was also chronological, if more discursive than Amat di San Filippo's. We should not lose sight of the nation-building value that such scholarly activities could have both at home and abroad (Branca 1873, v–viii; Amat di San Filippo and Uzielli 1882, v-x; Amat di San Filippo 1885, iii-viii). Among the "Italian" travellers that, from the ninth century onwards, had almost always played a leading role in the history of European expansion outside Europe, some had also visited Iran. However, in the eyes of the authors, this aspect was not more important than a generic Asiatic or oriental connection. The novelty of the national approach is to be measured against pre-existing Italian-speaking historiographic traditions that also continued thereafter, largely independently from national political events. For example, Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, a Franciscan friar, had been discussed in Father Marcellino da Civezza's *Storia universale delle missioni francescane* (Civezza 1857, 303–57) before being inserted in Amat di San Filippo's works (Amat di San Filippo and Uzielli 1882, I: 48–54; 1885, 1–9), just as he was later discussed in Father Girolamo Golubovich's *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della Terra Santa e dell'Oriente francescano* (Golubovich 1906, 190–213).

To sum up, it is safe to say that in the short term, post-unification diplomatic and cultural contacts did not contribute to the creation of a tradition on "Italian travellers to Iran". This may have also been because, as Piemontese said in his 1987 essay, Iranian studies in end-of-the-nineteenth-century Italy

> were late in finding a continuity of tradition, a stability of university-level instruction, or a homogeneity of discipline. Iranian studies were mainly characterized by subsidiary participation or complementary contributions by individual scholars of diverse subjects, such as historians of religion, Indo-Europeanists, Arabists, and so forth (Piemontese 1987, 104–5).

However, the slow accumulation of bibliographical works about travellers on the one hand, and the constant if fragmentary formation of oriental studies in Italy, as well as the development of a new sensibility that we may safely call "orientalist" on the other,[13] made "Italian travellers to Iran" available at least as a discursive

[13] For a discussion of these topics, with an ample bibliography, see the introduction to this volume.

option. This is clearly demonstrated by a book by Eteocle Lorini (1865–1919), *La Persia economica contemporanea e la sua questione monetaria* (Lorini 1900). Lorini was professor of financial sciences at the University of Pavia and spent the years 1897–1898 in Iran. While describing the cold reception of his scholarly project about the country (Lorini 1900, 6), Lorini introduced his chapter on the most convenient route between Rome and Tehran with a vivid if short account of Ambrogio Contarini's 1474 journey (Lorini 1900, 37–9). Lorini considered it appropriate to offer what we may call a forerunner's narrative to his readers when recounting his encounter with the Italian minister plenipotentiary in Iran, Felice Maissa.

> All'indomani, avvertito a Menzerièh il Ministro Maissa del mio arrivo, questi scende per offrirmi l'ospitalità ed alcuni giorni di ristoro nella sua splendida villa. Così anche noi due, come messer Contarini e Iosapha Barbaro seicento e ventiquattro anni prima, possiamo 'vistisi l'un l'altro, pieni di allegrezza abbracciarci et di quanta consolatione ciò ci sia, si può considerare' (Lorini 1900, 72). [14]

Furthermore, at the end of the volume, Lorini presented a short chronological list of the "principali scrittori italiani, che si occuparono della Persia" (Lorini 1900, 523).[15] The list starts with Marco Polo, ends with orientalist Vittorio Rugarli (1860–1900; on whom see Gabrieli 1967) and mentions, among others, Italo Pizzi (1849–1920), one of the most prominent Italian students of Iran of his age, especially known for his poetic translation of Ferdowsī's eleventh-century epic *Shāhnama* (Mastrangelo 2015). Unsurprisingly, Pizzi and Rugarli were the most prolific authors cited in the "Persiano" section of the bibliographical issue of the *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* published on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1913 (*Persiano* 1913; Crisanti 2021, 228–9). From this perspective, it is probable that at the turn of the century the idea of historical continuity in the relations between Italy and Iran, stretching back way before the unification of the peninsula and also expressed by travel experiences, was already in the making. It is worth stressing that, while past travellers could provide new ones with a point of reference, they could also be connected with the blossoming field of oriental studies, in light of their contribution to knowledge about the country, as would be the case of Piemontese's 1987 essay.

The second moment of the present analysis presents us with some important changes. From the unification to 1925–1926, namely during the last decades of the Qajar rule in Iran, Italian officials—both at home and in Tehran—occupied a neutral position in Iranian international relations, in the sense that they limited

[14] "The next day, having informed Minister Maissa in Menzerièh of my arrival, he came down to offer me hospitality and a few days' refreshment in his splendid villa. Thus, the two of us, like Messer Contarini and Iosapha Barbaro six hundred and twenty-four years earlier, can 'see each other, full of joy, embrace each other, and how much consolation this brings us!'" Though modernized linguistically, this quote may have been taken from the version of Contarini's travelogue published in Ramusio (1559, 112v–125v (117r)).

[15] "the main Italian writers that dealt with Persia".

themselves, both by choice and out of necessity, to observing how the competition between the British and the Russian empires played out in Iran (Pasqualini 1992a, 9–14, 217–48). The situation started to change by the mid-1920s, with the simultaneous consolidation of the Fascist regime in Italy and the establishment of the new Pahlavi order in Iran, marked by the accession to the throne of Reżā Khan, leader of the Cossack division of the Iranian army (Amanat 2017, 389–445). In this new context, close military cooperation was established, with the Italian Royal Navy contributing decisively to the formation of the first nucleus of the Iranian navy (Pasqualini 1992b). More generally, in conformity with the aggressive, albeit unrealistic, foreign policy towards Asia spearheaded by the Fascist regime (De Felice 1988; Arielli 2010),[16] the Italian government led by Mussolini attempted to direct diplomatic relations with Iran towards the acquisition of influence in the Persian Gulf, playing on Reżā Shāh's intention to escape British influence over the country (Casari 2007a).

These same years witnessed the foundation of two institutions which would play a pivotal role in the development of oriental studies in twentieth-century Italy. The first one was the Istituto per l'Oriente (IPO) founded in 1921 by jurist Amedeo Giannini and Arabist Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872–1938; on whom see Capezzone 2012). Today, IPO bears the name of Nallino, who directed it until his death. IPO's main scholarly outlet was the journal *Oriente Moderno*. Also launched in 1921, the journal focused on giving detailed information, through press reviews, about present-day countries of the Middle East. While by the late 1920s *Oriente Moderno* was showing a growing interest in Iranian politics and economy, the editors did not explicitly support any continuity narrative about the relations between Italy and Iran. In the early 1930s, Nallino became the head of the committee in charge of the millennial anniversary celebrations for Ferdowsī, which were held in Iran and several European countries between 1934 and 1935. Nallino and some of his collaborators, among whom Arabist Francesco Gabrieli (1904–1996), gave a series of conferences stressing the national value of Ferdowsī's *Shāhnama*. However, this literature, as well as the references regularly made to the subject in *Oriente Moderno*, convey the impression that what Italian scholars cared about most was promoting the translation of the *Shāhnama* made by Pizzi, who had been one of Nallino's teachers (*Persia* 1934a, 33; 1934b, 338; 1935, 22–3; Nallino 1935; Pagliaro, Rossi, and Guidi 1935; see also Piemontese 1987, 106).

The second institution was the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO). As is well known, IsMEO was born from the encounter between Giovanni Gentile and the young Indologist and Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984; Ferretti 1986; Di Giovanni 2012; Crisanti 2018).[17] IsMEO

[16] On this point, see the contributions by Laura De Giorgi, Beatrice Falcucci and Davide Trentacoste in this volume.

[17] For a biography and bibliography of Tucci, see respectively Crisanti (2020) and Nalesini (2018).

was inaugurated with a lecture on Italian travellers to Asia (De Filippi 1934). While travellers that had visited Iran occupied most of the space in the lecture, apparently this connection was lost on the lecturer and audience alike. Despite an already apparent interest in Iran (see e.g., Migliorini 1939),[18] in the first ten years of its existence (1933–1943) IsMEO focused way more on India, Tibet and Japan than any other Asiatic country, serving the practical function for which it was created—to lay the cultural foundations of the economic and political expansion of Italy in Asia—while also providing different kinds of orientalists with a new and increasingly prestigious point of reference in the national scholarly landscape. As for Iran and Italians who travelled there, they would enter the limelight soon thereafter.

4. Oil, archaeology and Italian travellers to Iran

In the immediate aftermath of the war, both Italy and Iran found themselves deprived of any autonomy at the level of international relations, although for very different reasons. On the one hand, the newly established Italian republic came out of the war (and entered NATO) with its international standing greatly diminished—not to mention the material devastation brought about by the conflict—while also being caught up in both the preludes of the Cold War and European integration (Mammarella and Cacace 2006, 131–206). On the other hand, the new shah of Iran, Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavi, found it extremely difficult to escape the influence of the Allies, and was soon confronted with an almost fatal crisis, namely the turbulent but extremely significant political experience of Moḥammad Moṣaddeg (1882–1967). Under the latter's leadership (1951–1953), the Iranian government attempted to nationalize Iran's British-owned oil industry, which led to a coup d'état and later to the formation of a new course for Iranian politics under the shah's direct guidance, the so-called "White Revolution" (Amanat 2017, 502–617). In the same years, however, Italy's foreign policy was taking a new direction, usually referred to as "neo-Atlantism". Its aim was to recover Italy's positions in the Mediterranean as well as to carve out space for manoeuvre in areas once firmly under French or British control and now undergoing decolonization (Mammarella and Cacace 2006, 206–24).[19]

The mid-1950s thus marked a change of situation. In this new context, a key role was played by Enrico Mattei (1906–1962), president of the Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (ENI), the Italian petroleum agency. Wanting to secure energetic independence for Italy vis-à-vis other western oil companies, in 1957 Mattei finalized an agreement with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) accord-

[18] Besides IPO and IsMEO, it is worth mentioning that a different institutional player, the Milan-based Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), also participated in this new politically oriented interest in Iran, as is shown by the publication of a handbook on the subject (Monterisi 1941).

[19] On this topic, see the essay by Spagnulo (2020) on relations between Italy, India and Pakistan.

ing to which ENI would receive only 25% of the profits, as opposed to the 50% usually negotiated by other western oil companies (Tremolada 2011).[20] This initiative, which disrupted previous practices between western oil companies and Iran, played a large hand in creating the conditions for closer diplomatic and commercial relations.[21] While none of this happened in a vacuum—a gradual re-establishment of relations had already allowed a new commercial treaty to be signed in 1955 (*Legge 25 aprile 1957*)[22]—it was only then that a seminal cultural agreement was signed (on 29 November 1958) that would provide the institutional framing for many scholarly and cultural initiatives carried out in the following two decades (*Legge 1 luglio 1961*).

The 1950s also witnessed the revival of the activities of IsMEO which, with its new statute and increasingly considerable funding,[23] had been placed under the guidance of Giuseppe Tucci. While IsMEO resumed its research projects on Nepal even more ambitiously than before, from the mid-1950s a growing interest could be seen in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran: my focus is on the latter, but this wider context should be borne in mind. In the summer of 1956, an exhibition of Iranian art was held at IsMEO's Roman premises, Palazzo Brancaccio, under the patronage of the shah and the president of the Italian Republic, Giovanni Gronchi. In the catalogue presentation, Tucci repeatedly thanked the shah for his involvement in the initiative, remarking that:

> Sua Maestà Imperiale Mohammad Reza Pahlavi dunque e tutti i prestatori e collaboratori sono gli artefici di questa esposizione che evoca, commemora ed esalta l'arte di un grande paese da lunga tradizione legato all'Italia [...] In Italia infatti [...] l'arte iranica non mancò sia pure in modo saltuario di far sentire i

[20] The literature on Mattei in general and on the agreement with NIOC in particular is extensive and often marked by celebratory and hagiographic overtones. On this point, see Tremolada (2011, 15–18). For a study of ENI's activities in Iran after Mattei's untimely death in 1962, see Milano (2013).

[21] During the last two decades of the Pahlavi monarchy, these relations became so significant that, throughout and after the 1979 revolution, the Italian government strove to maintain contacts with the new establishment and, therefore, preserve the interests of Italian companies in Iran. On this point, see Milano (2020).

[22] This commercial treaty spawned the publication of several handbooks edited by the Istituto nazionale per il commercio estero (ICE, Italian Foreign Trade Agency), such as ICE (1957) and ICE (1965). In 1958, a great Italian industrial fair was held in Tehran (ICE 1957, 25–6; 1958). The economic and commercial contacts between Italy and Iran in the 1950s are also evidenced by the mission carried out in the country by Leo Valiani in 1952–1953 on behalf of the investment bank Mediobanca and by his correspondence with Mediobanca's president Enrico Cuccia (Contorti 2013).

[23] The first post-war statute of IsMEO was approved in 1947. This statute was renewed in 1953 and would remain in force until 1983 (*Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica* 1947, *Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica* 1953). As for its funding, the most significant change took place in 1955, when the 30 million lire annual budget was increased to 150 million lire (*Legge 12 febbraio 1955*). By 1975, the annual budget had risen to 300 million lire (*Legge 20 ottobre 1975*).

> suoi influssi; in epoca più tarda qualche eco dell'arte nostra giunse pure in Iran, quasi a ricordare in modo visibile che Iran ed Italia pur così remote nello spazio le vicende della storia hanno più volto [*sic*] posto l'una in rapporto con l'altra; l'una e l'altra per il corso degli avvenimenti e la postura geografica destinate ad essere mediatrici fra culture diverse, pronte a riceverne l'ammaestramento o a illuminarle della propria luce (Bussagli 1956, 14).[24]

The 1956 exhibition was one of the starting points of a narrative about the historical connection between Italy and Iran. While coming from a scholarly milieu, it was used in a context of cultural diplomacy that we may also call ceremonial and presented to a wider public. Three years later, in 1959, having established a Centro Scavi e Ricerche Archeologiche (Excavation and Archaeological Research Centre) in Asia and in cooperation with the Iranian archaeological services, Tucci launched IsMEO's first wave of archaeological research in Iran, with a campaign in the south-eastern region of Sistān led by Giorgio Gullini and Umberto Scerrato. This endeavour marked the definitive establishment of an Iranian studies tradition within IsMEO (Rossi 2019, 3). In 1965, conservation and restoration work at Persepolis was put under the supervision of IsMEO-sponsored conservation experts Giuseppe Tilia, his wife Ann Britt-Tilia, Giuseppe Zander and Domenico Faccenna (Callieri and Genito 2007).[25] The study of Italian travel literature in Iran at the time suggests that the presence of IsMEO had become a point of reference not only for insiders but also for more casual travellers (see e.g. Brandi [1978] 2016, 115, and Basilico 2015, 77).

Around the same time, IsMEO's main journal, *East and West*, started to pay increasing attention to all things Iranian, giving ample accounts of excavations taking place in Iran and the manifold cultural activities connected to the relations between the two countries in its "Activities" section. This is not surprising, since the start of the excavations had gone hand in hand with the foundation of a Centro Italiano di Cultura in Tehran (1960), which was later transformed into the Istituto Italiano di Cultura. Inaugurated on 20 December 1963 with an exhibition of "Ancient Italian Drawings" organized by IsMEO, the institute was jointly managed and funded by IsMEO and the Italian Ministry of Foreign

[24] "His Imperial Majesty Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and all the lenders and collaborators are therefore the creators of this exhibition that evokes, commemorates and exalts the art of a great country with long-standing ties to Italy […] Indeed, in Italy […] Iranian art did not fail, albeit occasionally, to make its influences felt; in later times some echoes of our art also reached Iran, almost as if to visibly remind us that the events of history have several times placed Iran and Italy, although so distant in space, in relation with each other; one and the other, due to the course of events and their geographical position, were destined to be mediators between different cultures, ready to receive their wisdom or illuminate them with their own light."

[25] It is hard to overestimate the contributions made by IsMEO-sponsored Italian archaeologists in Iran. On this topic, see Callieri and Genito (2007), Rossi (2019) and, for a non-Italian account of restoration works conducted in Persepolis, Mousavi (2012, 202–6). For the restoration works, see Zander (1968) and Britt-Tilia (1972–1978).

Affairs (Caruso 1970; Gargano 1970). Between its foundation and its closure to the public in 1986, followed by its suppression in 1994, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Tehran played a very significant role in coordinating cultural and scientific relations between the two countries, "in particular in the field of architecture" and by means of "exhibitions, concerts, plays, cinema festivals, and numerous publications regarding Italian and Iranian cultures" (Casari 2007b).[26]

In the speech made on that occasion, Tucci stated that the institute's aim needed to be to help the formation of a "nouvel humanisme, dans lequel on rétablit un équilibre entre les sens et la pensée, les images et la raison." Tucci continued:

> Ces choses, je pense, sont bien connues de nos amis Iraniens, puisque on peut dire que l'humanisme a commencé depuis que Cyrus le Grand a établi son immense empire, en le fondant sur le respect de la dignité humaine. Ce que j'admire dans ces grands empires, l'Achéménide autant que le Romain, ce n'est pas le rêve fragile de la puissance, car l'histoire précipite dans le gouffre du temps, mais le fait d'avoir favorisé et consolidé des rencontres et des échanges de religions, de pensées, d'art, et de traditions (IsMEO 1963, 290).[27]

Three days later, the shah granted Tucci an audience, during which the head of the Italian archaeological mission illustrated the latest discoveries made by Scerrato in Sistān, notably the remains of a city which, besides offering "secure elements for stabilizing what the Iranian religion of that time [the Achaemenid empire] might have been", was without doubt "the capital of Sistan in the period of expansion of the Achaemenid empire towards India" (IsMEO 1963, 291). The work carried out by IsMEO in Iran under the guidance of Tucci arguably contributed to the construction of a discourse centred on both the historical continuity of a supposed Iranian civilization and its past and present influence, while gravitating towards the idea of an intellectual and spiritual connection between Iran and Italy. At the same time, this connection was presented as being based on universal values of a shared humanism.

It is likewise interesting to note that, in the early 1960s, different scholars wrote entries on travellers who are relevant for our discussion for the revamped *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Indologist Luciano Petech (1914–2010), one

[26] This institution deserves an in-depth study that could not be done here. Piemontese (2003, 10, 68–70) provides information on the significant cultural activity carried out in Tehran in the 1960s by professor and poet Gina Labriola (1931–2011), wife of the Institute's director Fernando Caruso.

[27] "[…] a new humanism, in which a new balance can be established between the senses and the thought, the images and the reason […] These things, I think, are well known to our Iranian friends, since it can be said that humanism began when Cyrus the Great established his immense empire, basing it on respect for human dignity. What I admire in these great empires, the Achaemenid as much as the Roman, is not the fragile dream of power, for history precipitates into the abyss of time, but the fact that they favoured and consolidated encounters and exchanges of religions, thoughts, art and traditions."

of Tucci's students,[28] wrote an entry on Ascelino (Petech 1962). The prominent geographer Roberto Almagià (1884–1962), who had started collaborating with IsMEO in the 1930s before being purged by the 1938 racial laws (Capristo 2019), wrote an entry on Giosafat Barbaro (Almagià 1964). Ugo Tucci (1917–2013), great student of early modern Venice (Cardini 2014), wrote the entries on Gasparo Balbi and Ambrogio Bembo (Tucci 1963, 1966). Almost simultaneously, some years before, Ugo Tucci and Almagià had published seminal contributions on the Vecchietti brothers, respectively in *Oriente Moderno* and in the proceedings of the moral sciences class of the Accademia dei Lincei[29] (Tucci 1955; Almagià 1956).

In other words, several different factors were pooling together towards a gradual scholarly reappraisal of many travellers tied to Iran in different ways. This could not fail to trickle down (or up?) to the official rhetoric. In 1963, in cooperation with the Ente Manifestazioni Milanesi (Milan Events Body), IsMEO sponsored another exhibition of Iranian art, this time held in Milan, which was in fact the Italian leg in a travelling exhibition organized directly by the shah's court. The catalogue, *7000 anni d'arte Iranica*, opens with forewords by the president of the Italian Republic Antonio Segni and Moḥammad Reżā Pahlavi. The shah established a special historical connection between Iran and Italy, "un paese con il quale da duemila anni noi Iraniani abbiamo avuto i più stretti rapporti artistici, culturali e di pensiero". He then added that the Italians were the forebears of knowledge about Iran in the West, and among others mentioned Marco Polo as the author of the "primo diario di viaggio che interessasse l'Iran", and traveller Giosafat Barbaro as the first to mention the monuments and bas-reliefs of Persepolis. The foreword concluded by mentioning recent cultural and scholarly exchanges between Iranians and Italians in several fields (archaeology, art and literature) and underlining the "preziosa collaborazione" of IsMEO (*7000 anni d'arte iranica* 1963, 17–18).[30] It is important to remark that the narrative expounded by the shah was by no means exclusive to political and diplomatic circles. For example, in the second half of the 1960s, the young Piemontese published a series of articles in both *East and West* and *Oriente Moderno* that, while reconstructing the vicissitudes of the 1862 Italian embassy to Qajar Iran in great detail (Piemontese 1968, 1969a, 1969b, 1972), shared the narrative about the almost eternal connection between Italy and Iran:

[28] Petech penned the biographical note in the 1985 memorial volume on Tucci edited by Raniero Gnoli (Gnoli 1985, 45–46). On Petech, see the contributions by Paolo Daffinà, Elena de Rossi Filibeck, Gherardo Gnoli and Piero Corradini in *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* LXXVIII, 1–2: 11–48 (2004).

[29] The Accademia nazionale dei Lincei was also responsible for the organization of two workshops about Iran and the West, one about relations between "La Persia e il mondo greco-romano" (Accademia nazionale dei Lincei 1966) and one about "La Persia nel Medioevo" (Accademia nazionale dei Lincei 1971).

[30] "a country with which we Iranians have had the closest artistic, cultural and intellectual relations for two thousand years [...] the first travelogue dealing with Iran [...] precious collaboration [...]".

in particular, in a 1968 contribution, Piemontese described the Italian mission of 1862 as "Il capitolo più recente dell'antica e gloriosa storia dei rapporti italo-persiani" (Piemontese 1968, 537).[31]

However, the implicit references made by the shah to historical facts unknown to most people—such as the printing of Avicenna's *Medical Canon* by the Rome-based Medici Oriental Press in the sixteenth century—may be a reason to suspect that the foreword of *7000 anni d'arte iranica* was written by his main ghostwriter, scholar and politician Shojā' al-Din Shafā (1918–2010), whom we have already met in his capacity of managing director of the Pahlavi Library. Appointed as cultural counsellor to the imperial court in 1957, Shafā became one of the leading ideologues of the shah's cultural policies and played a pivotal role in shaping a most significative and just as controversial initiative, the 1971 celebrations for the 2500th Anniversary Celebrations of Cyrus the Great (Steele 2021, 10–12, 30–4, 73–8).[32] Shafā was also a member of the honorary committee for the exhibition, together with several politicians, officials and scholars, ranging from the ambassador Hasan Ārsanjāni to Italian prime minister Amintore Fanfani and, of course, Giuseppe Tucci. What is more, he had a special connection with Italy.[33] In 1956–1957, just as Mattei was working on the ENI-NIOC agreement, in Tehran Shafā published the first integral translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in three volumes (*Komedi elahī. Duzakh. Barzakh. Behesht*). For this accomplishment, and on the recommendation of Tucci, the University of Rome would give him an honorary degree in literature in 1967 (IsMEO 1967, 173; Piemontese 2003, 60–6). The friendly relationship between Tucci and Shafā (IsMEO 1963, 291) may help explain Tucci's engagement in the 2500th Anniversary Celebrations with a conference on Cyrus given in Rome's Campidoglio on 25 May 1971 (Tucci 1971), while his close collaborator, the great scholar of Islam Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988), published a commemorative essay on Iran's millenary tradition (Bausani 1971). In a similar way, the Tucci-Shafā connection may also have played a role in the last and most apparent phase of the construction of the idea of Italian travellers to Iran, through Shojā' al-Din's brother, Sho'ā' al-Din, then a member of the diplomatic staff of the Iranian embassy in Rome (Piemontese 2003, 185).

In 1950, Tucci had launched an IsMEO series called *Il Nuovo Ramusio*. Its forthcoming publication was announced by Petech in the very first article of the institute's journal, *East and West*, as "a collection of travel accounts and old geographical texts of Italian authors" (Petech 1950). In the "News" section, the editors defined the collection as "[u]nabridged, scientific publication of writ-

[31] "the most recent chapter of the ancient and glorious history of Italo-Persian relations".

[32] Within the organization deputed to the celebrations for Cyrus , Shafā was also head of the subcommittee for international affairs, which was responsible for coordinating the events held around the world (Steele 2021, 27–38, 72–4).

[33] Coliaei (2016, 195–99, 279, 341–67) provides the reproduction of many documents relevant for this point.

ings by the greatest Italian travellers and of documents which shed light on the relations which existed in past centuries between our people and the East" (IsMEO 1950, 63). The *Nuovo Ramusio* books were published by the Libreria dello Stato in 1,000 numbered copies and an extremely handsome typeset. Many years later, in his recollections about Tucci, his disciple Raniero Gnoli would recall the connection between the series and Tucci's pride about "l'eccezionale contributo dell'Italia alla conoscenza che l'Europa ha lentamente acquistata dell'Asia e, di converso, le tracce della cultura e dell'arte italiana in Oriente" (Gnoli 1985, 22–4).[34] However, in his foreword to the first book of the series, Tucci remarked that Italy's contributions were even more worth remembering now that "l'Asia ha conquistato la sua libertà e si inserisce nuovamente nella storia come fattore attivo" (Da Verona 1950, viii).[35] The first volume of the *Nuovo Ramusio* dedicated to Italian missionaries in Tibet and Nepal—a project that must have been particularly dear to Tucci—came out in 1952. The editor, Luciano Petech, underlined that the edition privileged a "storico-geografico-etnologico" point of view, as opposed to a focus on missionary work (*Missionari italiani* 1952, ix). Tucci was also responsible for the inclusion of the edition of the travelogues of Cesare Federici and Gasparo Balbi by Olga Pinto in the series (Federici and Balbi 1966, xiii).

In 1972, the loudly announced edition of Pietro Della Valle's work was finally published. We know that as part of the *Nuovo Ramusio* series, this project had already been conceived before the war and that it was to be entrusted to Almagià, before the racial laws prevented this (Capristo 2019). While it is undeniable that the pre-war *Nuovo Ramusio* was supposed to serve the purpose of propaganda against the British and the French,[36] the post-war disappearance of this goal allowed for a purely scholarly perspective to be established. Hence, the *Nuovo Ramusio* books became a showcase for international collaborations. However, it may also be safe to say that, at the start of the 1960s, cultural diplomacy and political opportunity happily came together within the scope traced by scholarly imperatives. In fact, as for Della Valle, the Iranian section of his travelogue—which comprised volumes two and three out of four of the original 1650–1663 edition—was published first.[37] This Iranian perspective on Della Valle is also apparent in the slightly later edition of a short 1624 Latin essay about Iran (Della Valle 1977) in a collective volume edited by Enrico Cerulli, former Italian ambassador to Tehran (1950–1954) and African-cum-oriental scholar in his own

[34] "[…] the exceptional contribution of Italy to the knowledge that Europe has slowly acquired about Asia and, conversely, the traces left by Italian culture and art in the East".

[35] "Asia has conquered its freedom and once again enters history as an active factor."

[36] On this point see the essay by Beatrice Falcucci in this volume and the archival documentation quoted in Capristo (2019, 104n57).

[37] On the other hand, the Indian section of Della Valle's travelogue had been the subject of an article published in the first issues of *East and West* (De Lorenzo 1952) while the Turkish section would be thoroughly discussed later (Salvante 1997). However, the Iranian perspective is still dominant in more recent analyses of Della Valle's work (Masetti 2017).

right (Ricci 1990; Tremolada 2011, 41–60).[38] Thanks to an important essay on an early Italian translation of Persian literature (Cerulli 1975), Cerulli was also instrumental in providing Piemontese with a starting point for his 1987 essay on Iranian studies in Italy.

Tucci's presentation of the *Nuovo Ramusio* edition of Della Valle perfectly summarizes the different forces at play. The international academic scope of the work is highlighted by recalling the participation of scholar Laurence Lockhart as author of the commentary and the role played by the late Vladimir Minorsky in shaping the whole series. References to the Italian editors, the Libreria dello Stato and the Società Geografica Italiana reflect the Italian institutional network underpinning the work. Of course, the publication of the volume, as well as the forthcoming edition of Barbaro and Contarini (Barbaro and Contarini 1973), was directly connected to the 2500th Anniversary Celebrations of Cyrus. An interesting detail was also added: large excerpts of Della Valle's text were translated into Persian by Sho'ā' al-Din Shafā and published by the Pahlavi Foundation thanks to the "generoso contributo dell'ENI" (Della Valle 1972, ix).[39]

Moreover, these different forces had already united in 1970. The journal *Il Veltro. Rivista della civiltà italiana*, cultural outlet of the Società Dante Alighieri, published an issue on the relationship between Italy and Iran (*Le relazioni tra l'Italia e l'Iran*). *Il Veltro* regularly published issues dedicated to the relations between Italy and other countries. Hence, this issue of *Il Veltro* can be taken as indicative of the formation of mirroring narratives of national identity, whose most distinctive expression was given by the image of encounters through travel, on the part of both Italy and Iran. First, it should be said that *Le relazioni tra l'Italia e l'Iran* included reports by Scerrato and Zander about the archaeological mission in Sistān and the restoration work at Persepolis and Eṣfahān (Scerrato 1970; Zander 1970). Another group of articles discussed economic and commercial relations, with reference to ENI's presence in Iran (Canino 1970) and the hydroelectrical plant of Dez, built by the Italian consortium Impregilo between 1959 and 1963 (Finzi 1970). However, the most significant section, comprising almost half of the issue, was historical in character. This section began with an article by Shafā on *Italia e Iran dall'Impero Romano ad oggi* (Shafā 1970), and included an article by Bausani on *Iran, Islam e Italia nel Medioevo* (Bausani 1970), a contribution by once-Fascist geographer Giuseppe Caraci on *Viaggiatori italiani in Persia nel Medioevo* (Caraci 1970; on whom see Milanesi 1976) and an article

[38] Cerulli had also served as deputy governor general of Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI), the Italian colonial empire in East Africa. On this topic, see Pankhurst (1999), Del Boca (2002, 309–11) and Celli (2019). In the 1960s and 1970s, Cerulli would continue to play a significant role in Italian-Iranian cultural relations, serving as president of the Associazione Italo-Iraniana and the Centro Culturale Italo-Iraniano. Both institutions deserve further research.

[39] On this translation, *Safarnāme-ye Pitro Dela Vale (qesmat-e marbuṭ be-Irān)*, published in Tehran in 1969, see the unforgiving review by Piemontese (1970b). On the Pahlavi Foundation, see Azad and Rahmanian (2018).

by Iranist Gianroberto Scarcia about *Venezia e la Persia tra Uzun Hasan e Tahmasp (1454-1572)* (Scarcia 1970), while Piemontese wrote a *Profilo delle relazioni italo-persiane nel XIX secolo* (Piemontese 1970) and linguist Giorgio R. Cardona authored a contribution about *Studi di iranistica in Italia dal 1880 ad oggi* (Cardona 1970). The issue itself was opened by a presentation by the Italian ambassador to Tehran Gerolamo Pignatti and his Iranian counterpart in Rome, Jālal Abdoh, alongside a short text on *Le relazioni italo-iraniane* by Giuseppe Tucci. In his essay, Tucci started from the relation between Rome and Iran and, when talking about the Middle Ages and the modern era, mentioned many travellers on whom his collaborators, colleagues and students and he himself had worked in the previous years. They are the same names that would be found again, for the most part, in Piemontese's 1987 essay on *Italian Scholarship on Iran*, and in Bernardini and Vanzan's entry in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*: the Genoese Buscarello, on whom Petech had worked (Petech 1960), Gian Battista Vecchietti, Contarini, Barbaro, Giovanni Dario, Vincenzo Alessandri, Marin Sanudo and of course Pietro Della Valle, "figura di primo rilievo". This sequence of travellers was naturally connected to the renewal of oriental studies in post-unification Italy, and here Tucci mentions Pizzi, "patriarca della nuova scuola iranistica italiana",[40] and his translation of the *Shāhnama*, an abridged version of which, edited by Gabrieli, had just been republished (Ferdowsī 1969). He then proceeded to mention Scerrato, Bausani and Piemontese among others. Tucci concluded:

> Tutto questo fiorire di ricerche e di studi ha una sua ragione profonda; è cresciuta, con l'andar del tempo, la consapevolezza sempre più precisa e documentata dei rapporti antichi che hanno avvicinato i due paesi, la comprensione reciproca, la constatazione di certe somiglianze di temperamento e di atteggiamenti che rendono più agevoli l'intesa e la simpatia. Pertanto è facile prevedere che da queste premesse fioriranno collaborazioni sempre più utili (Tucci 1970, 8).[41]

Conclusions

The year 1979 saw the retirement of Giuseppe Tucci, then in his eighties, and the flight of the shah from Iran during the revolution that would imminently result in the foundation of the Islamic Republic. This in no way marked the end of Iranian studies in Italy, which between the 1960s and 1970s had developed in various directions, consolidating well-respected traditions especially at the "La Sapienza" University of Rome, at the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Na-

[40] "[…] major figure […] patriarch of the new Italian school of Iranian studies".

[41] "There is a deep reason for all this flourishing of research and studies; with the passing of time, an increasingly precise and documented awareness has come to be of the ancient relationships that have brought the two countries together, a mutual understanding, the realization of certain similarities of temperament and attitudes that make understanding and sympathy easier. It is therefore easy to foresee that increasingly useful collaborations will flourish from these premises."

ples, and at the "Ca' Foscari" University of Venice (Piemontese 1987, 106–19; Cereti 2007b). The dynamism of the field is documented, for instance, by the ample role played by Italian researchers in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, or by IsMEO's Iran-related activities: a few years after Tucci's retirement, the *Societas Iranologica Europea* would be born upon the initiative of IsMEO's new president, Gherardo Gnoli (Rossi 2019, 5–7; Panaino 2007).

As amply shown in this essay, the immediate post-war period up to the late 1970s was instrumental in the consolidation of a body of work about Italian travellers to Iran. These works and the discursive framing underpinning them were expounded thereafter by Piemontese's seminal 1987 essay and, as we have seen, found confirmation within the national organizational framework of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. The most recent developments in historical studies—from microhistory to all strands of global history, not to mention postcolonial studies—have contributed greatly to the critical reassessment, nuancing and even removal of nations and national boundaries at the methodological level. Nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to fall prey to the pitfalls inherent in setting up this kind of boundary, and in particular to continuity narratives that project both the identities of present-day national communities and the relations between them into the distant past. However, these boundaries and their interpretative effects are still very much alive in a great deal of otherwise excellent scholarly literature that we have many reasons to rely on. In some cases, like ours, such boundaries, and the narratives they help to establish, deserve to become the subject of historical enquiry in much the same way as they have called for methodological criticism.

As the outcome of the activity of researchers tied to IsMEO and other Italian centres of oriental studies, the body of work on Italian travellers to Iran nevertheless drew from different scholarly traditions and resulted from the expansion and intertwinement of pre-existing research outlines. In particular, stress should be placed on the long-term endeavour represented by the critical edition of primary sources, well exemplified by the *Nuovo Ramusio* series, and by no means limited to IsMEO's activity, as is shown by the edition of Michele Membré's *Relazione di Persia* (1542) sponsored by the Neapolitan Istituto Universitario Orientale (Membré 1969). However, while rarely stated in an explicit manner, the idea of Italian travellers to Iran took distinct shape in the context of the encounter between scholarly research and cultural diplomacy, and was all the more visible when the results of scholarship were re-employed—by the scholars themselves or by officials and politicians connected to them—in cultural activities aimed at a wider public, such as art exhibitions, public speeches and cultural journals. Indeed, we may even suppose that the constraints entailed by official rhetoric and popularization helped to establish "Italian travellers to Iran" in the eyes of scholars, especially since this category was endorsed by an immensely respected intellectual such as Tucci, who—by no accident—was by then more active as an organizer, popularizer and go-between for scholars and politicians than as a specialist.

However, even if a good deal of the scholarly activity played into the shah's self-aggrandizing cultural policies, or into Italian political and economic inter-

ests in Iran, we should not jump to the conclusion that it was directed by political power for its own ends, nor that such activity served political power out of necessity. Italian scholars did not spare criticism of the shah nor even of the tools of cultural diplomacy to which they had collectively contributed.[42] In my opinion, what we are talking about here is rather the coming together of different forces, many of which shared the aim of rebuilding a cosmopolitan sense of self in countries going through radical and often painful transformations, as had been the case of Italy and Iran in the three decades following the Second World War. In this sense, the perspective adopted here could fruitfully be applied to other cases of "bilateral nation-building" involving Italy and countries from Asia, Africa and the Americas. The post-war relations between Italy and Iran show that against the backdrop of a widening world, in both countries much effort was put into the formation of a national identity revolving around concepts of historical continuity and the alleged contributions made to distinct civilizations as well as to an idea of shared humanity. Travellers, in turn, served to embody the historical continuity of the bridge allegedly existing between the different civilizations, and it is precisely in this game of give and take that their "Italian" identity was established. As for the hopes for a brighter future often expressed by both Italians and Iranians alongside many scholarly and cultural projects, we cannot be sure that they stood the test of time as well as "Italian travellers to Iran".

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[42] On this important aspect see, for example, Scarcia (1962), the already mentioned review of Della Valle's Persian translation by Piemontese (1970b), or Tucci's harsh remarks on the floodlighting of the monuments at Persepolis, whose installation was supervised by IsMEO (Britt-Tilia 1972–1978 I: xii).

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AFTERWORD

Notes on *Rereading* and Re-enacting "China"

Giovanni Tarantino

In Europe, the historical representation and narration of China and the Orient more in general from an outsider's point of view has conjured up an exotic and a-historical image of a poetical, mystical and refined civilization. In Walpole's Britain, for example, "the argument from the Chinese"—namely, the admiration for a prosperous and densely populated kingdom which did not belong to a single faith—was frequently used in religious disputes when claiming a wider or more coherent policy of tolerance or seeking to cut down the prerogatives of the Anglican hierarchy. Moreover, the opposition press commonly brandished it in the bitter criticisms aimed at government policies. The most prolific journalists, tirelessly dedicated to revealing the corruptive tendencies, illicit ties with bishops and authoritarian inclination of the Walpole administration, and anxious to recement the cornerstones of British constitutionalism, repeatedly singled out the Chinese administrative system as exemplary. Their articles increasingly came to be dotted with snappy Chinese anecdotes of a moralistic sort (Tarantino 2012, 49–53). Nevertheless, the political and cultural paths followed in the actual western-Chinese power relations were rather more prosaic: from the proselytizing aspirations of the Christian missionaries, to the inconclusive plans for European colonial domination, through ineffective eighteenth-century diplomatic missions, conflicting Sinophile and then increasingly Sinophobe views in a large part of enlightened reflection on the ideal constitutional alchemies, different options of interfaith coexistence, and inclinations towards sec-

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

ularization. The change processes in China producing "the hundred years of national humiliation" were principally the response to the inexorable affirmation of unequal global trade and China's financial subjugation to Europe. To a certain degree these same processes were anticipated, championed or even "prescribed" in the works of Adam Smith and Denis Diderot (Abbattista 2022).

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Between the end of the 1920s and the start of the 1930s, political changes in Asia and Europe persuaded the Italian government that it could assume an important role in the game of relations with China. Therefore, the Fascist regime drew up an ideological narrative which was supposed to legitimize and corroborate the idea that it could claim and exercise a role at the helm of Sino-European relations. "May Italy, that was the first with Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci, not become the last, among European nations, to feel the duty to know and help China", claimed mathematician-cum-Chinese language teacher Giovanni Vacca (1872–1953) in 1934 (as quoted in De Giorgi 2010, 582). Indeed, Italy hoped that it could draw advantage from the difficulties encountered by the much more experienced European players in that area, first of all Great Britain, owing to the emergence of anti-imperialist and nationalist movements in China on one hand and Japanese expansionist goals on the other. Nevertheless, the idea of a privileged relationship with China and the hope of increasing Italian influence in East Asia clashed with Italy's objective structural weakness in that area and the need to support Japan's imperial sights. In the second half of the 1930s, the war of resistance against the Japanese aggressor was spun as the surrender of nationalist China to Bolshevism and Russian influence. Chiang Kai-shek, long celebrated for saving the Nationalist Party from communism, was now instead blamed for unexpectedly countering Japanese imperial expansion (De Giorgi 2010, 584).

Decades later, during the Cultural Revolution, famous Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni (1912–2007)—whose off-camera leftist political views were no secret—was invited by the Chinese government to document the New China. In 1972, for six months, Antonioni and his crew travelled from north to south, east to west of the great Asian country. After three weeks of filming, Antonioni edited the videos into a three-and-a-half-hour documentary entitled *Chung Kuo/China*. The documentary started in Tiananmen Square, "the great silent space that is the centre of the world for the Chinese" ("Chung Kuo" means middle kingdom). Antonioni concentrates on some cultural aspects that he deemed most representative of this millennial civilization: acupuncture techniques, cotton factory workers at work, the immense and pointless monumentality of the Great Wall, the Ming dynasty tombs, peasants' hard graft, culinary specialities. The camera dwelt at length on the imperial palace described by Marco Polo:

> One Sunday we went to see the walls, stairs, roofs and gardens of the forbidden city described in *The Travels*. Until a few decades ago, no European and very few Chinese could enter these places. Closed during the Cultural Revolution,

> the City of Emperors has only recently reopened. Our reason for coming was more to see the Chinese that visit it than to look for the memories of extinct dynasties. The rooms and pavilions have names that celebrate the religious and civil grandeur against which the emperors judged themselves: Supreme Harmony, Celestial Purity, Terrestrial Serenity, Nourishment of the Spirit. The real story that took place inside these bastions is very different. They were cruel and greedy courts, dominated by customs that were as sumptuous as they were inhuman. The rooms and palaces were itineraries towards an inaccessible power. […] Today the Chinese have a serene relationship with their past. They only feel its greatness as a reflection on the present and their visits to this no longer forbidden city are unhurried and laidback (Antonioni 1972).

The itinerary continued southwards from Beijing into the Henan province, China's breadbasket. The first passage from cooperatives to the farming communes took place in 1958. The director takes his time to show the austere everyday life inside a commune. The story continues by introducing the spectator to the Blue River valley and the hustle and bustle of lives along the precious and vulnerable network of rivers and canals. Antonioni then shows the wonders of the Garden of Harmony and the Buddhist temple in Suzhou:

> Of course, Suzhou reminded us of Venice. […] When Marco Polo got here, he was struck by the level of civilization of its inhabitants, who already used paper money, wove brocade, cultivated the arts and medicine, and had 6,000 stone bridges that were so high that a galley or even two galleys together could sail under each one. Today, it is a city of trade, factories and human industry (Antonioni 1972).

Lastly, the journey took Antonioni to Shanghai, the second-largest city in the world, with ten million inhabitants. The Huangpu River, with its constant traffic of large cargo ships, makes the city that has changed face over a generation a nerve centre for the country. His camera first dwells on the mud and straw huts which millions of people had lived in, then the elegant pavilion of the tea room reserved for state pensioners, and lastly the immense industrial outskirts whose products end up all over China.

In 1974, to Antonioni's dismay, the Chinese government banned projections of the film and targeted the director with an intense campaign of criticism and hostility:

> Antonioni came to China as our guest in spring 1972. With his camera, he visited Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Suzhou and Linxian. And yet the purpose of this journey to China was not to improve knowledge of China and even less so to promote friendship between the Chinese and Italian peoples. On the contrary, hostile towards the Chinese people, he used the opportunity of his visit for ulterior purposes; by underhand and utterly despicable means he hunted specifically for material that could be used to slander and attack China. *Renmin Ribao* 人民 日報 (The People's Daily), 30 January 1974 (as quoted in Rai Cultura n.d.)

One of the reasons for that acrimony towards Antonioni were the raw relations between China and the Soviet Union. While Antonioni was filming his documentary in China, the Soviet Union was projecting a film produced in 1971 by its Central Studio for Documentary Film entitled *Night over China – the Grandeur and Folly of China's Fallen Revolution*, which put together clips filmed before the Sino-Soviet split. After the release of *Chung Kuo*, the Soviet Union did not hesitate to extrapolate some episodes of the Italian documentary, *rereading* them and craftily bending them to its own disparaging narrative of Mao Zedong. This affront was obviously inacceptable to the hawks in the Chinese government and in particular the Gang of Four, a political partnership formed by the wife of Mao Jiang Qing, vice-chairman of the Communist Party Wang Hongwen and the boldest advocates of the revolutionary propaganda, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan. They saw every criticism against Mao as a threat to their own legitimation. Hence, to undermine the credibility of Russia's anti-Chinese propaganda (but also to discredit the premier of the State Council, Zhou Enlai, Jiang's main political opponent and feared contender for his succession, who had championed a rapprochement between China and the West), they immediately set about condemning Antonioni and his film. Knowing little about the political divergences between China and Russia, Antonioni openly expressed his disapproval and surprise at being insultingly singled out by the Chinese state media as hired by the "Russian revisionists". In his essay "De Interpretatione, or the Difficulty of Being Marco Polo", published towards the end of the 1970s, Umberto Eco finely summed up Antonioni's despondency: "The anti-Fascist artist who went to China inspired by affection and respect and who found himself accused of being a Fascist, a reactionary in the pay of Soviet revisionism and American imperialism, hated by 800 million persons" (Eco and Leefeldt 1977, 9).

In the 1960s and 70s, a large number of western left-wing intellectuals (think of Althusser in France or Dutschke in Germany) had been swept away by a wave of sympathy for Red China as they looked upon the country (more imaginary than real) as a feasible alternative to western capitalism. They may have pointed at China, but in reality, they were criticizing their own political contexts. Once again, "the argument from the Chinese" was used "as an agency for the West's self-criticism and self-renewal in moral and political spheres" (Liu 2014, 26). The relationship between China and the Italian intellectuals was very much the same. Even before official bilateral relations were established between Italy and the People's Republic of China, delegations of Italian left-wing intellectuals had already visited China, several of those taking part in these discovery expeditions, including Franco Fortini and Carlo Cassola, entrusting their impressions to popular travel reports. Their treatment of the otherness of China and the Chinese in their travel notes did not set out to underline any Italian superiority—if anything, their aim was to urge Italy to reboot its institutions and their ethical and conceptual foundations. Curzio Malaparte, who briefly visited China in 1956 on behalf of the Italian Communist Party and celebrated its revolutionary verve in his journal *Io in Russia e in Cina* published after his death

in 1958, even left his villa in Capri to the People's Republic of China in his will, in the hope that it would become a study centre for Chinese intellectuals. Director Carlo Lizzani's documentary *La Muraglia Cinese/Behind the Great Wall*, brought out in 1959 (the only colour film footage showing China to the West), represented China as an extraordinary political laboratory, whose people were marching towards a radiant future. With these premises, it is easy to imagine the Chinese government's hopes for Antonioni's *Chung Kuo*. Contrary to all expectations, however, the Italian director showed little interest in the country's industrial modernization and social transformations, instead demonstrating a preference for "unfruitful lands, lonely old people, tired animals and ugly houses":

> His three-and-half-hour-long film does not at all reflect the new things, new spirit and new face of our great motherland, but puts together many viciously distorted scenes and shots to attack Chinese leaders, smear socialist New China, slander China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and insult the Chinese people. There is no doubt that any Chinese citizen with any pride in their nation will be furious when they watch this film. *Renmin Ribao* 人民 日報 (The People's Daily), 30 January 1974 (as quoted in Rai Cultura n.d.)

Such heartfelt criticism was the upshot of China's distorted perception of the modernization it had achieved and the frustration for its lack of recognition abroad. A deep-rooted westernizing tendency fuelled a dual paranoia. On one hand, the Chinese population deemed its nation a lot more important than it really was. On the other hand, aware of the gap between China and the West, some Chinese notables reacted with overblown irritation when western observers noted or revealed ongoing structural shortcomings or contradictions or rigidity in the nerve centre of associative life in New China (Liu 2014, 28).

Eco observed how the image of pigs accompanied by a snatch of music from the Beijing Opera House could quite rightly be offensive and arouse in Chinese spectators "the same reaction that a bishop might experience seeing a clinch accompanied by the hymn Tantum Ergo" (Eco and Leefeldt 1997, 11). Nevertheless, the Chinese authorities' irritation was not, or at least not only, sparked by noticing an aesthetic slip or lack of sensitivity. The background music, as Xin Liu clarifies, was not merely an excerpt from a traditional Beijing Opera. It was a famous aria taken from the *Ode of the Dragon River*, a so-called "revolutionary opera" composed during the Cultural Revolution by Jiang Qing, convinced advocate of the need to innovate the theatrical arts and reject the plots of traditional Beijing Opera as feudal and bourgeois. Hence, the latter were banned and replaced by revolutionary operas celebrating the fight against class enemies and foreigners and praising Mao's thought. In all likelihood the Gang of Four would have condemned Antonioni even if he had not made use of these irreverent combinations of images and music; however, their clumsy, albeit perhaps unintentional, presence irremediably irked people (Liu 2014, 30–1).

Two years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, at the Central Working Conference on 10 November 1978, vice-chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Li Xiannian went back to the controversy aroused by Antonioni's docu-

mentary, demonstrating a new awareness and political sensitivity: "There are some problems in *Chung Kuo*. It hurt the feeling of Chinese people. However, the Gang of Four used the film to attack Premier Zhou. This issue must be well investigated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (Yu 2009, 87). Upon his urging, a government investigation invalidated a large part of the objections made against the film *Chung Kuo* but it did not lift the ban. Most Chinese citizens therefore had to wait until 2004, when the ban was lifted and the documentary projected for the first time at the Beijing Film Academy, to finally see *Chung Kuo* with their own eyes. This is how Geoffrey York, journalist with the *Globe and Mail*, described the spectators' reactions:

> For the audience in Beijing, the film was a journey to a land long ago and far away, as alien as any distant galaxy. Most of the audience members were young people who knew little of the Cultural Revolution beyond the stories they might have heard from their parents. […] Many of the Chinese audience members could not help laughing at the Maoist songs and revolutionary posters that the film captured. They giggled when an elderly woman explained that she had few grandchildren because 'to build a socialist society, small families are better'. They chuckled at the scenes of kindergarten children marching like Chinese soldiers, singing songs of praise to the People's Liberation Army (York 2004, as quoted in Liu 2014, 31).

The first public projection of *Chung Kuo* also met with criticism from some Chinese intellectuals. Ren Yuan, renowned film critic and lecturer in communication studies at the University of China, expressed unease and disappointment before some scenes which he felt inappropriate, such as those portraying children with runny noses or other people filmed on their way to the toilet. Antonioni's realist film style, used to dealing with European standards of beauty and ugliness, here came face to face with a Chinese aesthetic sensitivity conditioned by the eminently Confucian prescription that "moral and aesthetic goodness [be seen and experienced] as intertwined" (Liu 2014, 32).

Antonioni's film could therefore be read and *reread* in many ways. It at once photographed and aroused different gazes: those of the people portrayed, not rarely in funny and proud poses, but often also exposed, unknowing, in the melancholy austerity of their impoverished situation; that of the Chinese spectators—who discovered their regret, after the ban was lifted, for having supported the regime's ostracism—perhaps perturbed but nevertheless grateful for a non-toned-down representation of their history; and that of the European public, at first curious about a non-Soviet socialism, then dismayed upon seeing the generalized poverty, the workers' indoctrination, the children's military marches.

In his essay, Xin Liu points out how one of the most recent and significant Chinese artistic *rereadings* of *Chung Kuo,* the dance theatre *DIS/ORIENTED: Antonioni in China* (2013), was brought to the stage by choreographer Yin Mei, significantly one of those great many young people who in 1974 took part in the protest movement against Antonioni's documentary without having seen it. Years later, when she finally had the chance to see it, Yin Mei was bowled over

by Antonioni's realistic method and above all by the difference between the director's gaze on China then and her memories of the same years. So, she came up with a choreography portraying an imaginary conversation between her and the director, juxtaposed with frames from the original documentary and incursions onto the stage by the performers, alongside a narrator's voice breaking up the fragments of tales from the film with excerpts from Yin's childhood diary. The performance is made up of three acts marked by dull clangs and the propaganda music that resounded in *Chung Kuo*. The three parts all began with Yin and a partner dancing the same pas de deux. At the end of the performance, the clangs stopped and Yin pushed the dancer away from herself and the stage. After years of coercion, the sudden awareness of an unknown freedom catches her out and throws her off-kilter.

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A few months after the Chinese government placed its ban on Antonioni's film, the comedy by Jean Yanne *Les Chinois à Paris* (1974) came out in French cinemas, prompting a vehement official protest from China. The film opens with the French president's (Bernard Blier) announcement that the French borders have been invaded by Chinese troops. He solemnly announces his commitment to defend France, and runs off to catch a plane for New York. Imagining the People's Liberation Army invading and occupying Paris, *Les Chinois à Paris* is a parody both of France during the German occupation and the French infatuation with Maoist China—the "wind from the east" which swept through France in the 1970s. As Catherine E. Clark recently observed, "replaying the history of World War II with the Chinese in place of the Nazis suggests that the Maoist Far Left might be closer to the Far Right than many French people thought at the time" (Clark 2019, 71).

A particularly important insertion in the film and the *rereading* is a dance, *Carmeng*. As the title immediately shows, it is a "Mao-ified" version of Bizet's *Carmen* (1875), watched by a public of Chinese officials and French collaborators. Carmeng is an enemy of the revolution and an incurable seducer. In love with her, Don Cho-Sey, a soldier in the People's Liberation Army, frees her and is put to trial by court martial. But now seeing her dancing seductively among the American soldiers, Don Cho-Sey realizes that she has forgotten about him and he sees the light. He alerts his battalion so that they, together with a commando of warmongering women, surprise and defeat the capitalists, and he kills Carmeng himself. As already noted for Antonioni's film, the dance is not just a farcical imitation of *Carmen*, but a clever parody of a ballet also stemming from Mao's wife's cultural policy. Recent studies (Clark 2019; Ma 2020) have identified the target of the parody as *The Red Detachment of Women*—telling the tale of a female-only battalion engaged in the struggle against the Nationalists—one of the 18 "model works" celebrating the Cultural Revolution (ballets, operas, piano scores) produced under the watchful directorship of Jiang Qing. So Yanne's film at once reproduced and ridiculed what the Chinese were doing. Even more sig-

nificantly, almost all of the characters in the film seem to be inept, blind followers of ideologies, and the mocking of Maoism seems to be aimed at communism and socialism in general. "The People's Republic of China", notes Clark, "was hardly a blank screen onto which the French projected their fantasies about the 'East,' but rather a nation whose politicians were also very adept at reimagining France in their own image" (quite revealingly, one of the provisional hymns of the People's Republic of China, composed in the 1920s, copied the rhythm of *Frère Jacques*). And if China's vigorous protest once again used an international stage to dampen internal conflicts and cement positions of power, in France just buying a ticket to watch *Les Chinois à Paris* implied sharing an irreverent and distinctly anti-utopian political perspective (Clark 2019, 72–4).

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In 1739, a pantomime called the *Ballet des Porcelaines* (also known as *The Teapot Prince*) was put on at the castle of Morville near Paris. It was staged a second time in the castle garden in 1741, before disappearing without trace. All that remains of that 15-minute-long comedy is a musical score (composed by Nicolas Racot de Grandval) and the libretto written by the Comte de Caylus (1692–1765), both of which are conserved in the French National Library in Paris. The libretto tells the story of a Chinese magician on a remote island who transforms the islanders and passers-by into porcelain with a touch of his wand. A prince who hunts all over the island in search of his loved-one also falls victim to the spell. It will be the princess who saves him and the other prisoners by taking the wand from the evil wizard and transforming him into a "*pagode*", an eighteenth-century racialized version of a porcelain bobblehead, one of those ornamental pottery figurines depicting a Chinese man with grotesque features, a bobbing head and removable limbs. The story shows the Europeans' infatuation with Chinese porcelain and their hope to understand and reproduce their production techniques (think, for example, of the eighteenth-century Queen of Naples, Maria Amalia of Saxony, and her porcelain boudoir, a masterpiece in pottery technique and artistry made in just under 20 years by the Royal Porcelain Factory of Capodimonte) also in order to forge a modern sense of kingship with international scope (Frothingham 1955; Zanardi 2018).

As Meredith Martin, associate professor of art history at New York University, notes,

> [...] the château's owner served as France's foreign minister and promoted trade with Asia. We can assume some kind of chinoiserie imagery and context for the ballet, which can be interpreted both as a standard fairy tale love story and as an allegory for the intense European desire to know and steal the secrets of porcelain manufacture (Martin 2022).

Having learnt about the libretto from Esther Bell, a curator at the Clark Art Institute who had found it in the Paris library, Martin set her mind on bringing it back to life and to the stage in a *rereading* that would speak to a contemporary

audience. Her chance came during her 2021 fellowship at NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts thanks to the interest shown in her project by Phil Chan, choreographer and co-founder of Final Bow for Yellowface, an organization whose purpose is to rid ballet of racist, stereotypical and disparaging representations of Asians. In the "re-imagined" version of the *Ballet des Porcelaines*, already performed several times in America and due to hit the stage shortly in Europe too (including Naples and Venice), Chan and Martin have replaced the racialized character of the Chinese wizard with a European porcelain collector inspired by the figure of Augustus the Strong (1670–1733)—known as Frederick August I as duke and prince-elector of Saxony, and August II as king of Poland—who collected over 29,000 porcelain objects (Martin 2022).

With nothing more than the libretto and a musical score, no stage sets, or sketches to suggest the costumes, there can be no accusing the two ingenious *rereaders* who have rebuilt the *Ballet des Porcelaines* of betraying or ignoring its historicity or giving into the increasing calls from American society to implement the so-called "cancel culture" every time that minority rights, including the fundamental right to a respectful representation, are trampled upon. In the face of a long history of mystifying and tendentious *rereading*s generally aimed at assimilation and domination, this is instead—suffice it to look at the fine Chinese porcelain evoked in the stage costumes and not least the porcelain tights that imprisons the evil wizard at the end—a story of restitution, reparation and beauty.

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FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East. Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*, © 2022 Author(s), CC BY 4.0, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0, DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0

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CONNESSIONI. STUDIES IN TRANSCULTURAL HISTORY

1. Beatrice Falcucci, Emanuele Giusti, Davide Trentacoste (edited by), *Rereading Travellers to the East: Shaping Identities and Building the Nation in Post-unification Italy*

Rereading Travellers to the East aim to offer a new perspective on travel literature, the question of nation-building and the history of orientalism. Rereading Travellers focuses on the rereadings to which early modern travel literature about Asia has been subjected by different actors involved in the political, economic, cultural and intellectual life of post-unification Italy. The authors highlight how this literature has been reinterpreted and reused for political and ideological purposes in the context of the formation and reformation of collective identities, from the Risorgimento to the Fascist regime and the early republic. By showing the potential of the notion of rereading, the volume outlines a history of the political and cultural legacy of travel literature which goes well beyond Italy.

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ISBN 978-88-5518-578-3 (Print)
ISBN 978-88-5518-579-0 (PDF)
ISBN 978-88-5518-580-6 (ePUB)
ISBN 978-88-5518-581-3 (XML)
DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-579-0
www.fupress.com