

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. Introduction¹

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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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 research⁴ 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 post-war 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 ‘Abbās 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 Esmā’il (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 ‘Abbās 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 Shoja’ 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 pre-date 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 Montabone⁸ (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 Italiana⁹ 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 Ferdowsi'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 orientalist 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 Moṣaddeq (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 Vecchiatti brothers, respectively in *Oriente Moderno* and in the proceedings of the moral sciences class of the Accademia dei Lincei²⁹ (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 Iranian 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 Shoḡā’ 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 significant 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 Shoḡā’ 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 Ešfahān (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 Milanese 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 Vecchiotti, 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 micro-history 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 intertwining 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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