

150 Years of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari

edited by Laura De Giorgi and Federico Greselin

Foreword

This volume collects the essays dedicated to the history and development of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari. Since its foundation in 1868 the interest for the study of the languages and cultures of the East, believed to be a fundamental asset to develop trade relations with those countries and people, was identified as a distinct feature of this institution. Ca' Foscari was established two years after the Kingdom of Italy had signed its first diplomatic treaties with the Chinese and the Japanese empires, and, just one year later, in 1869, the Suez Canal was inaugurated. In this context, Ca' Foscari Royal High School of Commerce aspired to appropriate and develop the legacy of Venice as Europe's 'gateway to Orient', taking advantage of the city's long history of trade and cultural relationships with the East in order to play a pivotal role in reviving Italy's connections with this part of the world.

In the following 150 years, Ca' Foscari's professors and students worked hard in order to intensify these relations, and to make this institution an important centre for the study and research in the field of Oriental Studies. As this book shows, it was not an easy task. Actually, during the first decades after the establishment of the University, the study of the Oriental languages and civilisations played a secondary role with respect to the other disciplines, as their development was affected by the historical circumstances and several organisational difficulties. Nevertheless, the overall goal was never given up and, especially after the Second World War, Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari began to expand unceasingly, widening the scope of teaching and research to an ever-increasing number of languages, subjects and disciplines up to constitute one of the most important centres of area studies in Italy with regard to the Middle, Central and Far East.

The essays in this volume do not aim to offer an exhaustive narrative of the history of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari. Rather, their authors have tried to give some insights into the richness and the variety of the scholarly approaches and of the peculiar relations that, in the course of time, this University developed with the East.

The essays of the first part are mainly dedicated to the history of North African, West Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Maria Pia Pedani's article reconstructs the early years of the teaching of Oriental languages at Ca' Foscari, at that time limited to Arabic, Turkish and Japanese. In her essay, focused on Armenian Studies, Sona Horoutyunian places the devel-

opment of this field of study in the context of the Armenian religious and scholarly presence in Venice, which precedes the official establishment of the teaching at Ca' Foscari. Eleonora Cussini discusses the history of Semitic philology, but also reminds us how the studies of Oriental languages at Ca' Foscari were somehow connected to the presence of famous orientalists in the city, such as Austen Henry Layard, whose residence in Venice has become the first location for Oriental Studies in this University. The birth and development of Jewish Studies since '50s in the context of Italian Orientalism are, on the other side, accurately reconstructed by Dario Miccoli. The last three articles of this section are all dedicated to Arabic Studies and Ca' Foscari's connection with the Arab world. Antonella Ghergetti tells the story of a Ca' Foscari *alumnus* who had a successful career as a businessman in Beirut in the late nineteenth century, and who wrote a treatise on silkworm breeding in Arabic language. In her accurate essay, Ida Zilio Grandi offers a full portrait of the rich scholarly activities of Professor Maria Nallino, who played a pivotal role in establishing and developing Islamic and Arabic Studies since the early '60s, while Patrizia Zanelli discusses the teaching of colloquial Arabic at Ca' Foscari.

The second section of the volume collects the articles dedicated to the study of the languages and civilisation of South and Central Asia. Giuliano Boccali's essay is an overview of the rich history of Indology at Ca' Foscari from its early beginnings to now. Focusing on archeology, Paolo Biagi highlights of the important role of this institution in the study of the ancient past in Pakistan. At last, Elisabetta Ragagnin and Samuela Simion describe the development of the study of Mongolian language and culture in the last few years.

Finally, the third section is dedicated to the history of Chinese and Japanese Studies. Laura De Giorgi's contribution briefly illustrates the pioneering activities of the two founding fathers of Venetian sinology at Ca' Foscari, Professor Lionello Lanciotti and Professor Mario Sabattini, who since the mid-'60s were able to drive Chinese Studies towards a path characterised by strong innovativeness and academic rigour. From a different perspective, Daniele Brombal offers a reflection of the current challenges of interdisciplinary approaches to China in Venetian sinology. Recalling how the relations of Ca' Foscari with China have not only been confined to sinology, Guido Samarani' and Laura De Giorgi's essay analyses the experience of one of the most famous Ca' Foscari's *alumni*, Alberto De' Stefani, who was an economic adviser of the Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek in the Republic of China in 1937. The two last articles concern Japanese Studies at Ca' Foscari, whose history is quite long as they were established as early as 1873. Adriana Boscaro's rich essay gives a detailed account of the role played by Japanese teachers and artists in the context of the relations between Italy and Japan until the early '20s. Luisa Bienati, Adriana Boscaro, Bonaventura Ruperti and Luisa Bienati

describe the development of Japanese Studies since the establishment of the Degree in Oriental Languages and Literatures in 1965, accurately reconstructing the contribution of Ca' Foscari's scholars not only to the study of Japanese language and literature, but also to Japanese philology and history, philosophy and religion, art and social sciences.

As these essays show, Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari are grounded on a rich legacy of relations and scholarly activities, and they have been and still are opened to new developments and fields of enquiry. In this sense they fully belong to the history of this University - and of Venice - as a gateway to the world.

Laura De Giorgi and Federico Greselin

