

150 Years of Oriental Studies at Ca' Foscari

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Venetian Indology

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Abstract The essay traces the studies and academic responsibilities covered by all those scholars who have taught and teach Indological disciplines at Ca' Foscari, at every level, as well as of those who have studied at Ca' Foscari and have earned a position abroad or in other Italian universities. The author outlines the expansion of Indological Studies in Venice and the rich network of international relations established by Venetian Indologists.

Summary 1 Origins and Development of Venetian Indology. – 2 National and International Ramifications of Venetian Indology. – 3 Venetian Indology Today. – 4 Conclusions.

Keywords Indology. South Asian Studies. Scholars' education and fields of research. Ca' Foscari. Venice.

1 Origins and Development of Venetian Indology

1.1 Laxman Prasad Mishra


Venetian Indology¹ was born in 1965, when Laxman Prasad Mishra (Jabalpur 1931-Venice 1985) was appointed to a Professorship in Hindi Language and

1 Within the limits of this article it was not possible to include a presentation of all the people who in various ways contributed to the development of South Asian Studies at Ca' Foscari. Nonetheless, I wish to mention at least their names, with heartfelt gratitude, indicating their field of research. The absence of anyone's name – for which I excuse myself in advance – is due to nothing other than my own lack of recollection given the unavailability of official transcripts and the difficulty of reconstructing several decades of academic history. Adjunct Professors: † Franco Coslovi (Religions and Philosophies of India), Ilaria Graziani (Urdu Language and Literature), Monia Marchetto (Hindi Language and Literature), Claudia Ramasso (Indian Art History), Fabian Sanders (Tibetan Language and Literature), Giovanni Torcinovich (Indology), Marco Zolli (Hindi Language and Literature). Current Adjunct Professors: Sara Mondini (South Asian Visual Culture), Carmen Simioli (Classical Tibetan). Cultori della materia, i.e. 'Subject experts': † Corrado Puchetti (Religions and Philosophies of India), Daniela Rossella (Religions and Philosophies of India, nowadays Adjunct Professor at the University of Potenza), Guido Zanderigo (Indian Art History). Current Professors at Ca' Foscari whose field of research includes India: Paolo Biagi (Full Professor of Palaeoethnology and Prehistory of Near and Middle East), Stefano Pellò (Associate Professor of Indo-Persian Culture and Iranian Philology).

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Literature in the then degree programme of Oriental Languages and Literatures, at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures. The scholar became an Italian citizen that same year. He had previously worked as a voluntary Teaching Assistant at Nagpur University, where he graduated, and as a Professor of Hindi at Marathvada University. Invited to Italy by Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984), he introduced the teaching of Hindi Language and Literature at the Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (Is.M.E.O.) in Rome in 1959 and at "La Sapienza" University of Rome in 1960. Mishra taught the same subject at Ca' Foscari where, since 1975, he was Full Professor. He also held the Seminar of Hindi Literature at the same University since its establishment in 1967, until his untimely and abrupt demise in 1985.

As a young scholar, Mishra played a pivotal role in making the modern Indo-Aryan literatures, and in particular Hindi literature, known in our country - through important works such as *Mistici indiani medievali* (1971), a monograph on Ramanuja (1978), and *Nuovi materiali per un'antologia critica del medioevo religioso indiano: le 'kāvya-rūṣhi' nella 'nirguṇ-bhakti'* (1984). Numerous other publications reflect Mishra's prevalent interest in medieval Indian mysticism (the *nirguni* poet-saints, Gorakhnath, Namdev, Tulsidas, etc.). This privileged area of research, however, did not preclude him from venturing into other domains, such as literary and political Indian movements of the twentieth century.

Founder and first President of the Italy-India Association based in Venice (though for just few months before his death), member of the Société Asiatique in Paris, Mishra was awarded the prestigious prize of Vishva Hindi Sammelan by Indian Premier Ms. Indira Gandhi in 1982.

His personal biography, his scientific work, and especially his commitment in promoting cultural exchanges between India and Italy have given to Venetian Indology its peculiar orientation. One of its relevant features is its strong international vocation, favoured by the cultural transmission and mediation between the two countries. Indeed, this trait should characterise every institution or centre of study devoted to research in the fields of languages, literatures, and world civilisations (I try as far as possible to avoid using the adjective *foreign*, especially nowadays...). From this point of view, Mishra's birth and studies in India, his marriage with an Italian woman, and his acquisition of Italian citizenship certainly promoted and facilitated his role. A second meaning of the expression 'international vocation' used above is not likewise predictable. As it will be clear from what follows, I refer to the many international exchanges, not only with India, both personal and institutional, promoted by the first successors and disciples of Mishra and, subsequently, to the brilliant careers outside Italy, in academic positions of world-renowned prestige, of some scholars who flourished (also) in the domain of Venetian Indology.

L.P. Mishra's work was continued, in very different ways and fields, by two of his earliest and most gifted disciples, D. Dolcini and G.G. Filippi, and by one of his earliest collaborators, M. Offredi.

1.2 Donatella Dolcini

Donatella Dolcini enrolled in the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures (Oriental Section - Hindi Language and Literature) in 1966 and graduated under the supervision of L.P. Mishra in 1970 with a thesis titled *The Linguistic Evolution of Khari Boli Hindi*. She was the first one to earn a degree in Hindi Language and Literature from Ca' Foscari. In the same year she started to hold practical courses in Hindi as a Teaching Tutor. Afterwards, she obtained two scholarships (from CNR and MPI) for the academic years 1971-75, and two four-year contracts for teaching and researching in subsequent years. In 1984 she was appointed University Researcher. In 1985 she moved to the State University of Milan, where, at the then Faculty of Political Sciences, she continued to teach Hindi language under the label of History and Institutions of Afro-Asiatic Countries. In 1991, she had the opportunity to start an official, independent teaching of Hindi Language. During her work at Ca' Foscari University, having obtained special funding from the University, she went to the Municipal Library of Udine in order to examine the materials that the great scholar Luigi Pio Tessitori (1887-1919) had left as his legacy; she thus led the way in the study of this rich Indological collection. In the same years, she actively participated in national and international conferences and wrote essays and translations (some of which were the first to appear in a European language), concerning her particular fields of studies: Hindi grammar, Hindi history, and ancient and modern Hindi literature (Gorakhnath, Sadal mishra, Premchand, and the poets of Chayavad).

1.3 Mariola (Maria) Offredi

Mariola Offredi was not a direct disciple of L.P. Mishra, since her university education took place in Milan with the Hindi Language and Indian Culture diploma earned from Is.M.E.O in 1958 and with the degree in Political and Social Sciences obtained in 1961 from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, with her thesis *Le comunità agrarie nello sviluppo economico indiano*. In addition, in 1961 she received from Is.M.E.O the diploma in Chinese Language and Culture. After teaching History of Indian Art (academic year 1958-59) and Hindi Language and Indian Culture for seven years (1959-60 to 1965-66) at Is.M.E.O in Milan, in 1969 M. Offredi became Teaching Assistant in Hindi Language and Literature at Ca' Foscari. Adjunct Professor in the same discipline from 1974, she was appointed Associate Professor in 1982; from 1982 until 1987 she also held the course of Religions and Philosophies of India. While Mishra focused upon medieval texts, Offredi studied almost exclusively twentieth century narrative and poetry, publishing important translations: *Godan* by Premchand with

the title *Godān. Il dono della vacca* (1970); *Bahti Ganga* by Rudr (*Le onde della Gaṅgā*, 1980), *Kali-katha: vaya baipas (Bypass al cuore di Calcutta*, 2002) and *Shesh Kadambari (La storia di Ruby Di*, 2004) by Alka Saraogi. The latter three translations were the first ones to appear in any foreign language. In parallel to her activity as translator, she wrote essays in the fields of narrative, in particular novel, and twentieth century poetry. In addition, works concerning other subjects show the scholar's attention to the contemporary world: the book *I primi cento anni del giornalismo hindi (1826-1926)* (1971); the volumes resulting from several periods of fieldwork, namely *L'acculturazione dei tribali del Bastar* (1983), which examines the effects of industrialization on tribal populations of the area, and *I tessitori musulmani di Banaras e Mau* (1984). Offredi's interest in diverse fields and time periods is also proven by her research on unedited manuscripts attributed to Gorakhnath, studies that gave rise to the monograph *Lo yoga di Gorakh* (1991) and to various other essays. Offredi's assiduous work in the domain of Hindi Language and Literature earned her the Vishva Hindi Samman (World Hindi Award) received by the Government of India in 1999. She has also been honoured with the Dr. George Grierson Puraskar in 2006.

Offredi was able to build a network of international relationships, preferably of a personal kind, through numerous annual stays in India. Here, she met and interviewed Hindi and Panjabi authors, collected manuscripts and conducted various fieldwork, as the above-mentioned studies testify. In Europe, she had privileged contacts with Czechoslovakia (then Czech Republic), where, among other responsibilities, from 2007 onwards she was member of the Editorial Board of *Archiv orientální*. Offredi's teaching activity was untiring and among her graduate students mention should be made of the musician Vincenzo Mingiardi.

1.4 Cecilia Cossio

Cecilia Cossio, who graduated in 1974 with a thesis on the Hindi novel *Maila "anchal"* (1954) by Phanishvar Nath 'Renu', studied with M. Offredi, but also with L.P. Mishra and Paolo Beonio Brocchieri. Subsequently, from 1978 to 1982, C. Cossio was Teaching Assistant in Hindi Language and Literature and then University Researcher in the same discipline until 2006. From 1992 to 1995 she also held official courses of Hindi, while from 1998 to 2006 she taught History of India. In 2007 she retired but continued to collaborate with the University as editor of the India section of the Ca' Foscari Internet portal AsiaMedia, now dismissed. She is a member of the Scientific Committee of Ca' Foscari Short Film Festival, which is directed by Maria Roberta Novielli and is aimed at students of cinema schools from all over the world; indeed, it is the first festival of its

kind organised and managed by a university. From 2008 to 2010 she was a consultant for India in the Venice International Film Festival. Her research interests and her works were initially devoted to the *anchalik* or “regional” Hindi literature (with particular attention to the '50s) and to the literary production of the '60s and '70s known as *nayi kahani* or “new novel”. Starting from 1985, the themes of her works have mainly concerned Hindi and Indian cinema and its relation to Hindi literature and Indian history.

For another scholar who graduated with M. Offredi, Francesca Orsini, see below.

1.5 Gian Giuseppe Filippi

Gian Giuseppe Filippi graduated with L.P. Mishra in 1971 with the thesis *Il concetto di 'bhakti' nel Vedānta di Rāmānuja*. He was Teaching Assistant of Hindi Language and Literature from 1973 to 1975 and then obtained a three-year fellowship grant (renewed) in the same discipline (1976-81). From the academic year 1976-77, he taught History of Indian and Central Asian Art as an Adjunct Professor. He was then appointed University Researcher (1980-85), Associate Professor of Indology (1985-2004), and lastly Full Professor of Hindi Language and Literature (2008) until his early retirement in 2011. Among the subjects that G.G. Filippi taught during the long course of his didactic career there are also Political History and Institutions of the Indian Subcontinent and Religions and Philosophies of India. In addition to the numerous courses he held, Filippi has covered various academic roles both in the Department and in the degree and diploma courses, and has been President of the Self-Evaluation Committee (LICEM) in 2004. Of particular scientific relevance were his positions as coordinator of the PhD programme in Oriental Studies (the then Near East and South Asian Studies section of the Doctoral school LICUSO, 2005-10) and as vice-chairman of the Doctoral school from 2007 to 2010.

A versatile scholar, Filippi has written a large number of scholarly works in a variety of domains, which span from iconography, both Hindu and Buddhist, to mythology and *Puranas*, from Himalayan Shamanism to Hindi literature, and from the *Upanisads* to mysticism. His studies have culminated in a series of essays on all aspects of death in Hinduism, unified in the monograph *Mṛtyu. Concept of Death in Indian Traditions* (2010). Filippi has marked Venetian Indology with the establishment of many international exchanges and relationships, in dealing with which he was tireless. He was Visiting Professor at the universities of Hull (UK), Oxford (Magdalen College, UK), Stockholm (Sweden), Post-Graduate Institute of Deccan College (Pune, India), National Museum Institute (deemed to be University, New Delhi, India), Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (deemed to be University, New Delhi, India), Heidelberg (Germany),

and Venice International University (Venice). Besides his membership in prestigious international Indological societies and associations, Filippi has assiduously worked in the coordination and direction of important archaeological projects in India: 1996-2001, Kampilya, Farrukhabad Distr., U.P., funded by MAE; 1999-2002, Pedam village, Phulbani Distr., Orissa, funded by MAE and Regione Veneto; from 2000 the Arunachal Project, Tawang Distr., Arunachal Pradesh, funded by MAE. Such research activities have been effectively integrated with distinguished editorial positions and knowledge-sharing perspectives: the presidency of the Venetian Academy of Indian Studies (V.A.I.S.), with an intense activity of lectures and conferences, also of international level; the direction of the Indological works of the V.A.I.S. Series (New Delhi, DK(P) Printworld); and the direction of the Indoasiatic Series (Bassano-Vicenza, Itinera Progetti).

In this and the immediately following period, the contribution offered by some colleagues of Ca' Foscari and other universities, specialists in related disciplines, should not be forgotten. With gratitude, I must mention the names of scholars such as P. Beonio Brocchieri of Ca' Foscari and Mario Piantelli of Turin University in the field of religions and philosophies of India, of Ferruccio Ducray Giordano from Turin, refined connoisseur of Indian art history, and of Chatia Orlandi of Pisa University in the field of Vedic and Indo-Aryan linguistics. Moreover, it must be emphasised that, since its inception, Venetian Indology has benefitted from the irreplaceable contribution provided by mother tongue lecturers. I wish to remember at least some of these precious *lettori* starting from the '80s, when I began teaching Indology in Venice: Mahesh Jaiswal (from 1982 to 1987), Asvani Kumar Srivastava (from 1987 to 1994), Ghanshyam Sharma (from 1987 to 2012) and Shyama Medhekar (from 2013 up to the present).

1.6 Giuliano Boccali

In the academic year 1987-88 the present author, Giuliano Boccali, was appointed to a Professorship (from 1991-92 Full Professorship) of Indology at Ca' Foscari, where he had already taught Iranian Philology and other Iranian disciplines in the decade 1973-83. Disciple of Vittore Pisani (1899-1990) in Milan and of Helmut Humbach (b. 1921) in Mainz, G. Boccali is an Indo-European linguist by education as well as an Iranist. He was Associate Professor at Milan University in the years 1983-87. From 1986, he has focused exclusively upon Indological Studies, which he had always cultivated in parallel. In Venice he taught for a decade Religions and Philosophies of India and, above all, he introduced for the first time the teaching of Sanskrit and of ancient Indian literatures under the name of Indology. Among his various academic responsibilities at Ca' Foscari

especially significant were the presidency of the degree programme in Oriental Languages and Literatures and his participation in the Board of Directors of the University.

Boccali's studies have concentrated mainly on Indian classical literature (*kavya*), and, particularly, on the problem of its genesis and relationship to both the Epic Poems, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. He has also deeply investigated several specific aspects of *kavya*, with special attention being paid to the representation of love and natural descriptions – the latter also studied in relation to aesthetic feelings (*rasas*). Both literary and figurative aesthetics have indeed represented an important field of his research, and one that favoured the accord and collaboration with G.G. Filippi. Moreover, his activity as translator of Sanskrit poems has always been thoroughgoing, addressing works that are counted among the masterpieces of Indian classical literature: Hala's *Sattasai* (with Cinzia Pieruccini and Daniela Rossella), Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*, the *Chaurapanchashika* which is attributed to Bilhana and Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*.

Among the positions he covered, of particular relevance are the scientific direction of the above-mentioned Venetian Academy of Indian Studies (V.A.I.S., 1987-2004), which intensified his collaboration with G.G. Filippi; the cultural agreements with the universities of Marburg and Leipzig and the seminars held there; and the General Secretaryship of the International Committee for the Promotion of Studies in Indian Classical Literature (ICICL, 1996-99). The latter Committee was founded in Venice during a seminar of very high international level, which was the first manifestation of the international Indological seminars that would subsequently involve the universities of Prague, Milan, Cracow, Warsaw and Calicut and various other scholars of prestigious institutions all over the world (Leipzig, Lancaster, Lausanne, Marburg, Moscow, Paris, Stockholm and Washington among the others). Boccali is also a member of the Ateneo Veneto and of the Istituto di Studi Superiori dell'Insubria Gerolamo Cardano since its foundation. He is the editor, together with Carlo Della Casa, of the Bibliotheca Indiana Series (Paideia, Brescia, since 1986) and of the Ganges Series of Indian Classics (Marsilio, Venice, since 1989). In the academic year 1997-98, Boccali was appointed to a professorship in Milan in one of the chairs held by his teacher V. Pisani, i.e. Sanskrit. The decade of Venetian teaching activity, thanks to the consonance and cooperation with G.G. Filippi at both a cultural and 'diplomatic' level, represented a period of strong impulse for Venetian Indology, which contributed to its national and international expansion and renown also in terms of scholarly publications. According to the present author (a degree of subjectivity is unavoidable...), at Ca' Foscari, in the decade 1987-97, Indian Studies stood out especially in the fields of aesthetics in the broader sense, literary criticism, art history, and archaeology.

2 National and International Ramifications of Venetian Indology

With reference to the national and international ramifications of Venetian Indology, a significant interlude is to be introduced at this point to briefly present some of the Ca' Foscari graduates whose subsequent studies and careers brought them to other universities. This brief excursus well highlights the national and international appreciation of Venetian indologists, given their varied cultural background and ample range of scientific interests. The exposition is chronologically ordered on the basis of the dates of their graduations.

2.1 Francesca Orsini

Francesca Orsini graduated in Hindi under the supervision of Mario Norodio and Mariola Offredi in 1989, with a thesis titled *Il fuoco che non brucia. Ideologia e immaginario nei racconti di Rājendr Yādav*. After a long spell in Delhi, she pursued a PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. Her research on the Hindi public sphere of the '20s and '30s was published as a monograph in 2002. She has taught at the University of Cambridge for several years and joined SOAS in 2006, where she is at present Professor of Hindi and South Asian Literature.

Her research interests span between modern and contemporary Hindi literature; book history and nineteenth-century commercial publishing in Hindi and Urdu; popular literature in Hindi and Urdu such as detective novels, romantic fiction, and *barahmasas*; women writers and women's journals; and the multilingual history of literature in early modern North India. She organised numerous workshops and conferences, including one on *Love in South Asia* (2006). Another recent project (with Ravikant, SARAI/CSDS, funded by the British Academy, 2012-15) has been on the cultural and social dimensions of 'Hinglish', i.e. Hindi-English language mixing in everyday life, media, education, and the workplace. She is currently working on the multilingual literary history of Awadh and leading a project funded by the European Research Council (2015-20) on *Multilingual locals and significant geographies: for a new approach to world literature*. Francesca Orsini is presently Chair of the Centre for Cultural, Literary, and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS. She is also one of the regional editors for the Murty Classical Library of India and a member of the Executive Committee of the British Comparative Literature Association. In 2013-14, she was a Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, Harvard. In 2017, she has been elected Fellow of the British Academy.

2.2 Nicoletta Celli

Nicoletta Celli's university education at Ca' Foscari followed a double path, Chinese and Indian, involving exams on Indological topics and a degree thesis on Skanda/Weituo (1993). She obtained her PhD in History of Indian and East Asian Art in 1997 (University of Genoa) and thereafter focused her research upon Chinese medieval Buddhist art and thought. She continued her university career in Venice on Chinese archaeology through a research grant (1999-2002), and was subsequently invited to China (Research Fellow at the Department of Archaeology of Beijing University, 2001) and Japan (Research Fellow at the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies in Tokyo, 2002). She has travelled widely and frequently throughout Asia for research purposes. Nicoletta Celli taught as an Adjunct Professor at Venice University from 1998 to 2007, when she moved to the University of Bologna where at present she is Associate Professor. She is co-founder and member of the editorial board of the European Association for Asian Art and Archaeology. Her main interests lie in Chinese Buddhist art - especially its origins and relationship with the art of India and Central Asia - and Buddhist iconography.

2.3 Stefano Zacchetti

Stefano Zacchetti majored in Sinology, studying Modern Chinese with Mario Sabattini and Magda Abbiati, and Classical Chinese with Maurizio Scarpari. A strong interest in Buddhism and, in particular, in the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts led him to include Indology in his undergraduate curriculum, studying Sanskrit and Indian philosophy with Giuliano Boccali. He graduated in 1994 under the latter's supervision, with Alfredo Cadonna as co-supervisor, writing a thesis on the Chinese translations of the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita (Diamond Sutra)*. In 1994-95, he spent a semester in Leiden as a visiting graduate student with a grant from Ca' Foscari. He had the opportunity to study under the guidance of Erik Zürcher and Tilmann Vetter, who reoriented his research towards early Chinese Buddhist translators, especially An Shigao and Dharmarakṣa (second and third centuries AD). The latter's version of the *Larger Prajnaparamita* became the topic of his doctoral dissertation that he discussed in 1999. After teaching Sinology and Chinese philosophy at the University of Padua from 2000 to 2001, he was invited by Seishi Karashima to join the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Sōka University, Tokyo, where he worked until July 2005 as Associate Professor of Sino-Indian Buddhist Philology. In Japan he published, among other things, the monograph *In Praise of the Light* (Zacchetti 2005), based on his PhD thesis. He moved back to Ca' Foscari in 2005, teaching modern Chinese as a Tenured Lecturer

until 2012, when he took up the position of Numata Professor of Buddhist Studies at Oxford. He is a Professorial Fellow of Balliol College, and a co-editor of the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*.

2.4 Fabrizio Ferrari

Fabrizio Ferrari graduated at Ca' Foscari in 1999 with M. Offredi. His thesis, titled *Analisi semantica del romanzo "Sūkhā bargad" di Manzūr Ehteśām*, includes the first translation of the novel *Sukha bargad* that was published in 1986. In Venice, he studied also with G.G. Filippi, C. Orlandi (Indo-Aryan Linguistics), Riccardo Zipoli (Persian) and G. Boccali. The latter introduced him to the study of the *Gitagovinda*, Jayadeva's masterpiece. Thus Ferrari became interested in Bengali language, whose literature was taking form precisely during Jayadeva's time. He continued his research in West Bengal, where he perfected his language skills and developed a project whose outcome was the book *Oltre i campi, dove la terra è rossa. Canti d'amore e d'estasi dei bāul del Bengala* (2001). He then obtained a Student Research Fellowship at SOAS, where he earned his PhD degree in 2005 with a thesis on Bengali religious folklore. This work was published in 2011 and won the ICAS Book Pride (Colleagues' Choice Award) in 2013. Subsequently, his interests turned to healing and medical-ritual folklore, which, together with magic, were the topic of three consecutive monographs. More recently he has edited, together with Thomas Dähnhardt, three volumes on flora, fauna, and mineral world in Indian traditions (2013-16). After a short period as Teaching Assistant and Post-Doctoral Fellow at SOAS (2005-07), he moved to Chester University where he was appointed Full Professor of Religious Studies. In 2018, he has transferred back to Italy having been appointed Full Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Padua.

2.5 Davide Torri

Davide Torri studied with M. Offredi, G. Boccali and G.G. Filippi, and graduated in 1999 under the latter's supervision with a thesis on Lepcha *adivasi* religion (a population located in Darjeeling and Sikkim). He continued his studies orienting his interests towards anthropology under the supervision of Romano Mastromattei at 'Tor Vergata' University of Rome. He earned his PhD at the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' in 2009, and in the same year he taught at 'La Sapienza' and at Chester University. After a period of teaching and research at the University of Heidelberg (2013-17), he is currently working at Ruhr-Universität Bochum at the Religious Studies Centre (CERES) where he continues his studies on Himalayan

Shamanism. This theme constitutes the focus of his scientific production and scholarly endeavour, which also includes the investigation of the interactions between Shamanism and Buddhism. Among other affiliations, he is member of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies and of the Centre d'Études Himalayenne of CNRS in Villejuif.

2.6 Gianni Pellegrini

Gianni Pellegrini took numerous exams with M. Offredi, G. Boccali, A. Rigopoulos and G.G. Filippi and graduated in the year 2000 under the latter's supervision discussing a thesis on the figure of Bhairava. Between 2000 and 2007 he specialised in Advaita Vedanta at the Sanskrit University of Varanasi, completing a highly difficult study programme, especially for a non-Indian student. In 2011, he earned his PhD from Ca' Foscari (supervisor G.G. Filippi) with a thesis on the dream state (*svapna*) in non-dual Vedanta. His scientific interests focus upon the epistemology of this philosophical system, on Navya Nyaya logic, and on the commentarial tradition of Yoga. To these themes he has devoted important works published by prestigious international journals and editors. At present, Gianni Pellegrini is University Researcher of Religions and Philosophies of India and of Sanskrit Language and Literature at the Department of Humanities of the University of Turin. Here he is also the Scientific Director of the Summer School in Sanskrit (elementary level), which is taught in Hindi. In 2010, he was honoured with the Sarasvati Award (Heidelberg-Delhi). In 2015, he was the coordinator of the section "Philosophy" at the sixteenth World Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok.

3 Venetian Indology Today

I now come to an examination of the academic staff that took up the legacy of M. Offredi, G. Boccali and G.G. Filippi and that currently constitutes Venetian Indology.

3.1 Antonio Rigopoulos

Antonio Rigopoulos earned his B.A. in History – focusing on Religious Studies – in 1987 under the supervision of Prof. Franco Michelini Tocci and Prof. Mario Piantelli. His thesis concerned the life and teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918), a revised version of which was published in 1993. During his undergraduate years he also studied Hindi and Indology with M. Offredi and G.G. Filippi. Having won a scholarship, in 1987 he transferred

to the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), where in 1989 he completed his M.A. with a thesis on Buddhist logic centred upon the undecided questions (*avyakatani*). He subsequently earned his PhD at UCSB in 1994, discussing a thesis on the transformative and inclusive character of the multi-faceted Hindu deity Dattatreya (under the supervision of Prof. Gerald J. Larson, Prof. Ninian Smart and Prof. Barbara Holdrege). A revised version of his dissertation was published in 1998. Back in Italy, he was Teaching Assistant in Religions and Philosophies of India at the Department of Indological and Far-Eastern Studies of Ca' Foscari University and in the academic years 1995-96 and 1996-97 Adjunct Professor of History and Institutions of Asian Countries at the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Trieste (Polo universitario di Gorizia). Meanwhile the Department of Indological and Far-Eastern Studies of Ca' Foscari University granted him a post-doctoral fellowship, the outcome of which was the annotated translation of a Sanskrit poem, the *Dattalahari* of Daladanamuni (supervisor Prof. G. Boccali), which was published in 1999. In the academic years 1997-98 and 1998-99, he was Adjunct Professor of Religions and Philosophies of India at the Department of Indological and Far-Eastern Studies (in 1998-99 renamed Department of East Asian Studies). In 1999, he was appointed University Researcher in the field of Religions and Philosophies of India and subsequently, from 2002 to 2014, he was Associate Professor of Indology. From 2015, he is Full Professor of Indology at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University. Besides Religions and Philosophies of India, Indology, Sanskrit and Literary Cultures of South Asia, over the years he also taught courses in Hindi and Indian History. Throughout his career, Rigopoulos has covered a variety of academic roles within the Department and its Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes. Mention must be made of his actual position (from 2016) as President of the Master's Degree Programme in Religious Studies (inter-University with the University of Padua). From 2013, he is the Scientific Director of the Journal *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*. From 2015, he is in the Board of the Italian Association of Sanskrit Studies (AISS). He has been Visiting Professor at the Philipps-Universität of Marburg and at the Institut für Südasienskunde of Wien University.

Rigopoulos' research activity has focused upon the following subject-matters: 1) the study and critically annotated translation of philosophical and religious texts of Sanskrit and Pali literature; 2) the study of the devotional and ascetic movements of medieval and modern India, particularly of the Marathi cultural area (the Mahanubhavs and the *Dattasampradaya*); 3) the *guru* institute: its origin and development up to the modern and contemporary period. In recent years, he has focused attention on the mythologies centred upon sacred trees and termite mounds (*puttas*, in the first place by analysing the case-study of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh and Sathya Sai Baba's figure and cult). He has investigated the concepts

of *vibhuti* and *trimurti* (this latter one from its origins in the *Mahabharata* and its unfolding in the *Puranas* up to its transformations in contemporary neo-Hinduism) as well as of silence and negation in the literature of the *Upanisads* and of the *Nikayas* of the Pali Canon. He is presently working on Shirdi Sai Baba's short stories and parables (*gosthis*) and on hagiographic themes, with special attention being paid to the figure of the Hindu hagiographer and the *caritra* genre.

3.2 Thomas Dähnhardt

Thomas Dähnhardt studied with M. Offredi, G. Boccali and G.G. Filippi and graduated under the latter's supervision in 1994. His thesis concerned the teachings of a Sufi order in India. He then moved to London and earned his PhD degree in Religious Studies from SOAS (1999), with a thesis on the interaction between a Sufi order and initiatory Hindu contexts within the Kabirpanth. In the same year he was appointed Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (OXCIS), a research institute associated with the University of Oxford. Here he worked on a project centred on the intellectual and social history of South Asian Muslims. From 2001 to 2007, he was Adjunct Professor of Urdu Language and Literature at Ca' Foscari. From the academic year 2009-10, he is University Researcher in Modern Indian Languages and Literatures at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University. Author of a series of papers devoted to different aspects of Indo-Islamic civilisation, in 2002 Dähnhardt published a monograph focused upon the critical translation of a Sufi doctrinal treatise. He is also the co-author (with Ilaria Graziani) of an Urdu grammar (2014). He has been Visiting Scholar at the Department of Religious Studies of Chester University and at the Institut für Südasienskunde of Wien University.

3.3 Stefano Beggiora

Like D. Torri and T. Dähnhardt, S. Beggiora was a student of M. Offredi, G. Boccali and G.G. Filippi. He graduated with the latter in 1999, discussing a thesis on shamanic cults among the Lanjia Saoras of Orissa. He then perfected his studies on shamanism, also conducted under the supervision of R. Mastromattei at 'Tor Vergata' University of Rome, and earned his PhD at Ca' Foscari in 2005. Thanks to a funding by Regione Veneto (2006-07) his interests broadened to sociological and economic themes, though his main field of research is the anthropology of India and *adivasi* studies. His teaching activity has been intense: he was coordinator of seminars on Indian shamanism at University of Rome Tor Vergata, supervisor

of the Indian section of the Master “Cindia for Investors and Promoters: per esperti d'internazionalizzazione in Cina e India” (Autonomen Provinz Bozen/Fondo Sociale Europeo, Bolzano), and Adjunct Professor of History of Contemporary India at Ca' Foscari (2010-11). Since 2012, S. Beggiora is University Researcher in History of India at Ca' Foscari. In 2014-15, he has been Visiting Professor at the University College of Cork (Ireland). Very active in international research, Beggiora took part in missions to Kampilya (2000, with an Italian archaeological mission) and to Mongolia (2001, via the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Starting in 2001 and up to the present, he has been conducting extensive field-research in Orissa and Arunachal Pradesh. Mention must also be made of his missions to Bombay and Delhi (in 2007 and 2008), which have led to the establishment of important international agreements with various Indian institutions and universities. In 2013, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs honoured Beggiora with the Tagore Award for his archival research on Rabindranath Tagore's travels to Italy and the poet's legacy. The award ceremony took place at the Indian Parliament at the presence of the President of India, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee. The Tagore Award earned him a position at the prestigious Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla.

3.4 Federico Squarcini

Federico Squarcini graduated at the University of Florence under the supervision of Prof. Giorgio Renato Franci, discussing a thesis on *carvaka* and *lokayata* traditions in classical India. He earned his PhD in Social and Historical Studies of Religions from the University of Bologna and since 2011 he is Associate Professor of South Asian Religions and Philosophies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies of Ca' Foscari University, where he is also the Director of the Master in Yoga Studies. From 2013 to 2017 he was the coordinator of the Asian Studies PhD programme. He has taught History of Religions at the University of Florence and Indology at the University of Bologna and at 'La Sapienza' University of Rome. He is author and editor of various volumes, among which mention must be made of two of his works on Yoga, namely *Yoga. Fra storia, salute e mercato* (2008) and *Patañjali's Yogasūtra* (2015), and of his studies on Sanskrit normative textual traditions (*dharmashastra*) which include *Il trattato di Manu sulla norma* (2010) and *Forme della norma* (2012). His main research interests encompass also the intellectual history of asceticism and anthropotechnics, Western receptions of South Asian cultural and intellectuals traditions, and methods and theories in the studies of religions. He has published in journals like *Critica Sociologica*, *Orientamenti Pedagogici*, *Parole Chiave*, *Rivista di Studi Orientali*, *Social Compass*, and serves on the Board of Directors of *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Reli-*

gioni, Religioni e Società, and *Rivista di Studi Sudasiatici*.

3.5 Andrea Drocco

Andrea Drocco graduated at the University of Turin under the supervision of Prof. Pinuccia Caracchi and Prof. Mariangela D'Onza Chiodo, discussing a thesis titled *I nomi degli animali "jarāyuja" nella "Deśīnāmamālā" di Hemacandra. "Deśī" o "tadbhava"? Un'analisi etimologica*. After earning his PhD in Indological Studies at Turin University in 2005 – with a thesis titled *L'ergatività in hindī. Studio diacronico del processo di diffusione della posposizione 'ne'* (supervisors Prof. Stefano Piano and Prof. Giuliano Bernini) – he taught Hindi language at the same university for several years. Presently, he is University Researcher in the Department of Asian and North African Studies at Ca' Foscari University, where he teaches Indo-Aryan linguistics and Hindi language. His main area of research is the development of morphosyntactic alignment system of New Indo-Aryan languages, in particular of the period preceding the nineteenth century. He has published research papers not only on this topic as regards Brajbhasha, Hindi and Bangani but also on the interpretation of the technical terms *tatsama*, *tadbhava* and *deshi* in the context of the Prakrit grammatical tradition. He has recently started to collaborate with the International Center of Humanities and Social Change (Ca' Foscari University) on a research project focusing on the language rhetoric and linguistic strategies of religious intolerant discourses in various regions of South Asia.

4 Conclusions

Pondering over this fascinating human and scientific adventure, still in full course, I propose one last comment that is both joyful and painful. To be sure, the role of Venetian Indology has been remarkable, both at a national and international level, and this is a source of joy and pride: this is proved by its lasting relations and exchanges with other academic institutions and research centres in Italy and abroad; by the ongoing attraction that the Venetian school of Indian Studies has exercised over colleagues who were trained in other universities; by the high number of students who were educated at Ca' Foscari and who now cover prestigious positions throughout the world; and, last but not least, by the good fame that the latter have earned in both Italian and international contexts. All this stands in sharp contrast with the few, scanty resources that our country has always destined to South Asian Studies. A scarceness of resources that has forced and forces many young, talented scholars to leave Italy in the hope of building their career and finding a position somewhere else; alas, this is a sorrowful

fate which characterises many other disciplines as well. Furthermore, this pitiful state of affairs determines a terrible waste: even without considering the pain and suffering of whomever is forced to migrate, everyone sees what a waste it is to train students and scholars – wholly financed by Italy – whose often first-rate skills will be capitalised elsewhere. Such a situation reveals the obtuse short-sightedness of those who govern our country and our university system, given the growing importance of India in our globalised world, at an ever-increasing pace, especially in the economical, political and cultural realms. Unfortunately, it often appears as if India itself does not care to adequately support the studies on its own civilisation, nor the scholars who dedicate their lives to it. Nonetheless, these adverse circumstances do not prevent researchers, teachers and students alike from pursuing their investigations with passion, competence and generosity. Indeed, in such fascinating endeavour they discover the *raison d'être* of their human and cultural growth.