Italy

In Arabic texts I have read that Abdullah the Saracen, when asked what he considered the most marvellous thing in the world, replied that he could perceive nothing more splendid than man.

Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94)

Oration de dignitate hominis, Florence, 1498

Italy's connections with the Muslim world began early in the history of Islam. In 831, Arab armies landed in Sicily and southern Italy, and at one point even threatened Rome itself. However, they did not stay long on the mainland of Italy, but withdrew to Sicily, which became the centre of a flourishing Islamic civilization and culture which briefly paralleled that of Al Andalus. During the period of direct Arab rule, mainly under the Fatimid dynasty of Cairo, who later on bequeathed effective power to the local Kalbi dynasty, Palermo became one of the most prosperous cities in the Mediterranean region, famous for its trade in silks, sugar cane, date palms and citrus fruits. Palaces, mosques and libraries were built, particularly under the patronage of the Kalbi family. The arts, the Qur'an and poetry were studied and the island shared in the general intellectual flowering of literature and philosophy then influencing the whole of the Islamic world.

However, Islam in Sicily was soon threatened. In 1061 Norman armies pushing south through Italy reached the southern tip of the peninsula, and by 1072 Italy's only substantive Muslim emirate had collapsed. Arab resistance on the island against the invasion lasted another twenty years, but by the end of the eleventh century, the struggle was finally over.

Arab culture and civilization, however, survived for some time longer. It was at the court of King Roger II of Sicily (1130–54) that the gifted Muslim geographer Al-Idrisi (1100–66) was to work, producing his famous Kitab nuzhat al-mushtaq fi ikhtiraq al-afq, the most accurate map up until that date of the known world. Arabic was spoken alongside Norman French, and Ibn Jubayr, the Spanish traveller, comments as late as the twelfth century (when he was passing through Palermo on his way to the Holy Land) on the Arab atmosphere and traditions of Norman Sicily. But the destruction of Muslim rule on the island eventually led to the complete disappearance of Muslim culture. All the great libraries and manuscript collections of Muslim Sicily have vanished. Today, scarcely a single manuscript produced by the Arabs in this furthest point of Italy survives in any Italian orientalist collection.

Because Sicily itself is an island, separated from the Italian mainland, the Arab culture of Sicily, unlike that of Spain, never had any great impact on mainland Italy's links with the Islamic world. It was as though Muslim Sicily was complete in itself — a star that burned brilliantly for several centuries and then vanished, taking with it the culture, learning and scholarship that had once made it one of the foremost centres of Arab civilization in the Mediterranean. The Crusade to drive the Muslims out of Sicily lasted barely thirty years. The Italians were consequently never consumed by any of the torment and ecstasy that characterized the Spanish-Christian relationship with the Muslim culture of Al Andalus. The Muslim impact on mainland Italy was virtually non-existent. Sicily, being an island, was peripheral to the mainland's own sense of identity. Italians were involved in Crusades against the Muslims in the Holy Land, but in the same way that Normans, English and Flemings were involved — in an experience which did not directly threaten their own culture and sense of identity. The fact that there had been a Muslim civilization on their own doorstep for well over 200 years in no way changed this attitude. Italy's relations with the Islamic world were also moulded by forces and factors other than the Sicilian experience. Spared the Christian-Muslim civil wars that ravaged Spain for over six centuries, the Italians did not feel threatened by Islam in the same way that the Spanish did. Nor did they in more modern times have any of the pervading sense of loss and nostalgia that has affected Spain's links with the Islamic world, as a result of the deliberate destruction of flourishing Spanish Muslim kingdoms. Italy's mainland was scarcely settled by the Arabs, and Sicily's Arab emirate passed into the hands of the Normans very quickly after virtually no struggle at all, so that by the time of the high noon of the Counter-Reformation which told so tragically against the Moorish culture of Granada, the memory of Muslim Sicily was long past.

Thus Italy's relations with the Muslim world were never clouded by the envy, respect and contempt that has so often characterized Spain's relations with Islam. Following the collapse of Muslim Sicily, relations between Islam and Italy in the Middle Ages were coloured primarily by two events: the Crusades, and the development of strong trading links between the Italian city states and the Muslim Near East. The Crusades, launched in 1099 and culminating over two centuries later in the expulsion of the Templars and Hospitalers from the island of Ruwad off the Syrian coast, were characterized by a great expansion of trade between Western Europe and the Islamic world. While there were periods of intense military activity, all was not battle and bloodshed during this period. There was ample opportunity for trade and settlement to take place, and the Italians, thanks to their already well-established trading networks throughout the eastern Mediterranean and the Byzantine Empire, were able to take full advantage of the opportunities presented to them by this extraordinary episode in history. Genoese, Pisan and Venetian merchants were all active in the Near East during this period and
there were large colonies of Italian traders settled in all the major cities of Outremer, particular Tyre, Sidon and Acre. The Italian religious orders — most notably the Franciscans — were also active in the Holy Land throughout the Crusader period and even after it. St Francis of Assisi himself travelled to Palestine in 1219 in order to try to convert the Sultan, and though he did not succeed, the way was opened for the Franciscans to travel around the region much more freely. This link between the propagation of the Catholic faith and the conversion of Muslims was something that would strongly characterize Italy’s later links with the Islamic world and lead directly to the creation of several of Italy’s great orientalist collections. The trading tradition itself would also lead eventually to the formation of a number of other great collections. But this was all to be much later. During the Middle Ages itself, although there were close contacts between Italy and the Muslim world, there was very little scholarly curiosity shown by the Italians in Islam, and no serious attempt made to understand the basis of Muslim culture and religion. The old prejudices about Islam and tales of magic and superstition that surrounded the life of Muhammad were fully accepted by Italian theologians and scholars.\(^1\)

No attempt was made to collect Arabic manuscripts, and there is no evidence either that any reached Italy during this period.

Following the end of the Crusades in the fourteenth century, Italian city states, notably Venice and Pisa, maintained close relations with the Muslim world. These links would continue well into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, being particularly fruitful during the great days of Ottoman Turkey. The Renaissance in Italy also produced a flowering of interest in the Islamic world and its culture, and this wider humanism was the direct inspiration behind the important Florentine orientalist collections. Italy’s trade and political relations with the Islamic world faltered through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the power of the city states faded and Italy itself was caught up in its own struggle to define its national identity and status. Unlike Britain, France, The Netherlands or Spain, Italy was not involved in any extensive empire-building throughout the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries which might have brought it into contact with the Islamic world. There were no Italian colonies in India, the Near East or the Far East, and it was not until the late nineteenth century that the Italians came once more into direct political contact with the Islamic world through their attempts to create a new Roman Empire in Africa and the Mediterranean (1882–1945). This latter experience, however, was in no way to alter the country’s relations with the Islamic world in any dramatic way. The roots of the relationship already stretched back far into the past, and were for the most part founded on trade, religious missionary zeal and genuine intellectual humanism and scholarship — an extraordinary combination which has given Italy some of the finest orientalist manuscript collections in Europe, and produced a number of important scholars and collectors, who together have helped Italy create a valuable and enduring bridge into the Islamic world. Modern Italian interest in Islamic scholarship began in the mid-nineteenth century, at the same time as the Risorgimento, the political movement to unify Italy. There was a sudden flowering of Italian scholarly interest in the Islamic world, in particular in the history of Muslim Sicily. Bausani writes:

It is a remarkable fact that both the history of scientific orientalism in Italy and the history of the political struggle against the old, obsolescent state and a reactionary aristocracy, in other words the period of Mazzini and Garibaldi, begins with a renewed interest in the history of Muslim Sicily.\(^2\)

The history of modern oriental studies in Italy is associated primarily with three Sicilian names: Michele Amari, Salvatore Cusa and Bartolomeo Lagumina. Amari is rightly considered the greatest Italian orientalist of the nineteenth century, and possibly one of the greatest European orientalists of that era. His passionate involvement in the struggle for the freedom of his homeland from the oppression of the Bourbon monarchy led him back into history, to the study of the glorious days of Sicily, first under the Normans, and, earlier, under the Muslims. Amari reflected the totally different approach of Italian orientalists towards Islam from the agonized path trodden by Spanish orientalists of the same period. He was not engaged in any quest to restore to Italy, or even Sicily, any sense of its lost identity, but in the best Italian tradition of intellectual humanism and scholarship was seeking to revive a sense of historical legitimacy for an independent, free Italy. In no sense did the Italian orientalists of this period feel that they were the inheritors of a national trauma, which demanded their scholarly participation to help heal deep spiritual wounds that were festering at the national psyche. Amari was propelled into a study of Muslim Sicily by a desire to find out exactly what had taken place. In 1842 he wrote:

In the medieval history of Sicily the Byzantine and Saracen periods are so little known that fables and legends have taken the place of history. . . . I had been building castles in the air. I want now . . . to throw myself into the study of Arabic. If the way is not too full of thorns I will tread it as far as I can.

In 1843 he began studying Arabic. In 1854 he published the first volume of the History of the Moors of Sicily. It was published in Florence, at this time one of the more liberal towns in Italy. The second and third volumes of the book were published in 1868 and 1872. Amari did not hesitate to use the first volume as a good opportunity to attack what he considered to be the anti-liberal and reactionary attitudes of the Church and State in Italy, and he eulogized Islam for being ‘a political and religious system remarkable for both the vastness and simplicity of its tenets’. He went on to claim that the first sparks of present European civilization originated from Arabic rule in Sicily and Spain\(^3\). The book caused a storm of protest in various political circles in Italy when it appeared, and was interpreted as an attack on the country’s existing political structures. Amari’s strong liberal leanings, however, were to earn him credit in
circles where it mattered. In 1859, after the founding of the Kingdom of Italy, and the integration of Sicily within the new state, Amari returned to Italy (from seventeen years of exile in Paris) and was made Minister of Education. As such, he saw to it that several chairs of oriental studies were created in Italian universities, and he continued when he had time with his own scholarly researches into Sicilian Islam, and Islamic documents in other parts of Italy. Between 1863 and 1867 he published a study of the Arabic documents of the archives of Florence and also worked on a transcription of the Arabic inscriptions of Sicily (published in Palermo in 1875, 1879 and 1885). His death in 1889 robbed Italy of its finest oriental scholar, and of a man who reflected the best spirit of the Italian humanist interest in Islam.  

Salvatore Cusa (1822–93) ranks as another of Italy's most important and influential orientalists. He was Professor of Arabic in the University of Palermo and published the two-volume Greek and Arabic Documents of Sicily. Bartolomeo Lagumina (1850–1931) was active in working on the oriental manuscripts preserved in the National Library of Palermo, and in editing the text of Abu Halim Sijistani's Book of the Palm Tree.

The Italian scholarly interest in Islam would continue to flower through men such as Celestino Schiaparelli (1841–1919), author of the Vocabuli in Arabico, a lexicographical work of great importance for the knowledge of medieval Spanish Arabic dialects, and Ignazio Guidi (1855–1931), one of the greatest authorities on Muslim law in the Western world. Prince Leonardo Caetani (1869–1924) we shall have cause to mention later in the chapter. He has been described as 'one of the most attractive personalities of Italian orientalism in the first part of the twentieth century'. Giuseppe Gabrieli (1872–1942) devoted much of his time to researching into the history of cultural relations between Italy and the East, and the history of Arabic studies in Italy. Eugenio Grifoni (1878–1925) and Michelangelo Guido (1886–1946) were both outstanding figures in the early twentieth century, and I. di Matteo (1872–1948), Professor of Arabic at the University of Palermo, was to continue Italian orientalist interest in Sicilian Arabic studies. L. Bonelli (d. 1947) was a noted Turcologist, and F. Bigniol (1871–1953) had a keen interest in Berber Islamic culture. The latter half of the twentieth century has seen a continuing interest by Italian scholars in the field of Islamic studies; men such as Levi della Vida, Gabrieli, Rossi, Piamontese and Traini are proof of this sustained interest. Professor Gabrieli (who was Professor of Arabic Language and Literature at Rome University) produced some of the finest translations of Persian and Arabic poetry ever made into Italian, while Professor Rossi was Professor of Turkish Language and Literature at Rome University, and a leading scholar of Turkish and Persian literature.

Italy's collections of Islamic manuscripts are held in a wide variety of cities and towns. Since the country was united comparatively recently, and Rome only became the capital in 1870, there was no one major library which became a focal point nationally for the study and collecting of Islamic manuscripts. Today there are important collections in Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Milan and Venice, and minor ones in Turin, Genoa and Palermo. Each collection reflects the particular interests and differing style of involvement that each city or region within Italy had with the Islamic world, and each collection is therefore an important piece of the overall jigsaw that makes up Italy's national holdings.

**Rome and the Vatican**

Rome's major collections of Islamic manuscripts are those held in the library of the Vatican Papal State (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and the National Library (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II). Smaller collections are held in the Biblioteca Casanatense, the Oriental School of the University of Rome and the Biblioteca Angelica.

**The Vatican Library**

The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana is the library of the popes. Although it dates back to the thirteenth century it was not until the mid-fifteenth century that the library collections began to develop in any serious way. The present buildings date from the late sixteenth century and the reign of Pope Sixtus V (1585–90), when the growing size of the library necessitated a move to a new site.

The Vatican Library's collections of oriental manuscripts are among the finest in Europe. It has an estimated 2,000 Arabic manuscripts, 1,222 Persian manuscripts and 496 Turkish manuscripts. It is also the oldest collection of Islamic manuscripts anywhere in Italy, since those in Sicily had been dispersed following the collapse of the Muslim emirate. The collections are made up of the Vatican's own central core of manuscript acquisitions supplemented by the important Barberini, Borgia and Rossia collections, which were originally separate collections but which were donated to the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The Borgia collections originally came from the Collegio Urbano della Congregazione de Propaganda Fide, and were largely created by Cardinal Stefano Borgia in the late eighteenth century. They were passed over to the Vatican in 1902. The Barberini collections were also integrated in 1902, and the Rossia collections in 1922. All three of these separate collections contain Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts. It must be pointed out that a large number of the Arabic manuscripts held by the Vatican Library are in fact Christian Arabic manuscripts and not Muslim Arabic manuscripts. It is only the latter collections, however, which concern us in this chapter.

The origin of these collections dates back to the early fifteenth century. In 1459 the General Council of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches opened in Florence, under the patronage of Duke Cosimo Medici, a friend of Pope Eugenius IV. One of the delegations to attend the Florence Council was from the Coptic Church, and it presented the Pope with a
collection of Coptic and Arabic manuscripts. The head of the delegation appears to have been the Abbot of the desert convent of St Anthony and St Paul the Hermite, one of the most famous monasteries in Egypt. He was called Andreas, and his signature is to be found on the short-lived decree announcing the union of the Coptic and Roman Churches, now preserved in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. The majority of the Arabic manuscripts presented were Christian, but some were Islamic. These Islamic manuscripts are the foundation collection of all Italian orientalist collections and almost certainly predate any other existing collections of Islamic manuscripts in any known European collection, apart from those in Spain. Thus the first real Islamic collection in Italy was to be established as a result of attempts to heal schisms within the Christian Church.

The Vatican’s collections were augmented slowly. There was no interest at this time in expanding them, and certainly little scholarly interest in the Islamic world. In the West the kingdom of Granada was about to collapse (1492). In the East, the Turkish Ottoman sultans had captured the Greek Christian city of Constantinople (1453). The two worlds were still too far apart for there to be any real dialogue or understanding between their cultures.

The next group of manuscripts to reach the Vatican Library arrived following the sack of Tunis in 1535 by the Emperor Charles V. These consisted of several valuable vellum Qur’ans written in Spain and North Africa. Thirty-four years later, the first Persian text reached the library, presented by the Nestorian Bishop of Malabar, Mar Yusef, in 1569. It was papal interest in establishing links with the Christian Church in the East, and in converting Muslims to Christianity, that led to the Vatican’s collections of Islamic manuscripts developing in a serious way. It became increasingly clear to the authorities in Rome that the Church would make little headway with its proselytizing activities among the Muslims unless missionaries being sent out to the East understood some basic facts about the tenets and beliefs of Islam. A few of the Church’s legates sent East in the sixteenth century therefore brought back valuable collections of Arabic manuscripts with them, many of which were by Christian Arab writers, but several of which were by Muslim Arabs. In this connection the most famous sixteenth-century Vatican collector was Leonardo Abel, a M allocating fluent in Arabic who was sent by Pope Gregory XIII (1572–85) to the heads of the oriental churches with the task of promoting the new Gregorian calendar. He was given the title of Bishop of Sidon (in name only since the town had not been in Christian hands for over three hundred years) and set out on his mission to the East in 1583. He spent four years travelling around Egypt and Syria, and even reached Mosul in Iraq. It was an extraordinary series of adventures that befell him, some of which bordering on the farcical. An example was the events following the death in Cairo, during his visit, of the Coptic Patriarch Yuhanna XIV. Abel was arrested, being accused of disturbing the peace, and only released after a ransom had been raised by the Coptic merchants. He returned to Rome a disappointed man, having failed to persuade the great majority of the orien-
tal Church leaders he had met to accept Rome’s lead in the matter of the new Gregorian calendar or in any other matters. However, he did return with a number of valuable Arabic manuscripts which he had collected in Aleppo and Cairo, several of which are interesting examples of the debate going on in the Islamic world at that time between Christian and Muslim theologians. (Abel’s most valuable manuscript in this connection is a copy of a debate that took place between the Christian Ibrahim al-Tarabbarani and the Muslim Abdul-Rahman al-Hasimi.) Other Islamic manuscripts he collected included a copy of Tuhfat al-ha’d fi ilm al-faraid by Al Rasani, copied on 25 dhul qadah AH 729 (20 September 1329) and three treatises on elementary grammar by Ibn Masud. During the early seventeenth century, a collection of Turkish and Persian manuscripts reached the Vatican Library from the Inquisitor-General of Malta, Monsignor Leonetto della Corbara, who held the post between 1607 and 1609. These manuscripts had been seized from Muslim travellers whose ships had been raided in the Mediterranean by the Knights of Malta. The majority of the manuscripts sent by della Corbara were copies of the Qur’an, mainly from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

On 9 August 1623, a collection of 196 wooden chests arrived at the Vatican Library. They had been sent to Rome by Leone Allacci, the Vatican Librarian, from Heidelberg, the former capital of the Electorate of the Palatinate. The chests contained the collections of the Biblioteca Palatina, the famous library of the Elector Frederick of the Palatinate, and included a number of important Islamic manuscripts. What events had led to this extraordinary occurrence, whereby one of the finest libraries in the whole of Europe had been packed up and transported to Rome, its books and manuscripts ending up as part of the collections of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana? The explanation is bound up with one of the most tragic episodes in seventeenth-century European history. On 8 November 1620, outside Prague, a battle took place which was to plunge Europe into the chaos and bloodshed of the Thirty Years’ War. This was the Battle of the White Mountain, which ended with the defeat of Frederick, Elector of the Palatinate and King of Bohemia. When the Catholic armies of the Duke of Bavaria invaded Heidelberg, they were participating in more than the destruction of a German Protestant kingdom. They were overthrowing the final flowering of what has been described as the ‘Rosicrucian Enlightenment’, a movement which stretched back to the great days of the Florentine Renaissance in the fifteenth century. Heidelberg was famous not only for the famous Biblioteca Palatina, but also for its university and royal palace, and its many other scholarly institutions, all of them closely involved with the mystical hermetic traditions of the ‘Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz’ (written by Johann Valentin Andreae), John Dee and the Rosicrucian manifestos. It was thus an extraordinary Protestant movement that was gathering its forces under the patronage of the Elector of the Palatinate, one suffused with a belief in magic and mystery along with modern scientific thinking. Its defeat at the Battle of the White Mountain was a major set-back for Protestant liberal thinking in central Europe.
Among the Islamic manuscripts which had been in the Biblioteca Palatina and now found their way to Rome were those of the sixteenth-century French scholar and mystic Guillaume Postel. Fifteen manuscripts can be attributed to him. Following his travels to the Near East (Istanbul 1534-7 and Syria and Palestine 1549-50), he returned with Arabic and Turkish manuscripts, some of which he presented to the Elector of the Palatine. The manuscripts attracted the attention of Jakob Christmann (1554-1613), the first Professor of Arabic at the University of Heidelberg, who was responsible for introducing an Arabic course in 1609. He was also the author of *Alphabetum Arabicum*.47 Apart from the Islamic manuscripts of Guillaume Postel, there were also several belonging to the Protestant scholar Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614), who had also contributed greatly to the development of oriental studies through his interest in Arabic and Persian literature.

Under the patronage of the Elector Palatine, a rich flowering of interest in the sciences and humanities had taken place, and among subjects studied was the Orient. The Islamic manuscripts which arrived at the Biblioteca Apostolica in August 1623 were therefore not only mute witnesses to the destruction of one of Europe’s finest libraries, and one of its most progressive kingdoms, but also to one of the earliest examples of genuine European interest in the Arabic language and culture.

Many of the Islamic manuscripts in the Vatican collections also originate from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This was founded by Pope Gregory XV in January 1622, and its aim was to centralize missionary activity and make sure that much tighter papal control was extended over operations in the Ottoman territories.48 The oriental manuscripts in the Sacred Congregation’s library were merged with those of the Biblioteca Apostolica in 1902. They are often known as the ‘Borgia collections’, as they were under the patronage of the Borgia family and were largely built up by Cardinal Stefano Borgia in the late eighteenth century. Altogether 144 Islamic manuscripts belong to this collection, including 84 Turkish manuscripts, 25 Persian manuscripts (covering religious works, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, history and grammar) and 35 Arabic manuscripts.49 It is not surprising that there is such a preponderance of Turkish manuscripts, given the fact that the Sacred Congregation was operating very extensively in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

During the pontificate of Urban VIII (1623-44) another famous library was established, which would eventually be integrated with that of the Vatican. This was the library of the Barberini family, one of whose members, Francisco Barberini, was named Cardinal of the Vatican Library in July 1626, a post he held until 1633. He was a nephew of the Pope, and in his spare time greatly expanded the Barberini library, which he housed in a magnificent new palace in 1639. Its collections were integrated with those of the Vatican in 1902.50 The Islamic manuscripts of the Barberini library numbered 56 Arabic, six Persian and 32 Turkish manuscripts.

In November 1657, during the pontificate of Alexander VII (1655-67), there passed into the Biblioteca Apostolica 1,779 manuscripts belonging to the library of the Dukes of Urbino. This duchy had been seized in 1631 by Pope Urban VIII. Only a small number of these manuscripts were Islamic, however.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, there was a sudden expansion in the collection of Persian manuscripts held by the Vatican Library. This was largely due to the donation by Pope Clement XI (1700-21) of 77 manuscripts bequeathed to him by the Marquis Rinaldo del Bufalo. These manuscripts had been collected by Pietro della Valle (1586-1652) during his travels to Persia in the first half of the seventeenth century. A number of Turkish manuscripts collected by della Valle during his visit to Istanbul in 1614-5 also passed into the Vatican Library at this time. Another significant collection of Persian manuscripts — those belonging to Adriaen Reland (1676-1718), a Dutch orientalist — were also acquired by the Vatican during this period. During the pontificate of Pope Clement XII (1738-69) a collection of Turkish manuscripts belonging to Giuseppe Simone and Stefano Evodi Assemani also entered the Vatican Library. Altogether 500 oriental manuscripts were attributed to the Assemans, although the majority of these were Syrian Christian manuscripts. The Assemans played an important role in the history of the Vatican Library, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Islamic manuscripts have continued to enter the collections of the Vatican Library. In 1838, the Marquis Luigi Marini (1778-1838) bequeathed his collection of oriental manuscripts. In 1857, the collections of the English oriental scholar Watson, who was living in Italy at the time of his death, entered the library. Among the several thousand books that he had amassed were 85 Arabic manuscripts.51 In April 1922, the architect and art historian Luca Beltrami made a presentation of Islamic manuscripts which had originated in Yemen. These were part of a large acquisition of Yemeni manuscripts made by the Lombard merchant, Giuseppe Caprotti (most of which ended up in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan). Between 1935 and 1937, two important donations of Arabic manuscripts were made by Cardinal Ignazio Gabriel Tappouni, Patriarch of Antioch. Most of these manuscripts originated in Syria and Lebanon and are Shia in inspiration, being composed by a religious group living near Jebel Amil in central Lebanon, who appear to have had active links with the great Shia centre in Najaf, Iraq. Most of these manuscripts date between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and include the *Maqtul al-ahlub* of Ibn Bábawayh, an interesting Shiite text, and the *Dirwan* of Ibrahim Al-Tabatabâi, a Shiite genealogy. In 1963 the diplomat Enrico Cerulli donated ten manuscripts which he had collected in Somalia and Ethiopia. These manuscripts are particularly interesting for revealing the influence of local African cultures on traditional Islamic Arab literary traditions.52 A very substantial collection of Persian manuscripts reached the Vatican Library as a result of Cerulli’s posting as Italian Ambassador to Persia (Iran) between 1950 and 1954. Cerulli deliberately chose to concentrate on Persian manuscripts dealing with Shia religious drama, and as a result donated one of
the most original collections of Islamic manuscripts ever to reach a Western library. The Cerulli collection consists of 1,035 manuscripts, the majority of which are in Persian. A few are in Turkish. The Taqiyah (religious drama play) is a cycle of plays concentrating on the figure of Hussein, the son of Ali and Fatima, killed at Kerbala in Iraq on 10 Muharram AH 61 (10 October 680) by the Ummayads. The Persian religious theatre was first noticed by Westerners in the late eighteenth century, when the English traveller, William Franklin, on a tour from Bengal to Persia first described it in his book, published in London in 1790. One characteristic of Persian religious drama manuscripts is their anonymity. They are also largely without any date. However, it would appear that the oldest manuscripts in Cerulli’s collection go back to the late eighteenth century (1787-97), with much of the material originating in the years 1829-42. They were copied in cities all over Iran, though many are from Qom, Shiraz and Isfahan.

The catalogues of the Vatican Library’s oriental collections date back to the seventeenth century. In 1660, Abramo Echellense was named Scriptor Arabicus et Syricus of the Vatican Library, a position which passed to his nephew Giovanni Matteo Naironi on his death in 1664. Between them these two Maronites worked on an important catalogue of oriental manuscripts (Arab, Syriac, Turkish, Persian and Coptic). At this time there were about 430 oriental manuscripts in the whole library. The eighteenth-century history of the library is closely bound up with the Assemani family, who held the position of Scriptor Orientalis for much of that century. On 10 March 1716, Giuseppe Simonio Assemani was named Scriptor Orientalis, rising to the position of second custodian of the oriental collections in 1730, and first custodian in 1739. He died in Rome in January 1768. His nephew, Stefano Eudovio Assemani (1711-82), was named Scriptor Orientalis in 1730. The Assemanians appear to have been of Lebanese Maronite origin, as were their predecessors.

Giuseppe, in revising the catalogue of Echellense and Naironi, divided the Arabic manuscripts into Christian and Islamic sections. By this date (mid-eighteenth century) he estimated that there were 194 Christian Arabic manuscripts and 196 Islamic Arabic manuscripts in the Vatican collections. Later manuscript acquisitions were not so categorized, Stefano Eudovio divided his time as Scriptor between travels in the Near East and work on the catalogues of the oriental collection. On 4 February 1768, following the death of Giuseppe, he was named first custodian. Antonio Assemani, a nephew of Stefano Eudovio, was to hold the position of Scriptor between 1768 and 1816.

In 1835, during the tenure of one of the Vatican’s most famous librarians, Angelo Mai, Stefano Eudovio’s catalogue was at last published under the title of Catalogue codicum Bibliothecae Vaticanae Arabici, Persiani, Turcici, Aethiopicorum, Armenicorum, Ibericorum, Slavici, Indicorum, Sinensium. Further cataloguing of the library’s oriental collections was carried out by Fr Agostino Ciassa (1835-1902). The Barberini collections have also been basically catalogued, as have the Borgia collections. In 1935, the Vatican Library published Giorgio Levi della Vida’s first listing of Arabic Islamic manuscripts (Elenco dei manoscritti arabi della Biblioteca Vaticana), and in 1965 a second volume was published covering the 276 Arabic Islamic manuscripts which had entered the library since 1935. In 1948, Ettore Rossi’s listing of Persian manuscripts was published (Elenco dei manoscritti persiani della Biblioteca Vaticana). In 1953, the listing of the library’s Turkish manuscript collections was published.

The National Academy of Sciences

Vatican City contains what is undoubtedly the single most important collection of Islamic manuscripts in Rome. The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (National Academy of Sciences) is another important centre for the study of the Islamic world, and has one of the foremost orientalist libraries in Italy, bequeathed by the great Italian orientalist, Prince Leone Caetani (1869-1935). Currently, Renato Traini, the catalogue of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana’s Islamic collections, is Librarian. The Accademia, founded in 1603 by Federico Cesi, Marquis of Monticelli, is Italy’s oldest scientific academy institute. Cesi was greatly influenced by the life and work of Galileo as well as by three scientific and humanist figures of an earlier period: Johann Eck; Francesco Stelluti, famous for his interest in the national sciences and a translator of Persian writings; and Count Anastasio of Filis. The aim of the Academy was to encourage and foster a greater appreciation and understanding of man’s potential through supporting the study of the national sciences and medicine. Cesi was very much in the tradition of the great Italian humanist scholars, who wanted to widen society’s horizons. It was therefore appropriate that over three hundred years after its foundation Prince Leone Caetani, a noted liberal and orientalist, should choose it as the repository for his great collection of Islamic manuscripts, books and research papers. Also, a number of Islamic manuscripts had already been donated to the Accademia, principally by the oriental scholar Corsini in 1884, and by Michele Amari in 1890. On 1 June 1970, the statute officially incorporating the Leone Caetani Foundation into the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei was approved by national government decree.

Prince Caetani came from one of Italy’s most famous aristocratic families. While still a young man he travelled to North Africa, the Levant, Iraq and Iran. He took this opportunity to perfect his study of Arabic, Turkish and Persian, in which he had already developed a great interest. He also had acquired a deep sympathy for Islam and Muslim culture and society. The result of this was the first volume of his Annali dell’Islam (Annals of Islam), first published in 1905. Eventually, the Annali was to run to ten volumes and 10,000 pages, and occupy over twenty years of Caetani’s life. The series was projected as a monumental history of Islam, covering the years from pre-Islamic Arabic through to the tenth century AH (sixteenth century AD). In fact, despite all the work which he put into the research and writing, Caetani did not get beyond the year AH 40, and the series remains uncompleted until
Stephan Roman

this day. Part of the reason for this is that Caetani’s enormous energy was occupied with other large projects, among which was the "Onomasticon Arabicum," a collection of all the proper names found in Muslim sources, and a dictionary of national biography of all famous Italians from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. Aside from all this, he took an active part in Italian politics, being a firm believer in democratic socialism, and strongly anti-clerical. (The appeal which Islam had for many Italian liberals throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century is a recurring theme.) He was very much opposed to Italy’s declaration of war against Ottoman Turkey, as he believed that this could only embitter relations between Italy and the Muslim world. After the war, disillusioned by what he perceived to be the growing power of the Right in politics, he seemed to lose interest in his scholarly work and threw his energies into a number of socially inspired projects, including the draining of the infamous malarial marshes, the Paludi Pontine, and the distribution of his land to the peasants. On 6 June 1924, he transferred his collections of manuscripts, books and research papers to the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, in order to establish both a national and international centre for the study of the Muslim world. Much of the material comprises photogaphic copies of Islamic manuscripts held in other libraries in Europe and the Middle East, but there are 162 original Arabic manuscripts and 59 original Persian manuscripts. In 1926 Caetani left for Canada, where he settled in Vancouver, dying there in 1935. The library which he bequeathed to the Accademia, and the Foundation established in his name, remain today as one of the most important bridges of understanding between Italy and the Islamic world.

The National Library

The Islamic manuscripts held by the National Library, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II, number 37 Arabic and four Persian. Most of these manuscripts were collected by an American officer called Captain All Ragland, who was stationed in Turkey during the 1950s. He had made a collection of various manuscripts, which he proposed to divide between the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome. The best manuscripts he decided should go to Paris. Fortunately for Rome, a confusion arose when the manuscripts were dispatched, so that the best manuscripts were in fact sent to the Biblioteca Nazionale, where they remain today.

Other Roman Collections

The Biblioteca Casanatense has sixty-one Arabic manuscripts and thirteen Persian manuscripts. It is one of Rome’s more important collections of Islamic manuscripts. Finally, the Biblioteca Angelica, founded in 1605 as the private library of the Augustinian Fr Angelo Rocca and opened in 1614 as Rome’s first public library, has about sixteen Arabic manuscripts.

Italy

Florence

Florence’s major collections of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts are held in the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Magliabechiana) and the Biblioteca Riccardiana. Florentine interest in Islamic manuscripts dates back to the first years of the Renaissance, and the reigns of Cosimo de Medici (1389-1464) and his grandson Lorenzo de Medici (1449-92), popularly known as ‘the Magnificent’. In their thirst to rediscover the classical authors of antiquity, the Medici and their contemporaries were aware that much classical learning had been preserved through the intermediary of Arabic writers, and that Arabic and Persian philosophy also incorporated Greek ideas and thinking. Lorenzo sent his agent Giovanni Lascaris to the East on at least two occasions in search of original manuscripts, and although Lascaris was in the main concerned with recovering Greek manuscripts, there is strong evidence to indicate that he also had instructions to seek out interesting Islamic manuscripts. The Florence of the early Medici was expanding its intellectual horizons on all fronts. Giovanni Pico, Count of Miranda and Concordia (1463-94), one of the leading intellectuals of Renaissance Florence and a close friend of Duke Lorenzo, wrote in his Oratio de dignitate hominis, published in Florence in 1498, four years after his death: ‘In Arabic texts I have read that Abdullah the Saracen, when asked what he considered the most marvellous thing in the world, replied that he could perceive nothing more splendid than man.’ Pico was a disciple of the gifted and highly talented Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), who had been patronized by Lorenzo’s grandfather Cosimo, and was famous for his role in creating the Platonic Academy, founded in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century. Cosimo had established the Medici Library, which was patronized by Ficino and his disciples and included Islamic manuscripts obtained by Cosimo’s agents in the East. The library, which is now known as the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, is justifiably one of Florence’s most famous collections.

The Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana

The manuscripts which now make up the majority of the Medicea-Laurenziana’s Islamic holdings, however, date from a later period than the fifteenth century, and were acquired during the late sixteenth century, reaching Florence in the early seventeenth century. These manuscripts are closely bound up with one of the last flowerings of the Italian Renaissance spirit, the Stamperia Orientale Medicea, and it is therefore very appropriate that it should be in the Medici Library in Florence that they are now to be found. During the pontificate of Gregory XIII (1572-85) a plan was developed to reunitie the Eastern and Western Churches and to establish an anti-Turkish league in alliance with Safavid Persia. In order to facilitate this plan and to help the spread of the Christian religion in the Muslim world, it was decided that books
convert Muslims, it is hard to believe that this mattered very much to most of the people associated with it.

Like the early Medicis in their thirst for Greek culture and learning, this later generation of Renaissance scholars were interested in Islam and what it had to offer. The West. They were genuinely seeking to carry forward the work begun by men like Marsilio Ficino and Cosimo de' Medici in Florence in the fifteenth century. Raimondo himself was steeped in the Aristotelian-Platonic traditions. Vecchietti was a great admirer and friend of Tommaso Campanella, and fell into disgrace with the Holy See. His brother Gerolamo was widely known to hold philosophical views at odds with the conventional beliefs of the Roman Church. The Stamperia, established for the purpose of converting Muslims but staffed by people who had quite different motives, was in fact the final flowering of the late Italian Renaissance, and represented the last vestiges of lay spirituality eventually to be overcome by ecclesiastical authority.

In 1587, the Stamperia's patron, Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, left for Florence in order to become Grand Duke Ferdinand I of Tuscany. The press entered a period of decline, brought on by lack of adequate funding. Eventually it was decided to transfer both the press and its valuable Islamic collections to Florence. This was effectively the end of the Stamperia Orientale, although its influence was to have a continuing impact as seen in the Arabic typefaces designed for the Tipografie Orientali della Propaganda Fide (1626) and the Tipografie Orientali del Seminario di Pavia (1684). The establishment of the press had also given a great boost to Western European knowledge of Islamic languages, Arabic in particular.

About five hundred Islamic manuscripts from the Stamperia's collections entered the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana. These cover a wide range of subjects, including poetry, history, grammar, science, philosophy, astronomy, medicine and occult studies. The majority of these were Arabic, with around fifty-four Persian texts. The manuscripts were made available to oriental scholars, and were widely consulted. The French orientalist Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1625–95), who produced the first ever general encyclopedia in a European language on Islamic culture and civilization, spent time in the Library, using its oriental collections, as a guest of Grand Duke Cosimo III. In 1740, Stefano Evodio Assemani arrived from Rome to work on the production of a catalogue of the manuscripts held by the Library. This was published in 1742. This is the Codicum MSS. orientalium catalogus, and is famous for its polyglot introduction in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Turkish, Coptic and Ethiopic. It is illustrated with reproductions from some of the manuscripts, and is a work of art in itself. Large parts of the text are in Arabic. It remains today the only catalogue of the Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana's collections. The Arabic, Persian and Turkish collections of the Library have also been enriched by oriental manuscripts originating from convents and monasteries, which were suppressed by the Grand Duke of Tuscany between 1775 and 1789. Other Islamic manuscripts were added in 1884, and these were bought by the Italian government from the collections of Bertram, fourth Earl
of Ashburnham (1797–1878), who had bought them from Guglielmo Libri (1803–69), the bookbinder.

Other Florentine Collections

The other two Florentine libraries with smaller collections of Islamic manuscripts (mainly Arabic and Persian) are the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale and the Biblioteca Riccardiana. The Biblioteca Nazionale, sometimes known as the Magliabechi after its founder, Antonio Magliabechi (1633–1714), was created in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Magliabechi, an eccentric self-taught scholar, was Superintendent of the Medici Library, and transferred some of the collections then in his supervision to his own private library. Among these collections were a number of Islamic manuscripts, numbering perhaps 130 texts. On his death in 1714, Magliabechi left his collection of 30,000 volumes and 3,000 manuscripts to ‘the poor of Florence’, and it was opened to the public in 1747 as the ‘Biblioteca Magliabechiana’. In 1861, the library was designated the Biblioteca Nazionale, following the unification of Italy. In 1898, Lupo Buonazia produced a catalogue of the collections. This was the Catalogo dei codici Arabici della Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, which appeared in the 1898 edition of the Cataloghi dei codici orientali di alcune biblioteche d’Italia. Among the library’s most valuable Islamic manuscripts is an AH 614 (AD 1217) copy of Firdausi’s Shāh-nāma, in the Arabic script, which is believed to have reached Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, during the time of Marsilio Ficino (1433–99). The Biblioteca Riccardiana was founded towards the end of the sixteenth century by the poet Romolo Riccardi (1558–1612), and bought by the government in 1812. It has a collection of forty-two Arabic manuscripts and four Persian manuscripts.

Bologna

Moving north from Florence we reach the city of Bologna. Its collections of Islamic manuscripts date back to the early eighteenth century and were largely created by Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (1658–1730), a scholar in oceanography, cartography and military artwork, who had spent some time travelling in the Ottoman Empire. They are presently housed in the University of Bologna. Marsigli helped to found the Bologna Institute of Science in December 1711, and because of his strong interest in the Ottomans he was determined to establish a collection of oriental and printed books. He also set up an oriental press, using a modified version of the characters developed by the Stamperia Medicea, which he had managed to acquire. His association with the Ottoman Empire began in 1681, when he travelled through Turkey studying its economic and military organization. In 1688–9, the Bolognese scientist was an active participant in military campaigns against the Ottoman Turks in Vienna, Buda and Belgrade. These were the years of the final great Ottoman thrust into central Europe, the last attempts made by Islam to gain supremacy over the West through military force. The siege of Vienna, and the battles in Yugoslavia and Hungary which followed it, were graphically described by Marsigli in his Stato militare dell’Imperio Ottomano, published two years after his death in 1732. During these campaigns, he acquired a large number of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, more than 600 altogether. They were mostly from the mosque libraries of Buda and Belgrade. Of the manuscripts, 459 are in the Arabic script, the rest being in Turkish and Persian. Many of them are texts used in the Ottoman mosque schools during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and lack the title-pages, so that it is difficult to ascertain who are the copyists and original authors. Many of the Arabic and Turkish manuscripts cover subjects such as history, geography, cosmography and navigation, reflecting Marsigli’s own interest in these subjects. One of the most valuable manuscripts in the collection is a 1598 Turkish copy of Ibn Hawqal’s Kitāb Masalik al-Mamalik, a richly illustrated geography of the Arabic world. Marsigli’s aim in collecting the manuscripts and bringing them back to Italy was far removed from the warlike activities that had helped him obtain them. He appears to have had a genuine respect for Ottoman learning and civilization, and in his preface to the 1702 catalogue of the collection, he wrote that he wanted to rectify the false opinion held by Christians that ‘the Turks are without literature, and learning’. The 1702 catalogue of the manuscripts was updated by Giuseppe Assemani in the mid-eighteenth century, and a new listing of the Marsigli collection was carried out by Baron Victor Rosen of the Russian Imperial Library in St Petersburg between 1883 and 1885. The Bologna Institute of Science eventually became the Royal University of Bologna, and later the University of Bologna. The Islamic manuscripts housed there are a lasting tribute to one of the city’s most talented sons, who genuinely sought to create among his fellow citizens a better understanding of the largest Muslim power then in existence.

Other Northern Italian Collections

In northern Italy, there are several important centres for Islamic manuscripts, principally Milan, Venice and Turin. Milan’s principal collection, without any doubt, is that housed in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. The library was founded by Cardinal Federico Borromeo (1564–1631) and named after Milan’s patron saint, St Ambrose. In creating the library, the Cardinal seems to have been motivated both by intellectual and patriotic zeal. The Spanish were in occupation of large parts of Italy, and Borromeo wanted to do something that would raise the cultural and educational level in Lombardy. On 8 December 1609, the library was opened to the public, becoming the first public library in the whole of Italy. Borromeo was a great lover of books and manuscripts, and for the opening bequeathed a collection of over 30,000 books and 12,000 manuscripts. He made sure that funds were also available to the library for purchasing books and manuscripts from abroad, and agents were dispatched
to collect valuable items. Among these were several Arabic, Turkish and Persian manuscripts, including a copy of the only known Arabic loxodromic map in existence (produced in the fourteenth century), a very ancient copy of a book on agriculture and several manuscripts on philosophy, medicine and literature. However, valuable though these were, it was not until the twentieth century that the Biblioteca Ambrosiana would become famous for its Islamic collections, and, appropriately for Italy’s leading industrial and trading city, these were acquired as a result of the activities of its merchant and banking community. The manuscripts thus acquired were to make the Ambrosiana’s Islamic collections the most important in the country after those of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome.

The vast majority of these manuscripts, numbering around 1600, were acquired between 1906 and 1909, and had been collected by the Lombard trader, Giuseppe Caprotti, during the 34 years that he had spent in Sana'a in the Yemen. All the manuscripts were of South Arabian origin. In order to make sure that the collection remained in Italian hands and was not sold abroad, Achille Ratti and Luca Beltrami launched a fund appeal to buy the manuscripts. Twenty-five wealthy Milanese donors, together with the Banca Commerciale Italiana, raised the 30,000 lire that Caprotti was asking, and bought the collection, which was presented to the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in 1909, the tercentenary of its opening. In 1914, another collection of 180 Arabic manuscripts was presented to the library by Luca Beltrami. A further 56 were presented to the Ambrosiana by the Milanese arabisist, Eugenio Griffini, who up to his death in 1925 was the Librarian of the Royal Library in Cairo. At the present time, the Ambrosiana has the largest single collection of Arabic manuscripts anywhere in Italy, numbering 2,190 manuscripts all told. The number of Persian and Turkish manuscripts totals around thirty.

The first list of the Arabic manuscripts in the Ambrosiana was compiled by the Austrian scholar Josef von Hammer-Purgstall in 1839. In 1939, following the acquisition of the Caprotti and Beltrami collections, a Swedish professor from Uppsala, Oscar Lofgren, began cataloguing the Arabic manuscripts. Since 1969, he has been assisted by Dr Renato Traini, Librarian of the Fondazione Ca’ Foscari in the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. The first volume of their Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana appeared in 1975, the second in 1981. Support for publication was provided by the Banca Commerciale Italiana, with the aim of encouraging Arabic studies. For ease of classification, the manuscripts are divided into three main groups, according to the broad chronological periods in which they were acquired: the Antico Fondo, the Medio Fondo and the Nuovo Fondo. The Antico Fondo and Medio Fondo number about four hundred and eighty manuscripts. The Nuovo Fondo is made up of the Caprotti bequest. Volume 2 of the Catalogue, which covers the Caprotti manuscripts, in fact only lists about half of the total number of manuscripts acquired in 1909 (numbers 1–830). A third volume is planned to cover the remaining uncatalogued ones.

Undoubtedly, the Ambrosiana has the finest single collection of Yemeni Arabic manuscripts anywhere outside Arabia. However, according to Lofgren and Traini, ‘the great majority of the codices are of a mediocre level from the calligraphic point of view . . . and a considerable number of texts reflect the extremely typical script and superficial provincial and stereotyped culture that established itself in the Yemen under the influence of Zaidism, politically dominant in the country from the end of the Xth century’. None of the less, the manuscripts do give a very comprehensive insight into Yemeni Zaidite literature between the ninth and nineteenth centuries, and in this sense are quite unique. The flowering of Yemeni culture which took place in the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries can also be traced, and the collection is particularly rich in manuscripts relating to treatises on the Qur’an, Hadith, law and theology. There are also some interesting texts on medicine, mathematics, astronomy, geography, the natural sciences and magic.

Other Arabic manuscripts in the Ambrosiana which are worth noting, but which were acquired before the Caprotti collection reached Milan, include the great biographical dictionary compiled by Ibn Abî-Rıgal, the Summa theologica of Ibn Mattawaih and a work by the Sicilian Muslim Ibn Zafar.

Venice’s principal collection of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts is held in the Biblioteca Marciana. Surprisingly for a city with such long and well-established commercial links with the Muslim world, dating back to the time of the Crusades and continuing throughout the era of the Ottoman Empire, Venice’s collections of Islamic manuscripts are not numerous, and were mainly acquired in the eighteenth century. The Biblioteca Marciana itself was created in the mid-eighteenth century, arising out of a collection of Greek and Latin manuscripts presented to Venice by Cardinal Bessarion in 1464. In 1797, the Venetian Admiral Jacopo (alias Giacomo Nani, 1725–97) bequeathed to the Marciana his collection of oriental manuscripts and coins. Jacopo, who was Supreme Commander of the Venetian fleet between 1766 and 1776, was the author of books on history and military tactics, as well as being fascinated in oriental culture. In this respect he was not dissimilar to the Bolognian military scientist Luigi Marsigli, who a century earlier had collected Turkish and Arabic manuscripts in Ottoman Yugoslavia. Jacopo’s Islamic manuscripts are rare scientific and medical works, many in Persian. Other Islamic manuscripts reaching the Marciana were bequeathed by Emílio Tocci (1831–1912) and Ibrahim da Pera (1641–97). Da Pera started life working as a government official for the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. However, he was a secret Christian, and in 1690 took the opportunity of defecting to Venice with his collection of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts. He spent the rest of his life advising the Venetians on how to study oriental languages. Currently, there are about 100 Arabic manuscripts in the Marciana, and 33 Persian manuscripts, as well as a number of Turkish codices.

Apart from Milan and Venice, the third city in northern Italy with important collections of Islamic manuscripts is Turin, formerly the capital of the independent Kingdom of Piedmont. There are two major collections in Turin: those of the National Library (Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria) and
those in the Royal Library. Turin’s Islamic manuscript collections can be said to have begun during the reign of Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy (1580–1630), when collections of Islamic manuscripts were established in both the University and the Royal Library.\(^{55}\) Prior to his reign, however, Turin had already earned for itself a reputation as a city interested in Islamic languages. In 1516, the Milanese typographer Pietro Paolo Porro, resident in Turin, had printed one of the first Arabic books ever produced in the West. A century later, the inventory of the Ducal Library lists six Arabic books, as well 158 part-Arabic texts. It is estimated that by the early eighteenth century about a third of the books and manuscripts in the Ducal Library were in Arabic. Today, there are estimated to be 41 Arabic manuscripts in the Royal Library and 36 in the University Library. There are also an estimated 12 Persian manuscripts in the Royal Library and 31 in the University Library.

**Southern Italy**

The two centres for Islamic manuscript collections in southern Italy are Naples and Palermo. The Naples collections are located in the Biblioteca Nazionale and the Istituto Universitario Orientale. The Biblioteca Nazionale, formerly the Royal Library of the Bourbons, was originally founded in 1734 by Charles III of Bourbon. It was opened to the public in 1804 and became the National Library of Naples in 1860.

Its collections of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts were built up from various sources. According to Lupo Buonazza’s *Catalogo dei codici arabi della Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli*, which was published in 1898, there are 101 Arabic manuscripts in the National Library.\(^{60}\) An 1877 hand-written catalogue of the collections also lists seventeen Persian manuscripts, fourteen Turkish manuscripts and one Indian manuscript.\(^{60}\) Many of the Arabic manuscripts date from the sixth and seventh centuries AH (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD), and largely cover religious subjects. There are several copies of the Qur’an. The script style is predominantly Naskhi. The Persian collections include several well-preserved, richly illustrated manuscripts covering such subjects as poetry, mathematics, astronomy and divine poetry (e.g. the Songs of David translated into Persian). The Turkish manuscripts are mainly works of poetry and Turkish grammar.

The majority of the Arabic manuscripts in the library were acquired from a Scot named George Strachen between the years 1816 and 1819. Strachen spent this period in Baghdad, and his interest in Islam led him to collect various manuscripts dating from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of the Persian and Turkish manuscripts were acquired following the suppression of the monasteries and convents in 1864. Another small collection of oriental manuscripts reached Naples in 1920. These had been seized in 1797 on the orders of the reigning Habsburg monarch, Charles VI, and carried away to Vienna. In 1920, following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, the Austrians returned the manuscripts to Naples.

**Italy**

The experiences of the Biblioteca Nazionale in producing its own catalogues of oriental manuscripts is an example of the difficulties which many Italian libraries faced in the nineteenth century in compiling catalogues of the Islamic manuscripts. It is worth looking at the story in some detail. The idea of a catalogue for the Biblioteca Nazionale’s oriental collections was first mooted in 1822, and the work was entrusted to Professor Angelo de Simone. Nothing much seems to have come of this decision, however. Ten years later, Lettieri, who was an honorary scribe at the library, took it upon himself to establish an Arabic printing press and managed to obtain the characters from Rome. In 1846, he was instructed to proceed with the publication of a catalogue of Arabic manuscripts. Unfortunately the composer of Arabic letters at the printing press died in December 1846 and another man had to be prepared for the job. In 1847 the first five pages of the catalogue were ready for publishing, but in 1848 Lettieri himself died without finishing the work. In 1877 Alfonso Miola (1840–1934), a librarian and bibliographer at the Biblioteca Nazionale, eventually compiled the first hand-written catalogue of the library’s collections, but it was not until 1898, 76 years after the first decision had been taken to produce a catalogue, that the first printed edition of the Arabic manuscript catalogue appeared. Such drawn-out sagas were fairly typical in many other libraries of the period.

The Islamic manuscript collections of the Istituto Universitario Orientale are small and number only about twenty. The Istituto was founded in 1727 as the Chinese College and reorganized as the Oriental Institute in 1888. Courses are offered in Arabic, Islamic institutions, Turkish language and literature, Persian language and literature and Berber, as well as in African and Asian languages. The manuscripts held by the Istituto Universitario are mainly nineteenth-century medical texts, obtained from the Levant.

Palermo, once the seat of an Arab university and the centre of Arab power in southern Italy, now has relatively few Islamic manuscripts. The Biblioteca Nazionale has 29 Arabic manuscripts, none of which originates from the libraries of Muslim Sicily. All of them were acquired in the nineteenth century. These were catalogued by Bartolomeo Lagomina in 1896 and published under the title *Catalogo dei codici orientali della Biblioteca Nazionale di Palermo*.

The catalogues of Italy’s Islamic manuscripts range from the most up-to-date, such as that recently produced for the Biblioteca Ambrosiana’s collection, to catalogues that have not been updated since the nineteenth century. There has been only one serious attempt to produce a national union catalogue of Italian oriental manuscripts. This was between the years 1878 and 1898, and arose as a result of the meeting of the fourth session of the International Congress of Manuscripts in Florence in 1878. At the Congress it was announced by the Italian Minister of Public Instruction that there would be a national effort to publish all the catalogues of the various collections of oriental manuscripts then held in Italian libraries. This resulted in the publication over a twenty-year period of the *Cataloghi dei codici orientali di alcune biblioteche d’Italia*.\(^{60}\)
Most of the major Italian collections – apart from the those of the Vatican State – were included in this project. Unfortunately, this major national effort was not continued, so that today the responsibility for publishing collections rests with the individual institutions and libraries, as it did before 1878.

As in other countries, Italy's Islamic manuscript collections form part of a much broader bridge connecting Italy with the Muslim world. Islamic languages, principally Arabic, Turkish and Persian, are taught at universities in Rome, Naples, Palermo and Venice. The Istituto per l'Oriente in Rome, founded in 1921, is a private association concerned with promoting scholarship relating to the Middle East. It has a library, and publishes Oriente moderno, a monthly digest of the main political and economic trends taking place in the Middle East. The Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, also based in Rome, is mainly concerned with the Far East, but covers Iran and India. The Islamic Cultural Centre is also an important centre for the study of the Muslim world. It has a library of 150,000 books in the main languages of Islam. The Fondazione Caetani per gli Studi Musulmani has its headquarters at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, and continues to provide one of the best libraries and research centres on the Muslim world anywhere in the West. Today Italians such as Renato Traini, a specialist on Arabic manuscripts, and Angelo Piemontese, an authority on Persian language and literature, continue to uphold the great tradition of Italian scholarly interest in the Islamic world, a tradition dating back to the high noon of the Florentine Renaissance, when men such as Giovanni Pico sought inspiration from Arabic texts in order to understand better the wider world in which they lived.

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Italy

