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Gherardo Gnoli in a photo from the early 2010s.

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PREFACE

Gherardo Gnoli (Rome 1937 – Cagli 2012) was one of the most distinguished scholars of pre-Islamic Iran. From 1965 to 1993 he was Professor of Iranian Philology at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples (now L'Orientale University), of which he was also Rector from 1970 to 1978. Then, from 1993 to 2008 he was appointed Professor of the "Religious History of Iran and Central Asia" at the University of Rome La Sapienza, and Professor Emeritus since 2009. It was mainly due to Gherardo Gnoli's work and teaching that Iranian philology in Italy was able to grow into a distinct field of studies parallel to that of Persian studies. He was a member of many scientific academies. From 1979 to 1995, succeeding Giuseppe Tucci and Sabatino Moscati, he was President of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO) and since 1995 of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO). As President of the IsMEO, he contributed significantly to the expansion of Italian research work in Asia (after 1995 also in Africa) by increasing both the size of the related disciplines and the geographical areas involved. He was also a founding member of the Societas Iranologica Europaea (SIE), and it is not mere coincidence that, as long as the IsIAO was active, the official seat of the Societas was located at the Institute.

As Rector of the Istituto Universitario Orientale, he was the main promoter of a far reaching reform which was destined to transform an antiquated institution devoted to the study of a few languages and cultures of modern Asia and Africa into a modern, highly specialised university, in which the cultures of Asia and Africa were studied in their historical premises and modern developments, as well as in their interactions with European cultures.

Already in 2003 a number of his pupils and friends offered to Gherardo a volume on the occasion of his 65th birthday. The scope of this volume was restricted to only one of the main fields of interest of the dedicatee, viz. pre-Islamic Iranian religions approached from a historical and philological point of view; consequently the volume appeared as Religious themes and texts of pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia in the series "Beiträge zur Iranistik" of Reichelt Verlag directed by Nicholas Sims-Williams.

Approaching his seventy-fifth birthday, some friends insisted that the main Italian institutions in which Gherardo had been active should offer a volume of studies in his honour; and Gherardo, though somewhat reluctantly, admitted that

a volume connected with his name could be conceived only as a joint effort of L'Orientale University and IsIAO.

Major problems distracted the attention of Gherardo and his friends in the subsequent months, and during 2012 two sad events happened almost simultaneously, Gherardo's passing and the IsIAO dissolution by the Italian Berlusconi Government.

It was clear at this point that the projected volume should be realised. After the re-foundation of ISMEO as an International Association in 2012, it was decided that the new Association should join L'Orientale University in the project, that an international editorial board with fifteen leading Iranianists should be set up, and that the volume should be edited by Enrico Morano, Elio Provasi and Adriano V. Rossi, and the invitation to contribute should be circulated among senior colleagues and friends who had on occasions discussed with the dedicatee different questions of Iranian philology stricto sensu.

The present volume benefited from the collaboration and support of many people and institutions, above all L'Orientale University and ISMEO. We are deeply indebted to the colleagues and friends who readily accepted the invitation to join the editorial board of this volume; we profoundly miss the scheduled contributions by Werner Sundermann and Richard Frye; other colleagues, though unable to comply with our request for a contribution for different reasons, expressed their appreciation of the initiative. We are grateful to all colleagues who have contributed articles.

Enrico Morano
Elio Provasi
Adriano V. Rossi

A bibliography of the works (1961-2007) of Gherardo Gnoli has been published in *Bibliografia di Gherardo Gnoli pubblicata nella ricorrenza del suo 70^o compleanno il 6 dicembre 2007*, Roma, Aléxandros, 2007; all updates of the bibliography up to 2013 will be included in a second edition (in the press).