History of Religions in Italy: A Postscript

My short review, "History of Religions in Italy: The State of the Art" (History of Religions 20 [1981]: 253–62), has provoked a number of reactions from Italian scholars which, though positive on the whole, nevertheless contained several criticisms concerning the incompleteness and the methodological framework of my attempt.1 A postscript seemed necessary, in order to complete the review with data concerning those fields which for the most part had been neglected. However, once again I can but warn the reader—especially the Italian reader—that "it would be quite unrealistic to think that a survey such as the one we are attempting here could be exhaustive."2

I will start by mentioning several materials sent to me by authors already cited in my previous survey: U. Bianchi, D. M. Cosi, G. Filoramo, G. Piccaluga, S. Ribichini, G. Romanato, P. Scarpi, and

1 I have noticed two lapsi calami, and two others were pointed out by readers: p. 253, n. 1 (J. Waardenburg has published two articles entitled "Religionswissenschaft in Continental Europe"; the one that should have been mentioned appeared in Religion: Journal of Religion and Religions [August 1975], pp. 27–54); p. 258, n. 29 (a typographical error: the organizer of the congresses in philosophy of religions was A. Babolin only); p. 259, n. 38 (the translation of the Sāmkhyakārikā belongs to C. Pensà, first printing [1960]); p. 259, n. 42 (G. Tucci's Tibet ignoto is a new edition of his 1933 classic, translated into English by R. M. McBride in 1936, under the title of Shrines of a Thousand Buddhas).

2 See my article cited above, p. 255. Of more than 200 titles mentioned in my survey, several were books that I have reviewed extensively elsewhere; most of them were articles which I had received and read. Some of them, nevertheless, came to my attention only through bibliographies prepared for me by their authors, whom I wish to thank. A very few of them I had seen only briefly during my stays in Italy.
G. Sfameni-Gasparro. Since in my earlier review Italian orientalist studies were neglected for the most part, I will devote this “Postscript” to them.

Several studies in Indology and Tibetology, by O. Botto, C. Della Casa, R. Gnoli, L. P. Mishra, C. Pensà, S. Piano, M. Piantelli, and G. Tucci, either escaped my notice or were not mentioned because they did not fall within the chronological framework which I had set for my review (1975–spring 1979, when the survey was completed). However, the absence of important works on Iranian religions, mainly those of Gherardo Gnoli, director of both the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, Rome, and the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples (which publishes the important review, Annali...
dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale, cited hereafter as AION) represented one major shortcoming of my review. As far as Islamic studies are concerned, A. Bausani is still the leading figure in this field.

In my survey, I only mentioned the Istituto per le Scienze Religiose of Bologna, directed by G. Alberigo, which issues the series Testi e Ricerche di Scienze Religiose (containing mainly studies in the history of Christianity and related subjects) published by Paideia in Brescia. It would nevertheless be interesting to cite the names of the researchers of this institute, although most of them are historians of different periods of Christianity and/or theologians. This is true of A. Acerbi, G. Alberigo, G. Batteli, P. Bettiolo, P. C. Bori, M. Degli Innocenti, U. Mazzone, D. Menozzi, E. Norelli, L. Perrone, P. Pombeni, and G. Ruggeri. Mauro Pesce must be considered separately, since he is not only a specialist in the New Testament and primitive church but also one of the outstanding Italian Hebraists. Since the same M. Pesce published a bibliography of the Italian Hebraists in 1981, the task of reviewing publications in this field has become considerably easier. I will simply cite here, in alphabetical order, the authors mentioned by Pesce; for further details, his bibliography, as well as G. Romano's Bibliografia Italo-Ebraica, are recommended: S. Boesch Gajano, B. Chiesa, L. Cirillo, V. Colorni, C. Kraus Reggiani,


8 Their bibliographies are included in the booklet, "Associazione per lo Sviluppo delle Scienze Religiose in Italia. Istituto per le Scienze Religiose. Relazione conclusiva per il quadrennio 1977-78/1980-81" (Bologna, s.a.).


Another branch of oriental studies which I failed to mention is Coptology, in which Tito Orlandi occupies an outstanding international position. From 1978 to the present, he and his student G. Mantovani (with the occasional aid of A. Shisha-Halevy) published a very important and exhaustive review of Coptic studies published worldwide. This survey is well known to specialists in Coptic literature and art, as well as to scholars in Gnosticism.

Among the questions put to me by some Italian scholars who had read my review article, “History of Religions in Italy,” there were also three about methodology which require a short answer here. The first question was why I had not stressed the methodological differences between the various Italian “schools” in the history of religions (the school of the late A. Brelich in Rome, the school of U. Bianchi, the school of F. Bolgiani, etc.). Such an emphasis, as important as it might seem to Italian readers, is much less significant for an American reader, who needs, above all, bibliographical information. Nevertheless, some generic differences between directions in the Italian history of religions have not been neglected altogether—for example, between the “cultural” approach of G. Piccaluga or D. Sabbatucci (the latter being an Italian pioneer in political anthropology), the Marxist approach of E. De Martino’s disciples (although De Martino himself had been rather a historicist of the school of Croce than a Marxist), or the “typological” approach of U. Bianchi (not completely devoid of historico-cultural features).

The second question concerned the relation between history of religions and history of Christianity in Italy, the former being much less developed and influential than the latter. Historical reasons for that are too obvious to need further explanation. However, my intention was to review only studies in history of religions, not studies in history of Christianity, for which my competence is very limited.

The third question was of a merely pragmatic kind, namely, why “seniors” and “juniors” had been put together, giving the impression that all the studies I cited were of equal importance. I think that is not the case, but my intention was to draw a merely informative, not an axiological, list of works on subjects.

I hope that this postscript has largely fulfilled the purpose of completing and improving the data and the framework furnished by my previous survey. It is my opinion that perfection is beyond human reach, and an impersonal review like this one cannot meet everyone’s expectations. The limits and risks of an attempt of this kind should be obvious to anyone.

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