

L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

1

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THE ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS IN THE AMBROSIANA LIBRARY: A TREASURE FOR THE ARTS, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCES AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN CIVILIZATIONS

PIER FRANCESCO FUMAGALLI
Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

The article describes the revival of humanism in Milan during the Renaissance and at the Ambrosiana Library since the beginning of the XVII century, focusing on the new fundamental perspective and programme for the Oriental Studies and in particular on the collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts of the Ambrosiana Library.

Keywords: Ambrosiana, Oriental studies, Arabic manuscripts, Persian manuscripts, Intercultural dialogue.

1. *The revival of humanism in Milan during the Renaissance and at the Ambrosiana Library*

During the 17th century, Europe became a centre for Oriental studies and for collecting ancient books, documents and artifacts from the Middle and Far East, as well as from Africa and America. The humanistic movement and the Renaissance, fostered by Biblical and Talmudic studies, were among the roots of modern Europe, while the spiritual revolution of the Christian Reform, started in Wittenberg by Martin Luther in 1517, also challenged the Catholic Church in Mediterranean Europe, calling for a radical change in education and culture. Milan – where Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) worked for decades at the court of Ludovico il Moro – became a centre and a model for such a modern high education, thanks to its new College established by the Jesuits in Brera in 1572, following the example of the Collegio Romano. Not long afterwards, the enlightened Archbishop of Milano, Federico (1564-1631) – from the same noble Borromeo family of St. Charles – conceived the extraordinary new project of the Ambrosiana as a centre for arts, sciences and spiritual life. It was the same project as in other analogous cultural academies or university libraries, such as the Bodleian Library (1602), instituted by sir Thomas Bodley at Oxford University, or the Accademia dei Lincei (1603) instituted by Federico Cesi in Rome. The programme for research, which Federico established for the College of Doctors of the Ambrosiana, was open to all the world's philosophies, civilizations, languages and sciences¹.

¹ See *Storia dell'Ambrosiana*, I, *Il Seicento*, Cariplo, Milano 1992; II, *Il Settecento*, Cariplo, Milano 2000; III, *L'Ottocento*, Intesa BCI, Milano 2001; IV, *Il Novecento*, Intesa BCI, Milano 2002 (see in particular vol. I). A recent Latin-Italian edition of the first description of the Ambrosiana in the 17th century edited in 1618, is

2. *In the heart of Milan: the Ambrosiana*

Since its foundation, the Ambrosiana has been situated in the area where the Roman Forum once stood, Milan's centre for the last two thousand years. In the age of the late Roman Empire, Mediolanum was one of the four Imperial seats – together with Rome, Constantinople and Trier – and its Forum (55 x 160 meters wide) was the city's heart, commercial hub and gate open to the world. The original paving of the Forum is presently preserved both in the lower church of San Sepolcro (built at the end of the 10th century) as well as in the room housing the Ambrosiana Library, situated at ground floor level. San Sepolcro became the true centre of the city from both a civil and a spiritual point of view since the time of the Crusaders, ten centuries ago. The place is fascinating and highly evocative: it recalls the centre of the Roman city as well as the mysticism of Christ's Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, generating an architectonic and religious harmony where faith and cultures, arts and sciences all converge and mingle². Leonardo da Vinci used to come here to gather his ideas and make sketches for religious and civil architecture, collected for the most part in the *Codex Atlanticus* preserved in the Ambrosiana³. A few steps away, a great disciple of his, Bernardino Luini, in 1521-1522 frescoed the southern wall of the severe Renaissance hall of the Confraternity of the Pio Istituto di Santa Corona, in the context of the Dominican Cloister of Santa Maria della Rosa. The theme of the fresco – echoing the Sainte Chapelle of Paris – was Christ crowned with thorns (*Caput Christi spinis coronatum*) embellished with a series of grotesque heads inspired by Leonardo and esoteric allusions. Here, St. Charles Borromeo himself spent nights in devotion and penance praying for the Catholic Reformation of the Church, contemplated by the Council of Trent, and founded the Collegio degli Oblati for the sanctification of the Ambrosian Church.

3. *New Libraries for a New World*

A worthy successor of St. Charles, his cousin the Archbishop of Milan and Cardinal Federico Borromeo, turned to the same place of millenary memories when in 1595 he planned to found in Milan a multi-cultural institute that could vie with the most famous universities and

now available: G.F. Opicelli, *Memorie della Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, tr. by M. Rivoltella, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano 2018 (Fonti e Studi, 29).

² See P. Brambilla Barcilon – S. Abram – L.C. Schiavi, *San Sepolcro svelato*, Nomos Edizioni/Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano 2018.

³ See the recent exhibits' catalogues: *Fortezze, bastioni e cannoni. Fortresses, Bastions and Cannons*, P.C. Marani ed., Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Milano/Novara 2009; *La biblioteca, il tempo e gli amici di Leonardo. Leonardo's Library, Times and Friends*, E. Villata ed., Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Milano/Novara 2009; *L'architettura, le feste e gli apparati. Architecture, Festivities and Ephemeral Displays*, P. Cordera ed., Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Milano/Novara 2010; *Leonardo, la politica e le allegorie. Leonardo, Politics and Allegories*, M. Versiero ed., Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Milano/Novara 2010; *Le armi e le macchine da guerra: il De re militari di Leonardo. Disegni di Leonardo dal Codice Atlantico. Weapons and Machines of war: Leonardo's De re militari. Drawings by Leonardo from the Codex Atlanticus*, M. Landrused., Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Milano/Novara 2010.

academies in Europe. As a young man, Federico had received his education in Rome where he had had the possibility of appreciating the importance of the Vatican Library, created in 1451 by Pope Nicholas V for the public benefit of scholars. His formation had been inspired by a humanistic tradition open to ideas of spiritual reformation and scientific research. He found inspiration in the most advanced artistic and academic novelties existing at the time in Europe, viz. in France, England, Spain and Italy: in 1560, a library was opened to the public in Venice, in a new seat built by Sansovino hosting the collection bequeathed by Cardinal Bessarion; in 1563 in Spain, Philip II began the construction of El Escorial, where for decades Italian and Spanish artists would work together to create a splendid library. Federico also looked upon the example set by Sir Thomas Bodley in England who, in 1602, bought books from all over the world for his library, which he then donated to Oxford University at his death in 1613.

In Milan, a College of higher studies endowed with a rich library had just been opened in Brera in 1572 upon the initiative of the Jesuits. From that city, Archbishop Federico Borromeo cultivated friendships with Roman scientists, intellectuals and academics including Angelo Rocca, who at the time was opening his Angelica Library, and members of the Accademia dei Lincei, founded by Federico Cesi in 1603. Pope Clement VIII, finally granting the Archbishop's request, on 6th September 1604 ordered that 6,000 *scudi* from the Almo Collegio in Pavia should be used for the Ambrosiana Library and its Collegio dei Dottori. The construction of the splendid building took place between 30 June 1603 and August 1607 under the direction of Fabio Mangoni and Francesco Maria Richino. On 7th September 1607, the Collegio dei Dottori and the Library were formally established in order to provide a "universal service". With its opening to the public, on 8th December 1609, the "Immortal Library" (Fig. 1), as defined by Galileo Galilei in 1623, was born.

Figure 1 - *The Ambrosiana Library, South main Gate, 1607*



4. *An Academy for Beauty*

Harmony among Beauty, Truth and Faith was an ideal goal and a postulate deriving from the heritage of the Renaissance. Bearing this in mind, Cardinal Federico Borromeo had been one of the first to sustain the Accademia di San Luca, contemplated by Pope Gregory XIII in 1577 and inaugurated by Federico Zuccari in 1593. On his arrival in Milan as Archbishop, Borromeo had already decided to found an Art Academy, similar to those in Florence and Rome, and to connect it with his new Biblioteca Ambrosiana. In this new institution, aesthetical canons would merge with the novelties of scientific research and the more traditional historical and philosophical studies. Mentor of the Cardinal's program were Justus Lipsius, a professor in Louvain, Erycius Puteanus (Erick van de Put), a professor at the Palatine Schools in Milan, and artists such as the Brill brothers. After studying in 1613 the Statutes of the *Societas Pictorum* in Bologna, in 1618 Borromeo donated to the rising Academy his own extremely rich personal collection containing works by Raphael, Leonardo, Titian, Brueghel, Caravaggio and approximately one hundred others. At the same time, he entrusted Mangoni, the architect responsible for the much admired southern Library, to build the additional two northern halls for the Academy. These were completed between 1618 and 1621⁴.

5. *Dialogue between cultures and religions*

Cardinal Borromeo sent emissaries and letters to buy books all over the world, even in Arabia, China, Russia, Indies and Japan, as we can gather from his correspondence which reports on how many manuscripts and printed books arrived in Milan. Amongst these were the *Ilias Picta* painted codex of the 5th century, previously belonging to G.V. Pinelli, Petrarch's illuminated manuscript of *Vergil*, the Arabic *Kitāb al-Hayawān* [Encyclopedia of Zoology] by al-Īḏāḥiẓ, Giulio Aleni's Chinese map «萬國全圖» *Wàn Guó Quán Tú*, as well as the most ancient copies of the Hebrew *Bible* and the *Qur'ān*, which were all charged with the task of creating new occasions for dialogue between diverse cultures and religions, in order to stimulate encounters amongst artists, scientists and believers. The first Prefect of the Ambrosiana, Antonio Olgiato, himself visited the bookshops of Northern Europe in the spring of the year 1607, and in Amsterdam found the first Chinese book for the library⁵. Together

⁴ See the recent catalogues of the Art Gallery: *Dipinti dal medioevo alla metà del Cinquecento*, P.C. Marani – B.W. Meijer – M. Rossi – A. Rovetta ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2005; *Dipinti dalla metà del Cinquecento alla metà del Seicento*, B.W. Meijer – M. Rossi – A. Rovetta ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2006; *Dipinti dalla metà del Seicento alla fine del Settecento. Ritratti*, S. Coppa – M. Rossi – A. Rovetta ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2007; *Dipinti dell'Ottocento e del Novecento. Le miniature*, L. Caramel – F. Mazzocca – M. Rossi – A. Rovetta – F. Tedeschi ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2008; *Raccolte archeologiche. Sculture*, L. Caramel – F. Mazzocca – M. Rossi – A. Rovetta – F. Tedeschi ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2009; *Collezione Settala e Litta Modignani. Arti applicate da donazioni diverse. Numismatica*, A. Rovetta ed., Mondadori Electa, Milano 2010.

⁵ Cfr. P.F. Fumagalli, *Sinica Federiciana. Il Fondo Antico dell'Ambrosiana*, 78, "Aevum", 3, 2004, pp. 725-771.

with these pioneers, the library hosted the experts who were engaged in collecting, cataloguing and studying the fruits of these efforts; to disseminate their work they adopted the best and most modern media at their disposal, viz. figurative arts, literature and printing, even an Oriental printing house. The fame of the Ambrosiana was such that it attracted exceptional donations, such as Leonardo's manuscripts – including the *Codex Atlanticus* – a gift from Galeazzo Arconati in 1637 and in 1751-1755 the marvellous *Musaeum Septalianum* by Manfredo Settala.

6. *The Ambrosiana and Oriental Studies: a new fundamental perspective and programme*

The founder of the Ambrosiana in the years 1603-1609 wrote a *Memorandum* with the guidelines for the work of the Doctors of the Ambrosiana College, recommending that

Vicino a questa fatica [di fare le Grammatiche e i Dizionari di lingue straniere come l'Araba, la Persiana, l'Armena] ve n'è un'altra curiosa et insieme utile, mentre si darà alle stampe tutti gl'Alfabeti delle lingue straniere nobili, aggiungendovi regole per il leggere [...] In somiglianti linguaggi non è poco il sapere almeno leggere, et l'uno dall'altro distinguere, et riconoscerlo. L'opera sarà più compita se si aggiungeranno le lingue dell'Indie, et quelle del Mondo nuovo all'altre barbare che si sapevano, come Araba, Siriaca, etc.⁶

The Archbishop requested the College to accomplish another more universal task, asking for a general world bibliography:

42° loco. Non credo, che alcuno sin'hora habbia esposto il Catalogo compito de i libri, Siriaci, né Arabi, né pure Hebrei; De gli Armani, degli Illirici, de i Persiani, de i Chinesi, de gli Indiani, non ve ne è quasi cognitione. Et pure utile sarà la fatica. Massimamente se non sarà puro, et semplice Indice, ma che si dia ragguaglio, et mezzana Cognitione della qualità del libro, et di che cosa egli parla. Vi sono parimente quelli che sono in uso presso al Prete Janni. Et quelli de' Moscoviti, et de Tartari? Né questa sarà impossibile impresa. Et se alcun' libro non si potesse avere, si habbi di esso una fedele relatione. Né Tolomeo il Grande, poté vedere tutti quanti i luoghi, che egli descrisse nelle sue Tavole⁷.

⁶ Ambr. Z 109 sup., f. 90r-v: "beside the hard work for writing Grammars and Dictionaries of foreign languages such as Arabic, Persian and Armenian, another interesting and useful work will be to publish all the Alphabets and spelling rules of all the noble foreign languages. [...] In such a field, it is important to know, at least, how to read and to distinguish one language from another. To complete the work, one should add Indian and American new languages to the ancient ones that we already know, such as Arabic, Syriac, etc."; cfr. *Appendice* to the article by C. Marcora, *Manoscritti ed edizioni delle "Constitutiones Collegii ac Bibliothecae Ambrosianae"*, in *Accademia di San Carlo. Inaugurazione dell'8° Anno Accademico*, Cappelli, Bologna 1986, p. 170, cit. in E. Galbiati, *L'orientalistica nei primi decenni di attività*, in *Storia dell'Ambrosiana, I: Il Seicento*, p. 91 and footnote 5.

⁷ Ambr. Z 109 sup., f. 103r: "art. 42. I don't think, that until now anyone has drawn up the complete catalogue of the Syriac, Arabic and Hebrew books; almost nothing is known on the Armenian, Turkish, Persian, Chinese

The founder of the Ambrosiana himself, Archbishop Federico Borromeo, was inspired by an “incredibile passione per gli studi orientali”⁸, including the Arabic language, Islamic culture, politics and religion. The Ambrosiana collection of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew manuscripts is consistent with its orientations and with the contemporary efforts for diplomatic relations, developed under the pontificate of pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), in particular with the Persian Shah ‘Abbas I (1581-1629)⁹. Federico in his Latin book, printed in 1626, affirmed that Western culture originated from and depends on Eastern and Asian ancient civilizations:

Anche gli autori di scienze non ecclesiastiche dovrebbero convenire sul fatto, che le nazioni europee hanno accolto più tardi le leggi e le tradizioni civili, ricevendole dai popoli asiatici, perciò i popoli occidentali sono stati educati da quelli orientali¹⁰.

He continued his reflections on Islam, balancing severe critics, but also adding some positive assessment, since God tolerated Islam in view of the contest against polytheism and idolatry:

Dio ha tollerato la setta maomettana, per distogliere i pagani dal culto degli idoli, e perché il male peggiore venisse meno fino a scomparire del tutto, grazie al male minore... Dio volle recare al mondo un rimedio, così che il maggior male non fosse accolto¹¹.

and Indian books. It will be a very useful work, too. Especially, if it will be not only a mere Index, but also adding information and a general description of its contents and topics. There are also the books of Jean the Priest [i.e. Ethiopian]. And what about the books of Russians and of Tartars? It will not be an impossible task. And if it will not be possible to buy a book, at least we should have a faithful abstract of it. Nor was Ptolemy the Great able to see all the regions that he described in his Maps”, see: *Appendice* to the article by C. Marcora, *Manoscritti ed edizioni delle “Constitutiones Collegii ac Bibliothecae Ambrosianae”*, p. 179.

⁸ “incredibilem ardorem amplificandarum litterarum omnium, et praecipue Orientalium patefecit”, in A. Giggi, *Thesaurus Linguae Arabicae*, Ex Ambrosiani Collegii Typographia, Milano 1632, p. [2], cit. in P. Branca, *Gli interessi arabistici del cardinal Federico Borromeo nel quadro dello sviluppo degli studi orientali durante il Seicento*, “Studia Borromaica”, 16, 2002, pp. 330, 333, footnote 13.

⁹ See the documents quoted by A.M. Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d’Italia*, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Roma 1989 (Indici e Cataloghi, Nuova Serie, XV), pp. 98-99; 128-29; 173.

¹⁰ F. Borromeo, *De selectis divinarum rerum probationibus libri septem*, [Biblioteca Ambrosiana], Milano 1626- [1627], Lib. II, p. 304: “Authors of non-ecclesiastical sciences should also agree on the fact that European nations adopted civil laws and traditions later, receiving them from the Asian peoples, so in fact the western peoples were civilized by the eastern peoples”. This book – out of the total of seven books that were envisaged by the author – remained unfinished at Lib. III, published in 1627: see F. Buzzi, *Il corpus delle opere di Federico Borromeo stampate in vita e conservate all’Ambrosiana (1616-1631)*, 15, “Studia Borromaica”, 2001, 50, p. 117.

¹¹ F. Borromeo, *De selectis*, Lib. I, pp. 93-94: “God tolerated the Mohammedan sect in order to distract the pagans from the cult of idols and so that the greater evil should gradually disappear altogether, thanks to the lesser evil... God wanted to give the world a remedy so that the greater evil would not be accepted”.

In conclusion, it seems that Federico appreciated a theological motivation for the contemporary Muslim political and religious power: “esporremo... alcune ragioni, per cui Dio tolleri e permetta che questo impero continui tanto a lungo”¹².

After some consideration on the political dynastic crisis in 1622, culminating with the assassination of Sultan Osman II¹³, Federico expressed consideration in favour of the stability of the Osman power, a judgement that anticipated in some way the appraisal by Prince Leone Caetani (1869-1935), a strong opponent to Fascism¹⁴. Borromeo regarded the young Osman candidate as Sultan with favour (perhaps Murat IV, that he met in Rome as a child), who might be more open to the Church (“più favorevole verso la Chiesa”)¹⁵. In fact, in the year 1628 under Murat IV (1623-1640), the Jesuits developed a project for opening a College in Istanbul, and in his posthumous book *Meditamenta Litteraria*, Federico expressed the wish that his Catechism *Lux matutina* be translated into Persian and Arabic¹⁶.

7. *The first Arabic studies at the Ambrosiana*

Teaching of the Arabic language started in France in 1587, in Leiden in 1599, in Milan (Ambrosiana) in 1609, in Cambridge in 1632 and in Oxford in 1634; analogous initiatives flourished in Denmark, Germany, Tuscany, Rome and so on. Under Spanish rule, Milan enjoyed opportunities for economic and cultural exchanges with Eastern countries, thanks to its port of Genova, connected with Spain and Portugal and open to African, Indian, and Chinese ports for naval commerce. At the same time, the exceptional geographical location of Milan fostered relations with Northern Europe, and with central Asia through Venice towards Istanbul. In this framework, we should consider the important place that the programme for Oriental Studies received in the Ambrosiana¹⁷. The research for manuscripts was part of the programmes, to serve teachers and students. Milan soon became a centre for Oriental studies, thanks

¹² F. Borromeo, *De selectis*, Lib. II, p. 188: “we shall illustrate... some reasons for which God tolerates and allows this empire to continue so long”.

¹³ Cfr. J. Matuz, *Das Osmanische Reich. Grundlinien seiner Geschichte*, WBG Academic, Darmstadt 1994³, p. 166.

¹⁴ Cfr. F. Gabrieli, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 16, 1973, pp. 185-188.

¹⁵ F. Borromeo, *De selectis*, Lib. I, p. 97.

¹⁶ F. Borromeo, *Meditamenta litteraria*, [Biblioteca Ambrosiana], [Milano] 1633, p. 108.

¹⁷ See in particular: E. Galbiati, *L'orientalistica nei primi decenni di attività*, in *Storia dell'Ambrosiana*, I: *Il Settecento*, pp. 89-120; P.F. Fumagalli, *L'orientalistica all'Ambrosiana nel Settecento*, *Ibid.*, II: *Il Settecento*, pp. 167-203; *Id.*, *Raccolte significative di manoscritti: Mosè Lattes, fondo Trotti, Giuseppe Caprotti*, *Ibid.*, III: *L'Ottocento*, pp. 167-211. On Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts see: O. Löfgren – R. Traini, *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, vol. I, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 1975 (Fontes Ambrosiani 51); vol. II, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 1981 (Fontes Ambrosiani, 66); vol. III, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 1995 (Fontes Ambrosiani, n.s. 2); R. Traini, *Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. Nuovo Fondo, Series F-H (Nos. 1296-1779)*, vol. IV, Silvana Editoriale, Milano 2011. General information on the Arabic manuscript collection may be found in *Arabic Homilies on the Nativity*, tr. by S. Noja Nosedà, P.F. Fumagalli ed., Silvana Editoriale, Milano 2000 (Fontes Ambrosiani, n.s., 3), pp. 55-56; G. Borgonovo – P.F. Fumagalli, *The Old Col-*

to the books collected from Istanbul, Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Cairo. Selected manuscripts and books printed in Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Syriac and Turkish covered topics of all matters: sciences and religion, medicine and astrology, history and mathematics, philosophy and politics. Other experts and librarians visited Mediterranean and North European book-markets in order to effect purchases.

In his enthusiastic presentation of the Arabic manuscripts of the Ambrosiana, Jan Just Witkam asked the rhetoric question:

Where does one start when describing the Arabic manuscripts in the Ambrosiana library? It is not only a history of an institution and of books but also a history of people bringing the books in and reading and using them. From its very inception, in 1609, the Ambrosian Library has possessed an impressive collection of Arabic manuscripts, a few of Christian content, the majority coming from the Islamic realm¹⁸.

The first expert of the Ambrosiana College for Arabic studies was the Doctor Antonio Giggi (ca. 1580-1634), who published in 1632 an Arabic *Thesaurus Lingua Arabicae* in four volumes¹⁹, and his work was followed by his disciple the Doctor Giacomo Filippo Buzzi (d. 1677). Between the years 1609 and 1613, the Lebanese priest Michel Marun (Michele Maronita, d. 1613) assisted the Doctors and the archbishop in the Syriac studies and in buying books in the Eastern Mediterranean area²⁰. In the year 1629, the Scottish priest David Colville (ca. 1581-1629) arrived in Milan, only a few months before his death. He was an expert in Greek, Syriac and Arabic and became a friend of Giggi; after his death the Arabic manuscripts he copied in the Escorial Library were included in the Ambrosiana collection²¹. The Ancient Fund of Arabic manuscripts included Islamic sciences and Christian codices as well, such as the *Pentaglottus* (B 20 inf.). Among the scientific manuscripts are the two splendid illuminated texts of the aforementioned *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* by al-Ġāḥiẓ and the so-called *Symposium medicorum* by Ibn Buṭlān. During the 18th century, biblical studies were cultivated by Doctors Giovanni Battista Branca (1722-1799)²² and Gaetano Bugati (1745-1816)²³; in the College of the Ambrosiana; the Oriental studies also included the Armenian and Syriac languages, and the major expert in this field, Antonio Maria

lection of Arabic Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, in *Arabic Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, Ambrosiani Collegii Doctores ed., photographer Alfredo Dagli Orti, FMR-Art'è, Bologna 2009.

¹⁸ J.J. Witkam, *The Arabic manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, in *Gli studi orientalistici in Ambrosiana nella cornice del IV centenario (1609-2009)*, C. Baffioni – R.B. Finazzi – A. Passoni Dell'Acqua – E. Vergani ed., Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Bulzoni Editore, Milano/Roma 2012 (Accademia Ambrosiana, Orientalia Ambrosiana, 1), p. 35.

¹⁹ A. Giggi, *Thesaurus Linguae Arabicae*, Ex Ambrosiani Collegii Typographia, Milano 1632.

²⁰ E. Galbiati, *L'orientalistica nei primi decenni di attività*, pp. 101-111.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²² See A. Petrucci in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 13, 1971, pp. 759-760.

²³ See A. Paredi in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 15, 1972, pp. 4-5.

Ceriani (1828-1907)²⁴, published the *Peshitta* (ms. B 21 inf.). Ceriani welcomed and encouraged the young Eugenio Griffini in his Arabic studies, who played a major role in the donation of the Yemenite collection of manuscripts by Giuseppe Caprotti to the Ambrosiana in 1909.

8. *Persian manuscripts in the Ambrosiana*

Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts were purchased on Federico's behalf in Istanbul, Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Cairo and thus represent different cultural traditions, from the Turkish-Ottoman to the Iraqi and Egyptian traditions. The Persian codices in the Ambrosiana that have been examined so far number in all forty-one, nearly all of which have been catalogued by A.M. Piemontese, apart from two belonging to the Fondo Trotti and another two with works by A. Giggi²⁵. Prior to the recent catalogues by Piemontese, Löfgren and Traini, information on these manuscripts was to be found scattered amongst scholars in general who had mainly dealt with the cataloguing of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts, starting from the meritorious Viennese Baron Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), an orientalist and diplomat, who was already famed as the author, in 1820, of the catalogue of the *Codices Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Bibliothecae Caesareo-Regio-Palatinae Vindobonensis*, and, again in Vienna in 1854, had published his seven volumes on *Literaturgeschichte der Araber*.

In the cataloguing, the term "Ancient Fund" is widespread, indicating a part of the oriental manuscripts that constituted the original collection amassed by Federico, with some additions made shortly after, but this indication is sometimes to be judged with caution and in some cases appears less appropriate; in fact, other codices were added subsequently to the Persian collection dating back to the time of Federico, most of which were originally part of the Caprotti collection, which was received into the Ambrosiana Library at the beginning of the twentieth century²⁶.

As well as the Ambrosiana, the National Libraries Braidense and Trivulziana in Milan also preserve precious richly-illuminated Persian manuscripts²⁷. The Persian manuscripts which are certified as belonging to the Ancient Fund can be recognised both from some original notes from the time and also because of their characteristic pressmarks: overall there are approximately twenty extremely ancient and important codices. Apart from only two exceptions from the fourteenth century, these works have all been copied between 1501 (C 37 inf.; & 53 sup.) and 1601 circa (& 130

²⁴ See F. Parente in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 23, 1979, pp. 737-743.

²⁵ A.M. Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani conservati nelle biblioteche d'Italia* (Indici e Cataloghi, Nuova Serie, XV; Indices and Catalogues, New Series, XV), Rome 1989, pp. 145-175, nn. 174-210 (describes 37 manuscripts); P.F. Fumagalli, *Iranica Ambrosiana*, in "Quaderni Asiatici", 22, 2005, pp. 33-41.

²⁶ There are 13 manuscripts, corresponding to the present pressmarks A 121 ar., C 8 ar., C 21 ar., F 281 ar., H 149 ar., H 151-153 ar., H 156-159 ar., e H 162 ar., all of which are completely or in part Persian.

²⁷ Cfr. A.M. Piemontese, *Catalogo dei manoscritti persiani*, pp. 176-180, nn. 211-214.

sup.; N 247 sup.; B 7 sup.). As to their content, they may be divided into two more numerous categories as well as a third minor one, according to a criterion which seems to correspond appropriately to the cultural interests of the founder and of the first Doctors of the Ambrosiana. If in fact we consider separately the Christian texts (B 7 sup., C 8 inf., N 247 inf.) and an unparalleled miscellany of divinatory art dating back to the end of the fourteenth century (& 30 sup), the remaining sixteen Persian manuscripts from Federico's fund appear to be equally divided amongst the codices of varying literary content and works of a lexicographic and linguistic nature. Amongst the literary texts appear famous poems such as the *Būstān* and the *Gulīstān* by Sa'dī da Šīrāz, whilst amidst the dictionaries and lexica we can find unique examples such as the Persian-Turkish miscellany *Miftāḥ al-adab* [The key to culture] by Muḥahhar b. Abī Ṭālib (& 13 sup./1), or the ancient specimen of a Persian dictionary of Arabic by al-Zawṣānī, *Kitāb al-Maṣādir* (& 79 sup.), which can be dated back to the fourteenth century. Some of these manuscripts are decorated or illuminated (& 155 sup.), while others have preserved their original ancient oriental bindings. A small separate group, not less significant, comprises three Christian codices, all containing the Gospel according to Matthew in Persian; two of these were copied in 1598 and 1601 by Tūmā Ğān, an Armenian from Aleppo, formerly a pupil at the Collegio dei Neofiti in Rome. In some cases, the Persian manuscripts, which entered the Ambrosiana in the early years, bear notes in Latin that confirm not only the time of their purchase but also their provenance, such as: "Canginah Dictionarium Arabicum ex Aegypto" (C 37 inf.), or "est in Bibliotheca ab huius origine" (A 9 sup.). Soon to be added to these first twenty codices were another four manuscripts, which were the result of the early Persian studies carried out in the Ambrosiana: two of them were catalogued by Piemontese (A 56 inf., & 22 sup.) and the second was donated in 1638 by Francesco Rivola. Another two codices by Giggi, not described in the printed catalogue, contain respectively a *Vocabulatum persico latinum desumptum ex Golistan, Opus imperfectum* (A 66 suss.) and the great work *Gaza persica, sive apparatus linguae persicae, imperfecta ed partim transcribenda* (D 204 inf.): the collection of the three manuscripts by the Orientalist Doctor reveals his study and publication plan which, after the Arabic dictionary, envisaged the preparation of a Persian dictionary.

This happy beginning unfortunately was not followed by substantial developments or further studies of Persian texts, except for the occasional gift by the Count G.B. Luini Passalacqua of a splendid illuminated Persian manuscript, the *Tuḥfat al-aḥrār* by Ğāmī (S.P.10), bearing an ex-libris by L. Arrigoni, which became part of the library on 5th February 189²⁸. Furthermore, two other manuscripts were added in 1907, with the collection of 443 codices, which the princess Maria Trotti Belgioioso and her husband, the Marquis Ludovico Trotti Bentivoglio, donated to the Ambrosiana: a miscellany from the seventeenth century with documents of a theological, philosophical and Sufi nature in Arabic, Persian and Turkish, studied by Griffini (Trotti

²⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 180, pp. 151-152; the indication of belonging to the "Ancient Fund" (p. 148, tav. I) would appear, in this case not to be pertinent.

499) and the work *Gulšam-i-Rāz* [The secret Garden] by Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Yaḥyā al- Šabistārī (Trotti 507). A certain number of Persian texts came to light in 1909, through the purchase of a collection of 1610 Yemenite manuscripts in the collection of Giuseppe Caprotti, procured by the Prefect Achille Ratti, thanks to the intelligent mediation of the milanese Eugenio Griffini (1878-1925), an Arabist with a precocious talent who yearned for the institution of a chair for Arabic studies in Milan. There were thirteen Persian codices²⁹, of various literary, religious and linguistic genres; scattered within the immense Arabic Yemenite collection, their entrance in the Ambrosiana happened by chance rather than because of a methodical search. Amongst them attention must be drawn to *Gulšan i taubīd* [The Fruit and Vegetable Market of the divine being] by Šāhidī, maybe written in the years 1533-35 (H 153 ar.). The last acquisition in terms of time is an album of calligraphy and painting (S.P.10 bis), originating from the book collection of the sculptor Lodovico Pogliaghi (1857-1950), which became part of the Ambrosiana library in 1969³⁰. This work may possibly be attributed to Murtaḍā Qulī Xān Šāmlū (m. 1689), a calligrapher poet and functionary, the son of the governor of Herat under the Safavid Shah ‘Abbas I, which thus takes us back to the time of the beginnings of the Ambrosiana Iranic collection.

9. *The Ambrosiana Arabic manuscripts today*

At the beginning of the 20th century, under the Prefect Achille Ratti (later Pope Pius XI, 1921-1939), the Ambrosiana Arabic collection came to include the Caprotti collection, enriched by thousands of Yemenite manuscripts, thus becoming the largest bibliotheca of this kind in Europe. In the 20th century Giovanni Galbiati (1881-1966)³¹ and Rodolfo Enrico Galbiati (1914-2004)³² cultivated Eastern studies, assisted by the young arabist Sergio Noja.

The entire Arabic fund, divided into the so-called *Antico Fondo*, *Medio Fondo* and *Nuovo Fondo*, was catalogued in part by Eugenio Griffini Bey (1878-1925) and then in a completely modern way by Oscar Löfgren and Renato Traini. According to the Prefect of the Ambrosiana, Angelo Paredi, who in 1975 promoted the publication of the entire Catalogue by Löfgren and Traini, another important collection had been added to the Ambrosiana library in 1914, when Luca Beltrami donated 180 Arabic manuscripts; years later Griffini bequeathed his own library to the Ambrosiana, including a group of 56 Arabic manuscripts which he had gathered in Tunisia and Algeria. Subsequent endowments were made by various donors: Nosedà, Zoli, Fagiuoli, Gallarati Scotti. In the first volume of the Catalogue, published in 1975, Löfgren described 357 manuscripts of the *Antico Fondo* and *Medio Fondo*, divided into Section A, Chris-

²⁹ See footnote 25.

³⁰ Cf. M. Navoni, *Lodovico Pogliaghi e l'Ambrosiana*, in *Storia dell'Ambrosiana. Il Novecento*, pp. 265-266.

³¹ See P.F. Fumagalli, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 71, 1998, pp. 371-373.

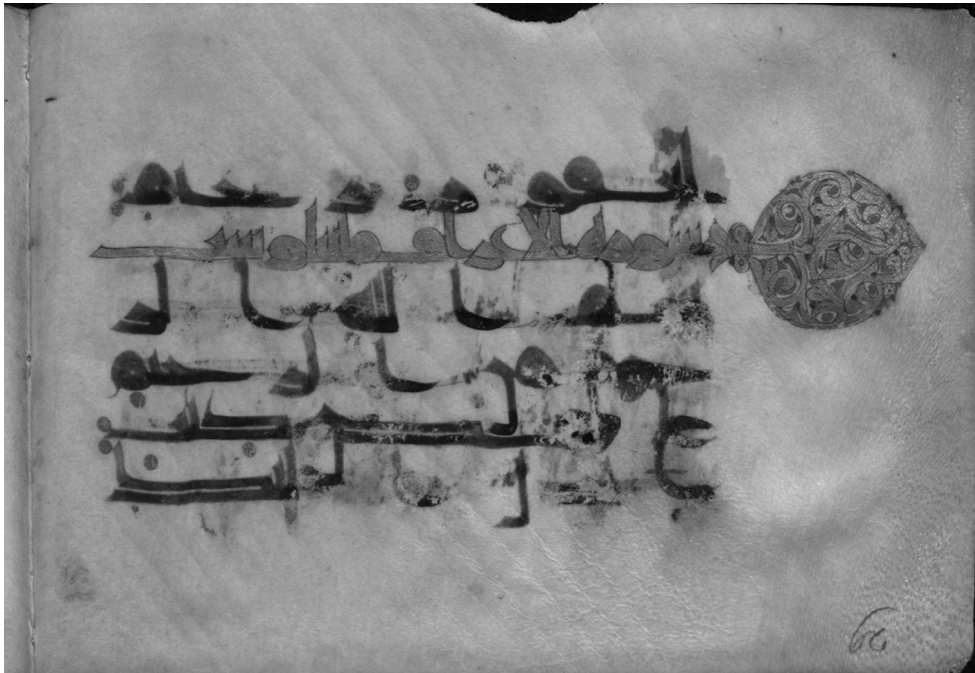
³² See *Enrico Rodolfo Galbiati. Un Maestro*, M. Adinolfi – A. Passoni Dell'Acqua ed., Portalupi, Casale Monferrato 2004.

tian texts (36 manuscripts, nn. I-XXXV bis) and Section B, Islamic manuscripts (321 manuscripts, nn. XXXVI-CCCLVI). The Ambrosian heritage is now studied and advanced by the Ambrosiana Academy, which was renovated by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola in 2014, to include eight Classes of studies: African, Ambrosian, Borromaic, Far Eastern, Italian, Latin and Greek, Near Eastern and Slavic, publishing eight series of academic volumes each year (see: www.ambrosiana.it).

10. *Art, Faith and Sciences in Ambrosian Arabic Manuscripts*

In their remarkable Catalogue, both O. Löfgren and R. Traini paid great attention to the wonderful illuminated manuscripts of the Ambrosiana Arabic collection. Among the beautiful illuminated codices of the *Qur'ān*, the magnificent text in Kufic calligraphy (Fig. 2 and 6bis, detail), written on parchment in the 8th-9th century (ms. & 35 sup., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. XLVIII) is to be found.

Figure 2 - *Illuminated Qur'ān on parchment, Kufic calligraphy*



(ms. & 35 sup., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. XLVIII) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

Another example of close cooperation between artists and scholars is the illuminated manuscript of the Mamluk period, 15th century, of the *Kitāb al-Hayawān* (Fig. 3) by 'Amr bin Bahr al-Ġāhiz (ms. D 140 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. CXXX).

Figure 3 - *Kitāb al-Hayawān* by 'Amr b. Bahr al-Ġāhiz

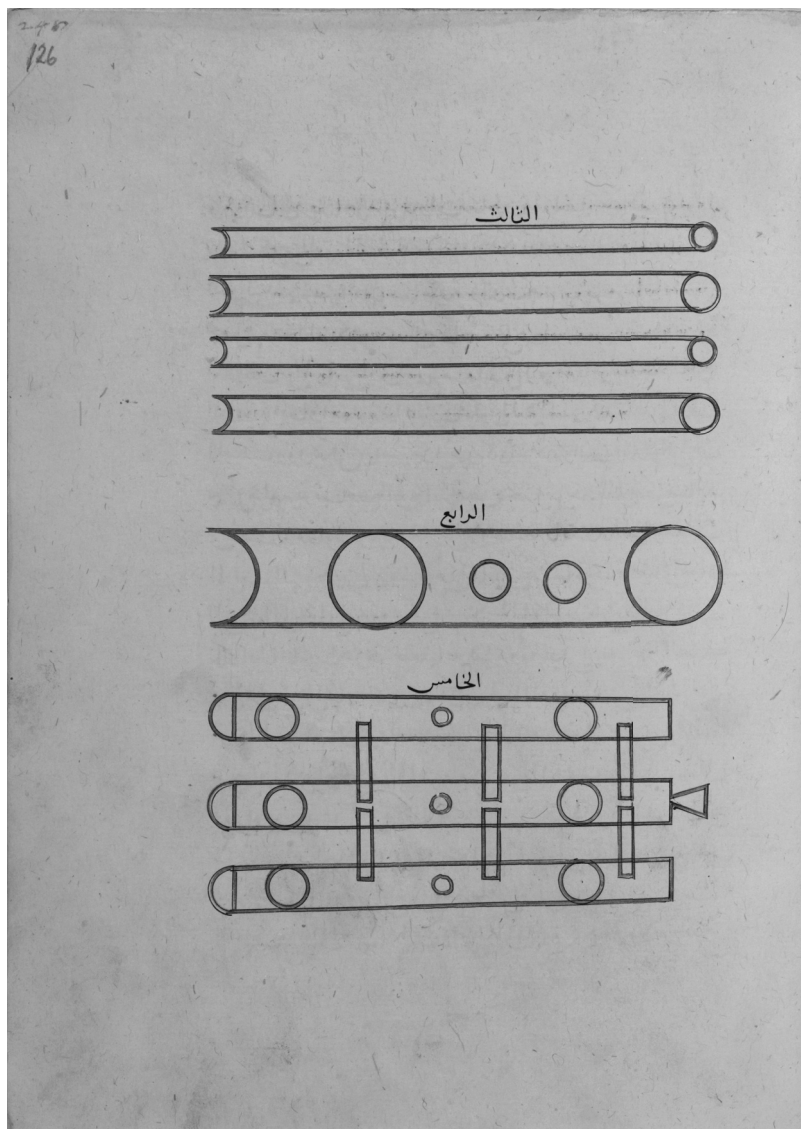
(ms. Ambr. D 140 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. CXXX) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

With regard to medical matters, the Ambrosiana owns an illustrated manuscript by the Christian scholar Ibn Buṭlān (Fig. 4), copied in Alexandria in the year 1273 (ms. A 125 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. LXX).

Figure 4 - *al-Muḥtār b. Ḥasan ibn Buṭlān, Risālat Da'wat al-aṭibba'*

(ms. Ambr. A 125 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. LXX) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

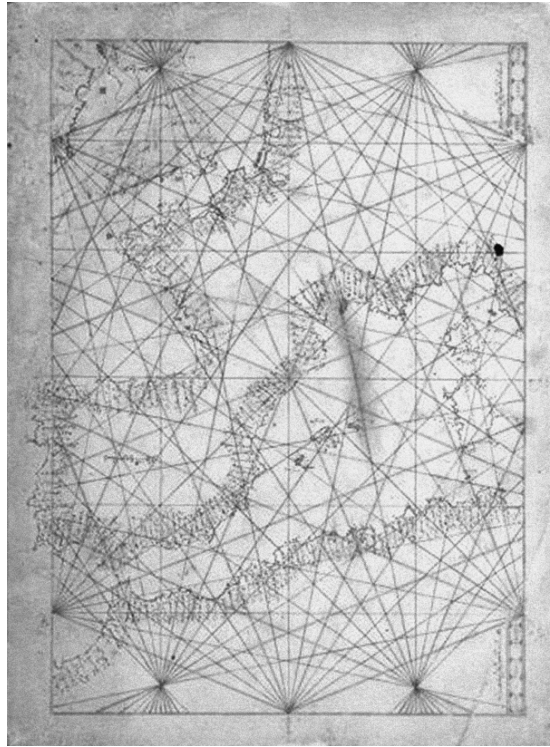
As a last – but not the least important – example, let us consider the *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* by al-Fārābī (Fig. 5), copied in the year 1347 (C 40 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. CXII).

Figure 5 - *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* by al-Fārābī

(ms. Ambr. C 40 inf., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. CXII) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

Of course, beside the manuscripts, the Ambrosiana is rich in many other Arabic treasures, such as the very ancient *Portolano* (Fig. 6)³³:

³³ P. Revelli, *I codici ambrosiani di contenuto geografico con XX tavole fuori testo*, Luigi Alfieri, Milano 1929 (Fontes Ambrosiani, Series Prima, I), pp. 181-182, Nr. 532 (Ambr. S.P.II.259). The Arabs were concerned with the need for developing in detail and updating the network of sea routes in Mediterranean-Atlantic trade and political rule, as we can see in the most ancient sea ports (*Portolano arabo*) of the Ambrosiana, probably copied

Figure 6 - *Portolano arabo*

(Ambr. S.P.II.259) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

11. *Modern technology, recent scholarly research and continuous donations*

In order to facilitate scholarly research, the Ambrosiana Academy, was re-established in the year 2008 as a third branch of the Ambrosiana, with a new Statute, in which a Section for Arabic Studies was instituted. The results of the recent academic work are regularly edited in the *Orientalia Ambrosiana* Series (vol. 1-5, 2012-2016, Bulzoni-Ambrosiana)³⁴. Among the many positive results of these studies, encouraged and promoted by the Ambrosiana Academy, one can consider the research on the *Porphyrius Ambrosianus*³⁵, and in 2011 the publication of the fourth volume of the Catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts of the Ambrosiana was

around 1300 in Fez: see V. Martínez Enamorado, *Carta Magrebina*, in *Ibn Jaldún, El Mediterráneo en el siglo XIV: auge y declive de los Imperios*; exposición en el Real Alcázar de Sevilla, Mayo-Septiembre 2006; catálogo de piezas, Fundación José Manuel Lara/Fundación El Legado Andalusi, [s.l.] 2006, pp. 32-33.

³⁴ See G. Borgonovo, *Gli studi orientalistici in Ambrosiana all'epoca del cardinal Federico*, in *Gli studi orientalistici in Ambrosiana nella cornice del IV centenario (1609-2009)*, C. Baffioni – R.B. Finazzi – A. Passoni Dell'Acqua – E. Vergani ed., Biblioteca Ambrosiana – Bulzoni Editore, Milano/Roma 2012 (Accademia Ambrosiana, *Orientalia Ambrosiana* 1), pp. 173-187.

³⁵ C. Baffioni, *The "Porphyrius Ambrosianus" and the role of logic in the Iḥwān aş-Şafāʿ*, in *Gli studi orientalistici in Ambrosiana nella cornice del IV centenario (1609-2009)*, pp. 47-76.

welcomed as a new beginning in Arabic studies³⁶. The opening of a Class for African Studies in 2014 facilitated new research in this field, as illustrated by Paolo Nicelli and Adel Sidarus among others³⁷.

Digitalization of the entire Arabic manuscripts collection was completed, and we are now considering the following steps to be taken, with a view to open access for consultation. In the meantime, the Ambrosiana Library on-line Catalogue has gained worldwide access (<http://ambrosiana.comperio.it/studi-sul-catalogo/>). More recently, we accepted a new private donation of Eastern manuscripts and books, including Arabic manuscripts; furthermore, we have also received from the family of the late professor Renato Traini (1923-2014), himself a founder of the Class of Near Eastern Studies at the Ambrosiana in 2009, the donation of his entire library and archives. This collection was only in part catalogued by prof. Ali Faraj, Ad-joint Doctor of the College of the Ambrosiana. Finally, many of the Arabic manuscripts were restored, and all are kept in safe rooms under rigorous climate control of humidity (50%) and temperature (20° C). In conclusion, I suggest that we could apply to the extraordinary richness of the Ambrosian Arabic collection the hadith that Ibn Manzūr referred to Sufyān ibn ‘Uyayna, (d. 811), comparing the richness of the verses of the Qur’ān to a mysterious treasure: إِذَا دَخَلْتَ خَزَانَةَ فَاجْتَهِدْ أَنْ لَا تَخْرُجَ مِنْهَا حَتَّى تَعْرِفَ مَا فِيهَا [When you enter in a secret Treasure, be attentive not to exit until you discovered what it contains] (Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘arab* s.v. *kh z n*). This quotation was placed in 1909 by wish of Achille Ratti, Prefect of the Ambrosiana, later to become Pope Pius XI, and can still be read above the entrance of the Ambrosian Library.

Figure 6bis - *Illuminated Qur’ān on parchment (detail of the decoration)*



(ms. & 35 sup., Löfgren-Traini vol. I, nr. XLVIII) © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana

³⁶ R. Traini, *Prologo alla presentazione del vol. IV del Catalogo*, in *āl-Gāzālī (1058-1111). La prima stampa armena. Yehūdā ha-Lēvī (1075-1141). La ricezione di Isacco di Ninive*, C. Baffioni – R.B. Finazzi – A. Passoni Dell’Acqua – E. Vergani ed., Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Bulzoni Editore, Milano/Roma 2013 (Accademia Ambrosiana, Orientalia Ambrosiana, 2), pp. 13-16; J.J. Witkam, *Achievement: An End and a New Beginning. In praise of Renato Traini’s Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, *Ibid.*, pp. 37-52.

³⁷ P. Nicelli, *Manoscritti dell’Africa araba, etiopica e copta di Federico Borromeo, letti e catalogati da Enrico Rodolfo Galbiati ed Eugenio Griffini*, in *L’Africa, l’oriente mediterraneo e l’Europa. Tradizioni e culture a confronto*, P. Nicelli ed., Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Bulzoni Editore, Milano/Roma 2015 (Accademia Ambrosiana, Africana Ambrosiana, 1), pp. 1-12; A. Sidarus, *Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar, historien copte (m. 1324) et le MS Ambrosiana C 45 inf.*, in *Written sources about Africa and their study. Le fonti scritte sull’Africa e i loro studi*, M. Lafkioui – V. Brugnatelli ed., Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Centro Ambrosiano, Milano 2018 (Accademia Ambrosiana, Africana Ambrosiana, 3), pp. 147-172.

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