Introduction

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Language studies had a central role in Alessandro Bausani's eclectic, ground-breaking research activity: although many of his interests might be primarily cataloged as belonging to the history of religions or to (Eastern) comparative literature, interest in natural (and artificial) languages is a thread that links virtually every aspect of his intellectual journey.

As it often happened in the course of his academic activity, Bausani's ideas about linguistics were often provocative, offering alternative views to language-related phenomena, and sometimes running deliberately against intellectual consensus.

This is also the case of a relatively neglected article that appeared in 1981, "Le lingue islamiche: interazioni e acculturazioni",¹ in a volume otherwise devoted to the then-fashionable issue of acculturation. As shown by Adriano Rossi (this volume), the 1981 paper actually restated – in slightly changed form – ideas that had been presented a few years earlier, in 1973 as a conference paper and in 1975 in written form.

In "Le lingue islamiche", Bausani discussed the multitudinous effects that cultural influences may have on a community of speakers and, consequently, on their language(s). He thus defined Islamic languages as the functional system(s) that arose in a number of Islamicate societies through simultaneous – often specialized – use of genetically distinct languages by the same speakers. Considering the relevance of such cultural aspects, and in combination with linguistic features, he finally outlined "a typological system", which "is based on cultural superstrata or ethnolinguistic substrata, where cultural, rather than linguistic, considerations hold."²

Bausani's core idea, namely the linguistic relevance of the broader cultural system of what nowadays may be labeled neutrally as "Islamicate countries",

1 Bausani, Alessandro, "Le lingue islamiche: interazioni e acculturazioni", in Bausani, Alessandro and Scarcia Amoretti, Biancamaria (eds.), *Il mondo islamico tra interazione e acculturazione* (Roma: Istituto di Studi Islamici, 1981): pp. 3-19.

2 Ibid.: p. 3.

was widely discussed and circulated among Italian orientalists for a few years. Nevertheless, this discussion did not leave much trace, mostly for reasons related to academic organization – scholars interested in Bausani's approach were mostly not linguists and did not dare to state academic views in linguistic issues, while linguists were possibly not aware of the paper, published in Italian in a collection devoted to Islamic studies.

After some decades of relative neglect of Bausani's view, we felt that it was high time to reassess the issue in a changed cultural setting: how much would a concept arguably linked to an age of postcolonial studies be relevant in a context where area studies and political correctness made it problematic at best the very application of labels such as "Islamic" or "Muslim" to linguistics? Ultimately, we wished to discuss how, or if at all, Bausani's approach could be accounted for today as a cutting-edge contribution to research, so as to include language studies into a wider interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Islamicate world, breaking with traditional historiographic methods.

To move this discussion ahead, we decided to organize a joint conference, thus titled "Le lingue islamiche", supported by our respective academic institutions (Freie Universität Berlin/Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, Roma Tre University, and the University of Naples "L'Orientale"), and that took place in Rome, July 2–3, 2019.

The conference brought together a group of international scholars whose research would pertain to linguistic as well as cultural aspects of languages that could fall into Bausani's notion of Islamic languages. Their contributions and discussions finally fostered modern readings of the matter, addressed in the light of current scholarship.

The present volume contains twelve papers, namely a selection of papers presented at the conference and some new contributions, all aiming to provide new readings of the subject, by means of a modern critical reading of Bausani's proposition. Finally, the papers in this volume show that, while Bausani remains a solid basis for our scholarship, there has been a marked shift in research focus and approach.

Kees Versteegh's opening paper ("Can a Language be Islamic?") discusses critically the issue of how legitimate the application of the "Islamic/Muslim" label to languages is, and concludes that it should be rather applied to speakers of the relevant languages: it is them that are Muslims, rather than the languages they speak, in a parallel with the popular concept of "Jewish languages".

Michele Bernardini's paper ("Sur la question des langues dans l'Islam oriental") offers an answer to some of the issues raised by Versteegh, by stressing the historical relevance of multilingual practice in the Muslim world and the reflexes that it had on the literary languages before the rupture that took place with the emergency of nationalisms in the twentieth century.

A more literal answer to the question raised by Versteegh is in the paper by Simona Olivieri and Giuliano Lancioni (“Balaibalan: An Artificial Islamic Language?”): at least a single language can actually be labeled as “Islamic” in every reasonable way. It is Balaibalan, an artificial language written (and perhaps spoken) by a specific Muslim community.

Other papers discuss Bausani’s insight in a variety of historical and geographic settings.

Gianfranco Bria’s article (“The Case of Albanian as an Islamic Language between Muslim Literary Tradition and National Culture”) addresses an instance of what Bausani considered not as “peripheral Islam”, but as a good example of “integrated Islam”: Albania and its language, with an intrinsic tension between the adoption Islamic models and nationalism, an important drive in the contemporary history of the country.

Another periphery, the historical prototype or the linguistic and cultural other in Pre-Islamic Arabic culture, is addressed in Giuliano Castagna’s paper (“An Analysis of the Modern South Arabian Languages as ‘Islamic Languages’”), where the subtle intertwining of genetic relationships and superstratum effects in modern South Arabian languages is investigated.

Riccardo Contini and Mara Nicosia (“Western Neo-Aramaic as an Islamic Language? A Look at Some Lexical and Sociolinguistic Issues”) extend the discussion to a minority language of an only partial Muslim community that has lived for centuries in an Islamicate context.

Francesco Grande (“Islamic Languages before Islam? The Arabic of Jurhum and of Ishmael”) addresses the paradoxical extension of the concept of “Islamic languages” to two mythical languages referred to in the Qur’an as reflected in Classical Arabic lexicography.

Valentina Bella Lanza’s paper (“Judeo-Arabic Orthographies: Insights from a Fifteenth-Century *Šarḥ*”) discusses one of the best-known Arabic “religiolects”, in Benjamin Hary’s terms, Judeo-Arabic. In this case, the process might rather be labeled as a “de-Islamicization” of Judeo-Arabic, especially in the progressive adoption of an orthography influenced by Hebrew.

Federico Salvaggio (“Language, Ideology and Identity in Post-Partition Pakistan in the Light of Bausani’s Notion of ‘Islamic Languages’”) addresses the specific context that Bausani discusses at the beginning of his 1981 paper: significantly enough, the very expression “Islamic language” was applied to Urdu by the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in motivating his choice of Urdu as the official language of the new country, despite its being the native language of a minority of speakers.

Muhammad al-Sharkawi’s paper (“The Emergence of Classical Arabic: The Case of *Mā al-ḥijāziyya* in the Qur’an”) is devoted to the very source of Islamic/

Muslim languages: Classical Arabic as the prototypical language of Muslim communities.

Francesco Zappa (“Une langue islamique postmoderne? L’émergence d’un « français d’islam »”) extends the idea of “Islamic language” to Europe, where the use of French by a growing number of Muslims as a native language makes it plausible to talk about “français d’islam”.

After the discussion on “Islamic languages” in a variety of historical and linguistic contexts, the collection concludes with Adriano Rossi’s first-hand historical recollection (“Alessandro Bausani and ‘Muslim languages’, forty years after”) of the genesis of Bausani’s paper and the cultural milieu in which it developed. This final contribution will allow readers to connect the other papers in the volume with the original evolution path of the author’s idea and to appreciate elements of continuity and change in the intellectual view of the relations between language spoken by Muslims and Islam.

A final aim in this volume is rethinking and re-evaluating our views about the relation of language, culture and religion. We do not know yet what future research on the subject will bring, but this collection of essays will surely offer readers an intellectual stimulus in this direction, a stimulus that includes criticizing and even deconstructing Bausani’s own view, which is perhaps the best token of the value of his scientific thought and the long-term issue of his research and teaching. And certainly, Bausani himself would have appreciated this debate.