

In Memoriam

Anna Vanzan (1955–2020)



Anna Vanzan, an eminent Venetian scholar who wrote essays on gender issues in Iran and translated into Italian many Persian novels and short stories that helped transform the understanding of Persian culture and civilization, died on 24 December in Venice. She was sixty-five.

Amongst millions of obstacles, the new Iranian generations are producing a sophisticated and cosmopolitan culture strongly linked to its local history. Let's then try to look beyond this historically difficult moment, whilst on the international agenda the conflict between the United States and Iran is reintroduced. The hate that is currently associated with Iran risks to bring us to the brink of collapse. As for me, I can only continue to divulge the culture of this amazing country which I love as if it was my own. My favourite spot is Tehran, I am aware of all the objections, it is polluted, chaotic developed without any urban planning. It is ugly but I am in love with it, and, as you know, lovers are irrational. (*Diario persiano: Viaggio sentimentale in Iran* [Persian Diary: A Sentimental Trip to Iran])

Professor Vanzan devoted her life and works to Iran, its literature, its women. After a degree in Oriental Languages and Cultures at the University Ca' Foscari Venice, she moved to New York University for her PhD in Near Eastern Studies. Her dissertation was the translation of the Qajar princess Taj al-Saltana's controversial memoir *Khaterat*, which appeared in Italian under the title *Memorie dall'harem imperiale persiano*. "A gifted scholar, who devoted herself to understanding gender

issues in Iranian society. Thanks to her work, she built a bridge between Iranian scholars and those living in other parts of the world,” said her supervisor, Professor Peter Chelkowski. “She will be remembered as a great scholar of contemporary Iranian literature, with an acute understanding of women’s lives and struggles. Above all she will be remembered as a warm and wonderful human being,” said Ziba Mir-Hosseini.

Professor Vanzan produced many publications in Italian and English. Her book *La storia velata: le donne dell’islam nell’immaginario italiano* is a history of the image of Muslim women in Italian culture since the Middle Ages. For this book, she was awarded the International Prize Feudo di Maida 2006. *Figlie di Shabrazad, scrittrici iraniane dal 19 secolo a oggi* is a history of Iranian women writers from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. *Le donne di Allah: viaggio nei femminismi islamici* (Women of Allah: A Trip in Islamic Feminisms) offers a collection of conversations and discussions with Muslim women engaged in finding their way to feminism. Amongst her other writings are “Primavera rosa: Rivoluzioni e donne in Medio Oriente” (Pink Springs: Revolutions and Women in the Middle East) and “Donna e giardino nel mondo islamico” (Women and Gardens in the Islamic World). With Jolanda Guardi she wrote *Che genere di islam: Omosessuali, queer e transessuali tra shari’a e nuove interpretazioni* (Homosexuals, Queer and Transsexuals from the Shari’a to the New Interpretations). “We had recently started a new project on the concept of body in Islam, but unfortunately we couldn’t take it to an end. Her profound knowledge of the Iranian culture, paired with her sense of irony and her cleverness, will be profoundly missed,” said Jolanda Guardi.

Professor Anna Vanzan’s works cast Iran as a leading civilization facing the West both before and after the Iranian revolution of 1979. In 2017, she was awarded by the Italian Ministry of Culture career award for her translation work and for the diffusion of Persian culture. Amongst her last translations are two bestsellers published at the time of Muhammad Reza Shah: Simin Daneshvar’s *Suvashun* and Iraj Pezeshkzad’s *My Uncle Napoleon*. Both novels have been printed in Italian in the last two years by Francesco Brioschi Editore in Milan.

She was one of the founders of the Italian journal *Afriche & Orienti*. Her colleague, Elisa Giunchi, of the State University Milan said:

Last October she submitted to the journal *Storia delle Donne* [Women’s History] a thought-provoking article on *Effeminacy in Persian culture*, which will be published shortly. Besides being a sophisticated scholar, she was passionate, witty, intellectually curious, generous. She regularly lectured in various Italian institutions on issues of multiculturalism. We shall miss her and so will the students who have had her as their professor.

Anna Vanzan had lectured at the Universities of Bologna, Milan, Pisa, Geneva, New York. In the academic year 2020–21 she was teaching *Culture as Mediation* at Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

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