

FOREWORD

أورد خير شکر ستانی کز مصر رسید کاروانی
صد اشتر جمله شکر و قند یارب چه لطیف ارمغانی
جلال الدین رومی

Āvard xabar šakarsetān-i k-az Meṣr resid kārvān-i
šad oštor jomle šakkar-o qand yā rab ce laṭif armaġān-i

*A very sweet person brought news: «A caravan has come from Egypt!
A hundred camels, all sugar and candy. O Lord, what a fine gift!»*

Ġalāluddīn Rūmī

Once a caravan could have traveled (at least, ideally) from Farghana to Ghana, uniting Asia and Africa both in this rhyme and in fact, as happened with al-Ḥarīrī's characters. A caravan is the flattering metaphor and the emblematic starting off point of this new journal, so enthusiastically wished for by the teachers of the four disciplines - Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Hindi Languages and Literatures, which are the pillars of the research and teaching of African and Asian cultures at the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Turin University. It would certainly be nearsighted (as well as inaccurate) to maintain that there was a need felt for a new scholarly periodical dedicated to all the contributions of Asian and African civilization within the scope of Italian higher education. There is no need to name the illustrious journals that are the pride of our studies in these fields. Nevertheless, it is equally indisputable that this journal could serve a useful function. *Kervan* is an on-line journal and for that reason it will be free from the restrictions of the availability of publishers, the cost of paper, and the relative uniformity of the number of the pages. Furthermore, on such a versatile platform, there is an almost unlimited opportunity to publish material that would be impossible or too expensive to reproduce in printed copies - films, audio material, and all kinds of photographs.

The only condition asked of contributors to *Kervan* (obviously, besides relevant topics) is scholarly depth, which will be guaranteed by our high-level scholarly committee. For everything else, contributors have total freedom of opinion and methodology. Precisely to underline our respect for the freedom of research, the journal does not require that contributors use standard transliterations because we maintain that everything that can be held to be methodologically appropriate and internally coherent has the right to full membership in the scholarly community.

The editorial board of *Kervan* is particularly happy that its project is connected with the School of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Turin University. This young Facoltà was founded only several years ago but it is already efficiently organized and open to providing services that answer the needs of today's world better and better. From its founding, the School has placed great faith in the academic disciplines treating Asia and Africa. It has acutely grasped how important for our society it is to promote the scholarly grounded and progressively broader understanding of the peoples and cultures of these two continents. (This insight is something that is not always shared by other institutions.) It is with a sense of justice, gratitude and sincere satisfaction that we would like to write down two names here on page one of issue number one. Paolo Bertinetti, the creator of the Facoltà, was its first dean. Without his tireless commitment Asia and Africa would still be sitting in the academic waiting room here in Turin. Liborio Termine is the happily presiding dean, who has continued to support this field with passionate conviction and dynamic availability.

We will not illude ourselves that our *Kervan* will be greeted like the caravan of Rumi, which we have wanted to place in the heading only because we thought it was good luck. We can wish only that our caravan will contribute to scholarly discourse with dignity and effectiveness and that it will be acknowledged as a serious and reliable instrument by our fellow scholars.

THE SCIENTIFIC DIRECTORS

Pinuccia Caracchi
Emanuele Ciccarella
Stefania Stafutti
Michele Vallaro