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PAOLO GRAZIOSI

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Basic Biographical Information

Paolo Graziosi (1906-1988) was one of the most relevant Italian scholars in Prehistoric Archaeology. Born in Florence in 1906, his father was the sculptor and painter Giuseppe Graziosi (1879-1942) and his mother was Bianca Coduri, an artist. In 1930 he graduated from the University of Florence with a degree in Natural Science under the supervision of Aldobrandino Mochi, an anthropologist, and Renato Biasutti, a geographer. During this period, he had his first experiences as researcher, spending multiple research periods in Paris where he studied with Henri Breuil (Vigliardi 1992).

In 1933 he began his fieldwork experiences in Africa, first in Libya (1933), then in Egypt (1935) and Somalia (1935), focusing on re-constructing the archaeological stratigraphy of important prehistoric sites (i.e. Bur Eibi in Somalia).

Graziosi taught Prehistoric Archaeology in the School of Humanities, at the University of Florence (1936-1977), which was the second Italian university to create this course after the University of Rome. He became a lecturer in Anthropology (1939-1953) and then Palaeoanthropology (1942-1953) in the School of Natural Science, at the University of Pisa. In 1954, he became full professor of Anthropology at the University of Florence, position he held until 1977 (Vigliardi 1992).

Graziosi was the co-founder of the “Istituto di Paleontologia” (1940), the “Museo e Istituto Fiorentino di Preistoria” (1946) and the Italian Institute of Prehistory and Protohistory (1954). He was also an active member of numerous societies and the organiser of multiple workshops, exhibition, conferences and congresses (e.g. International Congress of Prehistory and Protohistory).

His interest in the rock art and prehistory is visible from the numerous campaigns conducted in Italy and abroad. In Italy his most famous excavations were conducted at the Balzi Rossi caves, Romanelli caves and Porto Badisco cave in Italy. Since 1950 he studied the Levanzo island (Italy) where he discovered both Neolithic pictures and Palaeolithic rock art (Vigliardi 1998).

Graziosi also conducted multiple fieldworks and study periods abroad such as in Libya (1933, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1952-1954, 1962, 1965, 1967-1968), Egypt (1935), Somalia (1935, 1952-1954, 1958, 1963), Spain (1950), France (1959), Chile (1959), Peru (1959), Argentina (1959), India (1954-1960), Pakistan (1954-1960), Afghanistan (1954-1960), Eritrea (1961), Ethiopia (1965), Scandinavia (1957), Mexico (1957) and Kenya (1958), focusing on prehistoric rock art, lithic industries and palaeoanthropology. Additionally, he served as scientific member to the Italian expedition to the Karakorum K2, directed by Ardito Desio where he was in charge of the archaeological research in Pakistan and India. There, Graziosi surveyed numerous Palaeolithic and Neolithic sites, analysing extensively the lithic material of the north-western Punjab (Graziosi 1964).

Major Accomplishments

Graziosi published more than 260 articles that highlight his extraordinary academic breadth on the subjects of prehistory, ethnography, rock art and anthropology. His first published work was on the Venus of Savignano

(1926), which he completed before enrolling to University, probably guiding his future interests to prehistoric arts. Graziosi's research interests included Euro-Asian and African prehistoric cultures and his investigations made him a pioneer in the study of African rock art and lithic industries.

In Italy Graziosi directed numerous excavations at the Romito cave, S. Teodoro (Messina), Levanzo (Egadi) and Porto Badisco cave. His research of Romanelli cave first highlighted the need for rock art to be investigated in conjunction with precise stratigraphic information (Graziosi 1933). He was a precursor in the reconstruction of prehistoric sites by the combined use of stratigraphy, material culture and stylistic analysis of prehistoric paintings, expanding this analysis to compare motives across different geographical areas (Graziosi 1973). His last published research was on the Porto Badisco cave (Italy) where he focused on the Neolithic paintings, stratigraphy and the methodological process applied to the study of cave paintings (Graziosi 1987).

His fieldwork in Libya (1933-1940 and 1952-1968) helped him to develop a rigorous methodology promoting analysis of the lithic industries as well as a new classification for local rock art (Fig.1). His studies were published in numerous articles and in the monograph "L'arte rupestre della Libia", which mainly focused on the classification and stylistic analysis of Libyan rock art (Graziosi 1942). Likewise, his studies in Somalia were collected in the ample monograph "L'arte della Pietra in Somalia" that it is still considered one of the most comprehensive works on Somalia prehistoric archaeology. The volume presents a comprehensive catalogue of archaeological sites, lithic finds and rock art finds in the region (Graziosi 1940).

Graziosi's major contribution to lithic studies was constituted by his research of Mousterian lithic industries, which focusing on both qualitative and quantitative data helped reconsider the role of the microburin as a fossil guide in the passage between Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in Italy (Graziosi 1951). Graziosi's extensive investigations also have the merit to address the problem of chronology in rock art sites as he dedicated multiple publications to highlight that stylistic and contextual analysis should be combined with stratigraphic information and the analysis of material culture. His investigation of technological, contextual and stylistic characteristics of cave paintings and engravings were cutting-edge and helped him coin the term "Mediterranean artistic province" for Italian, French and Spanish rock art sites (Graziosi 1960).

He was the founder of the scientific journal "Rivista di Scienze Preistoriche" (1946), a member of the Accademia dei Lincei and he received numerous national and international honours and awards. The Museum of Prehistory in Florence was named in his honour and posthumously hosts Graziosi's archive donated to the Museum in his will. In 1992 the Italian Institute of Prehistory and Protohistory organised and published a memorial in his honour (Vigliardi 1992).

Cross-References

Rock Art, Forms of

Archaeology of Art: Theoretical Frameworks

Archaeology and Anthropology

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Photo di Paolo Graziosi. Udei el Chel - Libya, 1954.
Courtesy of Museo Fiorentino di Preistoria "P. Graziosi".

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