

‘My Life is like the Summer Rose’  
Maurizio Tosi e l’Archeologia  
come modo di vivere

Papers in honour of Maurizio Tosi for his  
70th birthday

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## FRAGMENTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE!

Bruno GENITO

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It is not easy to write an article in honor of Maurizio: too broad has been the sphere of his scientific interests, too complex his personal and professional identity, so as to close our relationship, to find the right way to contribute to this initiative. Yet, when the original editorial Committee of the volume to his honor asked me to participate to it, I immediately began to think about the kind of article I could write and Maurizio would have appreciated. Then, I thought to the possibility to dedicate to him some reflections I have made on our human and professional relationship over the recent decades, during which we have shared moments of an intense and exciting professional itinerary, that have brought us together.

I met Maurizio for the first time at the end of November 1972 in Teheran, in Park Hotel, at that time home of the members of the Italian Archaeological Mission working in Iran. On that occasion I met also Giuseppe Tucci, who was visiting Umberto Scerrato, hospitalized for an annoying physical problem. Of course, I had already heard much about them, but I was leaving for Isfahan to participate to the archaeological activities, directed by Umberto Scerrato, in the *Masjed-e Jom'e* of that town (but this is another story!). Thus, my meeting with Maurizio was short and fleeting. At that time I was 21 years old, actually not very much far in age from him, but enormously far from his level of knowledge.

Although at that moment I could not imagine the extent to which my life would have been affected by that journey and those encounters, the meeting with Maurizio gave me the opportunity to know immediately and appreciate not only his skill and scientific knowledge, but also his immense humanity; qualities that, together with others, have always characterized his work and life.

Thinking about that first meeting and all the experiences I lived with him, during these days I have felt the need to tell, in this article, how much my relationship with Maurizio has given to me, even through some apparently less important or macroscopic episodes.

I can start telling about Sistan, where I went in 1975 and 1976 to participate at the restoration activities of IsIAO (at that time IsMEO, and now again ISMEO) of the Achaemenid monumental complex of Dāhān-i Ghūlāmān, uncovered and studied by Umberto Scerrato since 1959. Today the historical importance of that urban complex is very well known, but, even then, it was easy to glimpse the research perspectives of a work of the Achaemenid period.

In those years Maurizio was working at Shahr-i Sokhta, where warmly welcomed me at my arrival from Isfahan.

He immediately behaved like a master, just explaining me, in his point of view, the immense perspectives of a research work at Dāhān-i Ghūlāmān. I had not explicitly told from Umberto Scerrato about the work on the ceramics collected there, but with the great enthusiasm that Maurizio has always been able to transmit, he stimulated me to do it. Realizing that, as a student, I was uncertain and worried about the possibility to cause some inconvenience to whom had sent me there, Maurizio suggested me to phone to the *Masjed-e Jom'e* of Isfahan. I tried, but I could not speak with Umberto Scerrato because, at that time, the phone connections were not as widespread and technically efficient as today.

After some hesitations, I set to work on that immense quantity of pottery fragments. Up to then, I had never worked on ceramics; I had just dug it and only in Isfahan. Maurizio gave me lots of recommendations and a wealth of references, many of which in Russian, also because within a very short time I would have been able to start again the excavations at Dāhān-i Ghūlāmān, working again on the path that Scerrato had traced years before. I still remember the great amount of information he gave me: he tried to explain to me the morphology and the typology of ceramics and, particularly, the concept of 'morphotype', a word that at that time seemed to me almost incomprehensible.

Even if the ceramics from Dāhān-i Ghūlāmān are not yet been published, today it is easy to recognize that Maurizio's theoretic-methodological approach was as quite correct as far-sighted.

No one could have then imagined that, for more than 30 years, it would have been practically impossible to go back to Iran, as well as to Sistan. I myself had not thought that it could have been so difficult to do, much time later, something that, in those days, was going to be immediately reached.

I still remember an occasion in which, once more, Maurizio was really surprising: at a certain point, he asked me a precise question: "What do you think about me?". But, when I answered using the term 'genius', Maurizio promptly replied that geniuses do not exist as the genius of a person depends only from his/her commitment and study (*industria ac studio*, the ancient Romans would have said!).

Later on in the 80s, thanks to his intuition, it was possible first to imagine and then to realize an archaeological project in Hungary, that brought us to talk and discuss together again. We were in another epoch, there still was



the communist bloc, and only with the help of Bökönyi Sandor, at the time director of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Hungary, it was possible to start the project on the field.

There was an episode that occurred in that country on April 1984, at the beginning of the project, that can be considered indicative of Maurizio's attitudes. After some critical misunderstandings with the local colleagues to start the fieldwork, we had to suggest a concrete, very specific and articulated proposal, on the basis of the agreement we had set down with them: the opening of a new topic for the Italian field archaeology about the migratory waves of nomadic people of Asiatic origin who reached, in different times and ways, the Carpathian basin. The project in Hungary had been conceived as an exchange agreement, according to which the Hungarians would have dug in Italy and the Italians in Hungary. The problem was that, while Hungarians immediately sought and obtained the excavation of a Roman *villa* in central Italy, we did not have the chance to make a specific request that would somehow interested Hungarians.

In those days Maurizio and I spent an evening together, having a dinner and making a quick tour of the pubs in a fascinating Budapest, at that time immersed in the atmosphere of an attractive - for the Westerners - town of the Communist bloc. Talking about this and that, before a Magyar delicious dish, Maurizio suddenly asked to me what could correspond, in the Great Hungarian Plain, to a Roman *villa*, from an archaeological point of view. Even if I had an adequate knowledge of the archaeology in that country, the answer was not quite easy. However, I quickly told him that, according to me, if we considered the question from the point of view of the most common remains, the burial mounds, the *kurgans* (in Hungarian *halom*) could be compared to a Roman *villa*. The answer was rather improvised and, actually, scientifically daring. Immediately Maurizio said that it was a right answer and that we could have put in the same position those two different classes of archaeological remains. As a matter of fact yet, in July of the same year I started the excavation at Gyoma 133, the area of an ancient *kurgan* of Scythian epoch, named *Csap Halom* and also covered by Late Bronze and Sarmatian age remains.

There is another episode concerning Hungary that I remember clearly. It was 1988, and I was at the "Istituto Universitario Orientale", now "Università degli Studi di Napoli, "L'Orientale". I had just come back from Hungary, where there were some unpleasant incidents between myself and local colleagues. One of them, who was not involved in the *affaire*, had written a letter to Maurizio, as the first promoter of the project years before, to tell him about the incident. I was the bearer of the letter and Maurizio wanted to open it in front of me. I was impressed by this initiative, because he imagined that the letter could not contain flattering remarks about me and, therefore, he could read them alone and then tell me just what he thought it was appropriate. But, as usual, he preferred to behave in a direct way; what I appreciated very much.

Going back in my memory I could recall many other episodes of our shared experiences, and I will speak only about a few more.

The great expedition in Turkmenistan began quietly in 1989, but soon grew until 1998, thanks to an enormous amount of energy, including financial management by IsMEO and Istituto Universitario Orientale. The area is very well known as one of those where you may to spend an entire working life, being even not sufficient to find out its cognitive potential. In fact, whichever this is the point of view from which you can look at its history and environmental context of the region, Turkmenistan can be considered as a milestone in the understanding of the whole set of the historical, cultural, economic and political dynamics from Neolithic era (up) to the rise of Islam.

I remember the first time I spoke with Maurizio about the project, I was quite worried by what I might expect. But I could not imagine the extent of the concrete topographic fieldwork and of the efforts we would have to face in those years, when the modern GIS perspectives had not yet or just begun (it was 1989). Thanks to the available technology, nowadays everything is much easier! Though Maurizio, at that time, was living and working in India, he tried so much to organize everything, especially in the practical aspects, as far as we had to work in a particular cultural, political and geographical context, so much so that my efforts and those of my Italian colleagues certainly appeared to be fewer! In a couple of weeks he was able to transform the place where we were living in a suitable camp-base for working in the next years (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Turkmenistan, September 1989; Sovkoz "50<sup>th</sup> anniversary", now Bayram-ali. Me, Maurizio, Gennady Andreevič Košelenko and Vassif Gaibov.

Notwithstanding or thanks also to the difficulties I had to face, the work experience in Turkmenistan was one of the most stimulating I could ever make in those years, also because the archaeological richness of the area revealed even greater than I had imagined. I remember one day, while we eat our usual frugal lunch in front of one of the sites identified in the morning, no 38, and Maurizio spoke

to me about the possibility to dig it maybe next year. It did not happen, mainly because the quantity and quality of the sites gradually came out to be so large, that site no 38 became less significant than it had looked to us at the beginning.

This just to say that Maurizio had immediately thought about the possibility of developing specific themes and subjects, including new and unknown, at the same moment they had occurred and even if they only seemed possible.

Something analogous happened for Yaz-tepe, a huge and incredibly important Iron Age site of the area, that Maurizio thought I could dig. Although with some misgivings and reluctance, I practically gave up the idea of opening trenches there, also because we were at the epilogue of the first phase of the project and our Italian Institutions, already burdened by increasing financial constraints, did not seem to be longer so sure to bring it at the end.

What still now has quite impressed me, have not been so much the numerous proposals that Maurizio made to me and to other even younger collaborators, as the conviction with which he defended the scientific motivations to undertake a work even when it was easy to foresee that it would not have been possible to get an adequate financial support. For him, the fact that a project was scientifically legitimate, feasible and adequate was, in fact, the priority issue, far more important than any contingent economical question.

It is definitely true that, first, it is important to build up a project and, second, to try to get money for that. But it is equally true that, if you do not have at least the initial financial support, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish what you intend to do. The balance between these two aspects is very difficult to have at your disposal, but it should be certainly pursued, if you want to have a credible expectation of success.

The history project, that have seen Maurizio and me so closely involved both in conceiving and thinking over them and, sometime, also working on, is full of more and less important episodes. If they are observed now, by the detached eye of an older aged, these episodes may appear less influential than they were perceived at that time. Yet, one thing is certainly sure: for me, all of them, and many others, are the mirror and, at the same time, the expression of an interpretation of the enormous scientific personality of Maurizio. It is not my job up to me to

make a value judgment of his scientific life or, even more, express an opinion of him: I have no role nor, perhaps, even the ability! I cannot say to have shared all his chooses, views and ways of living and working....I would be a liar! But I strongly believe that our mutual respect has always been above undeniable moments of tension between us.

My intention in these few pages has been to outline the path, the line, the attitude that, in my view, has always inspired Maurizio with regard to his colleagues, friends and not friends, young and old, 'structured' or 'unstructured' (as they say in Italy, nowadays, with an unhappy expression); the objects of his fighting, his conviction, the perseverance with which he could get results even when the goals were unattainable. I think that there are two, in conclusion, more aspects that have made Maurizio a tireless teacher: his tenacity and utopia. There are two ways of understanding and living also the profession, questionable if you will, but still undeniable elements of vitality that can bend even the most skeptical and pessimistic visions: one immediate, active, less reflective and another more cautious. Maurizio has always belonged to the first, I perhaps to the second; but my experience with him has a little contributed to the passage, during the time, to the first one.

Last but not least, let me also to make a final comment on our profession: archaeology. I come from a tradition of studies of Classical Archaeology (in Italy, i.e. the Greek-Roman archaeology) that, good and evil, is always forged generations of scholars! The same tradition of research has enabled Giuseppe Tucci, the pioneer of Oriental Studies in Italy, to open the new season of the Oriental Archaeology in our country, with the contribution he expressly asked to such scholars as the late Umberto Scerrato, Domenico Faccenna, Maurizio Taddei. Maurizio Tosi does not belong to that tradition, and nevertheless its contribution to the proto-historic and prehistoric archaeology in the countries of Asia has, however, been and will remain central. The future of archaeological research in Asia will depend, in my opinion, on both those two different methods and strategies; the future generations will arise with the necessary continuity and discontinuity to follow those footsteps that have thrown an inescapable methodological and factual bridge between the Mediterranean areas and the vast deserts, plains, steppes and plateaus of Asia. Otherwise we will go further back to 40 years ago before the genial intuition of Giuseppe Tucci!

Thank you and best wishes, Maurizio!

