

Jole Bovio Marconi, - 1986

By Vincenzo Tusa

Translated from the Italian by Michelle Hobart

When Professor Jole Bovio Marconi died of old age on April 14, 1986, a well-known and important figure of Palermitan culture died with her.

Originally from Rome and of distant Piedmontese extraction, Professor Marconi went to Sicily at an early age, after having attended the *Scuola archeologica italiana* in Athens and won a competition for a position in the administrative offices of the *Antichità e Belle Arti*. She was the wife of Piero Marconi, the great archeologist from Verona who left many useful signs of his work in different parts of Sicily thanks to the expertise and attention he brought to the archaeological monuments of the island.

After having worked on the classical monuments of Sicily and published papers like the “Corpus Vasorum antiquorum”, still the only publication available on the black figure vases of the archaeological museum of Palermo, as well as various other articles, Professor Marconi focused on the prehistory of the island. In particular, she studied the history of western Sicily, where she worked first as an inspector, then as a Director and finally as the Superintendent from 1939 to 1963. The work she left behind can be considered of fundamental importance for her knowledge of the prehistory of this part of the island, and cannot be ignored by anyone who is seriously considering undertaking this field of study. Some of Professor Marconi’s studies are automatically associated with her by scholars both in Italy and abroad. Studies like “The Civilization of the Conca d’Oro”, published by the Accademia dei Lincei, is the result of an accurate investigation of the area of Palermo dating from the Bronze Age and of insightful studies conducted on materials taken from other parts of Sicily. The paper titled “Grotta del Vecchiuzzo”, a cave located in the vicinity of Petralia Soprana first individuated by Dr. Collisani, examines the extraordinarily interesting material dating from the Bronze Age which was excavated. Very much involved in the work of the Superintendency, which became more and more onerous as the years went by, Professor Marconi found it difficult to adequately study the material recovered in the excavations and publish her findings in the timely and thorough fashion that characterized her. She could only do this when she reached the age of retirement and could leave the increasingly demanding duties of the Superintendency. I recall the commitment and the sense of duty with which she scrupulously followed all her work through to its final and satisfactory publication.

To return to the field of prehistory, Professor Marconi’s excavation of the Grotta del Genovese on the island of Levanzo and of the Grotta dell’Addaura on the slopes of the Montepellegrino mountain in Palermo as well as the consequent publication of the findings at both sites are worthy of note. These two caves have stirred enormous interest on the part of scholars both in Italy and abroad for the quality of their findings as well as

for the painted and graphic depictions of human figures and animals that document various aspects of the lives of our distant ancestors.

Both Professor Marconi's particular commitment and her published work were to qualify her for a university teaching position in the field of Prehistory and lead to her teaching this subject at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Palermo, a position that Professor Marconi held honorably for many years.

However, her interests were not merely limited to the field of prehistory. She devoted herself diligently and dutifully to the other excavation and restoration sites which fell under the institutional jurisdiction of the Superintendency which she headed. Of these sites, I would like to mention the restoration of the so-called temple of Segesta. She was personally involved in the excavation of the transversal roads that ran perpendicular to the main north-south thoroughfare of the acropolis of Selinunte, where she saw to the expropriation of a strip of land around the temples on the eastern hill and supervised the excavation and exploration of the necropolis of Palermo.

At Selinunte, she promoted and completed the highly controversial reconstruction of the temple E. No matter how this work is considered, it clearly reveals Professor Marconi's uncommon commitment and the extraordinary interest she had for the monuments entrusted to her as well as her great determination. These are qualities that render a functionary in the civil service like Professor Marconi a model to be taken as an example by all.

But, Professor Marconi's moral qualities and sense of duty which she expressed, albeit brusquely at times, in all her actions are her most exemplary features. It was her sense of duty which led her during the war to endure great peril and risk her own life, so that she could supervise the transfer of all the objects and material contained in the Archeological Museum of Palermo. Professor Marconi personally accompanied much of the above material, regardless of the difficulties and danger involved, to the Convent of S. Martino delle Scale. In fact, the museum building was subsequently bombed and had any of the material been left behind, it would have been destroyed and irremediably lost. At the end of the war, notwithstanding the numerous commitments she already had, Professor Marconi was entrusted with rebuilding the part of the museum that had been destroyed. As a young inspector assigned to the Superintendency of Antiquities of Palermo in 1949, I had the opportunity of working with her to transport the material from S. Martino delle Scale back to Palermo and to reinstall the material in the Museum. I therefore have clear and vivid memories of her commitment, her concern and her dedication to this task.

It is common knowledge that the museum of Palermo was founded by Antonino Salinas, but I feel it can be safely said that it was Professor Marconi who founded it anew. As was said previously, underlying all of her work was an extraordinary sense of duty and a strong vision of the State, which should be the fundamental characteristics of all civil service administrators. I do not hesitate to say that in the thirteen years I worked

with her, I acquired this idea of the State from her, which certainly helped me to carry out my duties, and for this legacy I am grateful.

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