

30th October 2012, 2.00 PM
Fudan University, West Tower, Institute of Historical Geography, Room 2201

Stefano Piastra

Emilio Sereni,
key-figure for geo-historical studies

Emilio Sereni (Rome, 1907-1977) had Jewish origin.

After a first, Sionist phase, and after the degree in Agricultural Science, he joined the Italian Communist Party in 1928.





But, after 1922, Italy was not a Liberal Monarchy. It was a dictatorial country, led by Fascism

So, the Communist Party was illegal at that time, and in 1930 Sereni was arrested and condemned to 15 years of jail.

In 1935 he was involved in an Amnesty, and he escaped in France.

In 1943 was arrested by Fascists again, during the Second World War.

Once he got freedom thanks to Communist partisans, he moved to Milan.

After the end of the Second World War, he was Minister of the Italian Republic (first, Minister for Post-War Affairs; later, Minister to Public Infrastructures)

He soon became *the* leading scholar of the Italian Communist Party.

He became the editor of the Journal «Marxist Criticism» (In Italian, «Critica Marxista»).

But, more important, during his mature age he dedicated himself to research in the field of historical landscape.

His main work was the «History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape» (1961):

A very famous volume.

16 editions until now; still today published.

For a long period, textbook for most of the Academic courses in Historical Geography.

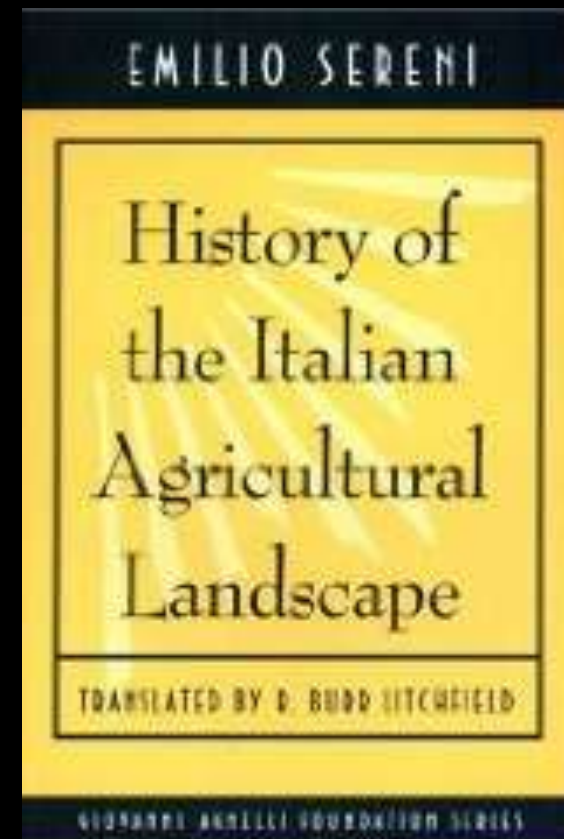


In this book, Chronological approach in a long-term perspective:

The evolution of Italian landscape from Greek/Roman Times to the year of its publication.

An influential book also out of Italy:

- Famous in Spain;
- A French Translation (E. Sereni, *Histoire du paysage rural italien*, Parigi, René Julliard, 1965);
- A recent English translation (E. Sereni, *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997).



In 2011, 50 years after the publication of his main volume and 150 years after the Italian Unification (1861), several events were organized to reconsider Sereni's work:

- A new volume , in Italian, M. Quaini (ed.), *Paesaggi agrari. L'irrinunciabile eredità scientifica di Emilio Sereni* (Agricultural Landscapes. The fundamental scientific heritage by Emilio Sereni)
- An exhibition with the same name, firstly inaugurated in Rome in the headquarter of the Italian Geographical Society

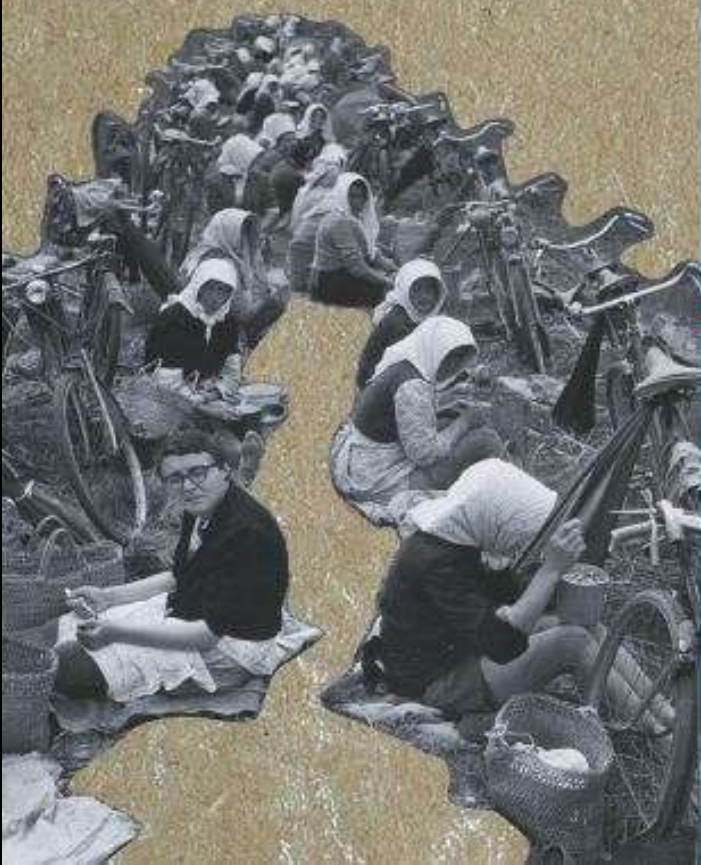


Exhibition's panel

La "Biancata" della Salsomaggiore (1911-1914)

Un'attività degli operai della Salsomaggiore, tessitori e cardatori, che si svolgeva in un'aula della fabbrica. Un momento di aggregazione e di scambio di informazioni e di cultura politica e sindacale.

La "Biancata" era un'attività di aggregazione e di scambio di informazioni e di cultura politica e sindacale. Si svolgeva in un'aula della fabbrica, dove gli operai si riunivano per discutere e scambiarsi informazioni e cultura politica e sindacale.

IL MONDO BRACCIANTE E IL MOVIMENTO OPERAIO IN ITALIA (1890-1914)

LA "BIANCATA" DELLA SALSOMAGGIORE

La "Biancata" era un'attività di aggregazione e di scambio di informazioni e di cultura politica e sindacale. Si svolgeva in un'aula della fabbrica, dove gli operai si riunivano per discutere e scambiarsi informazioni e cultura politica e sindacale.

LA RISCULTURA E LA COOPERAZIONE

Una società di riscultura e di cooperazione fondata da un gruppo di operai della Salsomaggiore. Questa società aveva lo scopo di migliorare le condizioni di lavoro e di vita dei lavoratori.

IL MONDO BRACCIANTE E L'IMPEGNO POLITICO

Il mondo bracciante e il suo impegno politico. Un'attività di aggregazione e di scambio di informazioni e di cultura politica e sindacale. Si svolgeva in un'aula della fabbrica, dove gli operai si riunivano per discutere e scambiarsi informazioni e cultura politica e sindacale.



Un'attività di aggregazione e di scambio di informazioni e di cultura politica e sindacale. Si svolgeva in un'aula della fabbrica, dove gli operai si riunivano per discutere e scambiarsi informazioni e cultura politica e sindacale.

Ennio Scarp



1911-1914



1911-1914



1911-1914

These events were under the direct patronage of the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano:

He and Sereni were friends and both of them have belonged to the Italian Communist Party



In the framework of the 2012 International Week of the Italian Language in the World, in cooperation with the Italian Institute of Culture based in Shanghai, it was developed the idea of an event in Shanghai.

Publication of a Bilingual CD (Italian/Chinese) to make possible , for Chinese Academic community, to read and understand part of Sereni's work

- The aim is to broaden the knowledge about Emilio Sereni's work in China and , indirectly, to encourage a Chinese edition of his most important book.

(In the cd, you will find the Chinese translation of a chapter of the *History of the Italian Agricultural Landscape* by Sereni)

Presentazione del volume

Paesaggi agrari.

L'irrinunciabile eredità scientifica di Emilio Sereni

Shanghai, Fudan University, 30 ottobre 2012

Contenuti aggiuntivi a cura di Stefano Piastra

书籍的介绍

农业景观。艾米尼奧·赛莱尼不可遗弃的科学遗产

上海，复旦大学，2012年10月30日

补充内容由史提法诺(Stefano Piastra)负责

Why the work by Emilio Sereni has to be considered so important?

He «imported» and «adapted» to the Mediterranean context the ideas and the approach of the French school of the *Annales*.

The *Annales* school was founded by Marc Bloch (1886-1944) and Lucien Febvre (1878 -1956) in 1929.

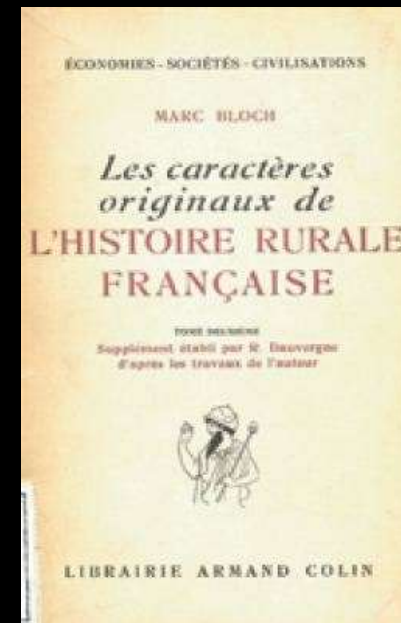
The name *Annales* derives from the journal they founded, *Annales* («Annals»).

Bloch had a background in History.

He was the first to introduce the idea that history was made not only of dates or names,
but even fields and agriculture could be considered history.

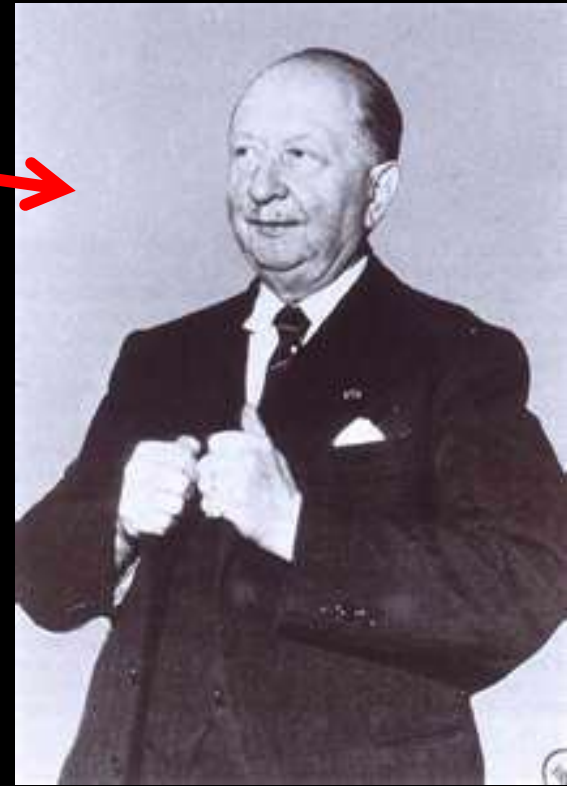
Moreover, he supported field work in Geo-Historical studies.

Like Sereni, Bloch had Jewish origin, battled against Nazi occupation during the Second World War and was finally executed by German army



**Main work by Bloch.
Copy from E. Sereni private
archive**

Lucien Febvre had a background in Anthropology. He was a former student of the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845 – 1918).



Febvre invented the term «Possibilism» to describe De la Blache's approach (which was very different from Frederick Ratzel's «**Determinism**»)



The approach by Sereni was based on **Historical Materialism**: the morphogenesis of the landscape, layer by layer through history, is linked to economic and social dynamics between leading social classes (the owners of the lands) and farmers/field hands (the people who daily worked the land).

Thanks to Sereni, in Italy the scientific community and the governmental elite started to think to the landscape not only as agriculture, but also as a **Historical/Cultural Heritage**.

It was the first step towards the protection of the historical landscape on the basis of laws and regulations; the protection of the historical landscape started to be present **in planning**.

Which new issues in reconsidering Sereni's work Today??

Today , Sereni's studies are already considered a «source» in themselves.

His methodology, based on the study of all the sources available (written documents, historical maps, toponymy, field work), is very modern.

He used even artistic representations of agriculture in research: the landscape was/is central also in artistic perception of rural spaces

- Sereni wrote his main work in the '50s: he was aware that Italy, in that years, was experiencing a quick transition: the so-called «Italian Boom».

In 15 years only (1946-1960), Italy passed from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial-based one, mainly thanks to the American Post-War Support (in the framework of the so-called «Cold War»).

And Sereni was not nostalgic of the past: he understood it was only another step in landscape evolution, related to the new world political and economic order

After Sereni, in all the Western countries and in the USA in particular, new streams in Human Geography arose.

From late '70s to middle '90s, the so-called «Post-Modernist» approach was very popular :

- there's not «one truth»
- Everything can be evaluated and seen on the basis of different perceptions, based on your different background, nationality, etc.
- Economic and political issues were not considered so important about landscape studies
- The landscape was considered more a «mental construction» than something «tangible», derived from Man-Environment Interactions

This approach was the opposite of Sereni's one.

Now, most of the scholars agree with Post-Modernism about the importance of Perception, but a new «need» of «materialistic issues» is currently rising in the West:

The so-called «New Realism».

That is also why, recently, in Italy there was such a need to rediscover and recover Sereni's thought

New realism (philosophy)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

New realism was a philosophy expounded in the early 20th century by a group of six US based scholars, namely Edwin Bissell Holt (Harvard University), Walter Taylor Marvin (Rutgers College), William Pepperell Montague (Columbia University), Ralph Barton Perry (Harvard), Walter Boughton Pitkin (Columbia) and Edward Gleason Spaulding (Princeton University).

The central feature of the new realism was a rejection of the epistemological dualism of John Locke and of older forms of realism. The group maintained that, when one is conscious of, or knows, an object, it is an error to say that the object in itself and our knowledge of the object are two distinct facts. If we know a particular cow is black, is the blackness on that cow or in the observer's mind? Holt wrote; "That color out there is the thing in consciousness selected for such inclusion by the nervous system's specific response," Consciousness is not physically identical with the nervous system: it is "out there" with the cow, all throughout the field of sight (and smell, and hearing) and identical with the set of facts it knows at any moment. The nervous system is merely a system of selection.

This position, which belongs to a broader category of views sometimes called neutral monism or, following William James, radical empiricism, hasn't worn well over the subsequent century, partly because of the problem of the nature of abstract ideas such as blackness. It seems very natural to locate blackness as an abstract idea in the brain that useful in dealing with the world. The new realists did not want to acknowledge representationalism at all but later embraced something akin to Aristotle's form of realism: blackness is a general quality that many objects have in common, and the nervous system selects not just the object but the commonality as a fact. But Arthur Lovejoy showed in his book *The Revolt Against Dualism* that the perception of black varies so much, depending on context in the visual field, the perceiver's personal history and cultural usage, that it cannot be reduced to commonalities within objects. Better, Lovejoy thought, to bring representational ideas back into the account after all.

Moreover, there is an Ethical dimension in Sereni's work.

As he was used to say, «to make research is to make politics, too».

He considered research work and Politics as something joint.

If you are a professor or a researcher, you are not only an «educated person»; you hold a key-role in society and you have to give your contribution to the formation of civic sense among young generations

What is the importance of Sereni's thought for Chinese scholars??

To Reflect about the importance of protecting historical landscape from destruction.

Historical/Cultural Heritage is made up not only of Building, paintings, museums, etc, but also Fields, Rural Houses, etc.

Necessity to harmonize urban growth with landscape protection

Agricultural land consumption is an emerging theme in the world

Moreover, Emilio Sereni's importance for Chinese Studies is not related to Historical Geography only.

Sereni had a broader view of culture and research.

According to him, the first step to understand a given culture was to learn its language.

That's why Sereni was an incredible multilingual expert.

- Italian (Mothertongue)
 - Jewish

 - French
 - German
 - English
 - Spanish
- 
- European «International» languages

He was Communist. So he learnt all the languages connected with Communism:

- All the Slavic languages (Russian + almost all the Eastern European languages)

If a communist delegation paid a visit to Italy, Sereni was the official interpreter of the Italian Communist Party

But Sereni paid great attention and had great expectations also towards Mao Zedong's China.

Sereni published also a short paper about Cultural Revolution.

Finally, Sereni learnt Mandarin and Cantonese as self-taught

We are sure about this: in the private archive once belonged to Sereni, now a Museum in the village of Gattatico (Reggio Emilia), key-place for the Italian Communist Party, several dictionaries with Sereni's handwritten notes can be found.

A
CHINESE-ENGLISH
DICTIONARY

Compiled for the China Inland Mission

BY

R. H. MATHEWS

SHANGHAI

CHINA INLAND MISSION

AND

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION PRESS

—
1931

Chinese-English
dictionary by
Australian Priest
Robert Henry
Mathews
(Shanghai 1931)
(for a long time, the
leading dictionary
from Chinese into
English)

Copy from E. Sereni private archive

英 粵 字 典

AN ENGLISH AND CANTONESE DICTIONARY,

FOR THE
USE OF THOSE WHO WISH TO LEARN THE SPOKEN
LANGUAGE OF CANTON PROVINCE.

BY
JOHN CHALMERS, LL.D.

Fourth Edition.

With the Changing Tones marked.

Hongkong:

KELLY & WALSH, LIMITED.

HONGKONG—SHANGHAI—YOKOHAMA—SINGAPORE.

1891.

Copy from E.
Sereni private
archive

BUL	31	BUR
Bud, 芽 <i>nga</i> , 咪 <i>meuk</i> (flower) 淋 <i>lan</i> , (to) 發 芽 <i>faat'-nga</i> , 爆咪 <i>paau'- meuk</i> , 出淋 <i>ch'uit-lun</i> .		Bum, 臀 <i>t'uen</i> , 臀墩 <i>t'uen- tan</i> , 屁股 <i>pi'-koo</i> , 尾 后 <i>mi'-huk</i> , <i>jiu'-t'ung</i> , <i>tal</i> .
Buddhism, 佛教 <i>Pat-kam'</i> .		Bum-boat, 雜貨艇 <i>tsaap- juh'-t'eng</i> , <i>tsai'-k'ung</i> , <i>tsai'-t'ung</i> .
Buffalo, 水牛 <i>'shui'-ngau</i> .		Bump, (to) 撞着 <i>ping'- cheak</i> , (down) 墩 <i>tun'</i> , <i>tun'</i> , <i>tsai'-t'ung</i> , <i>tsai'-t'ung</i> .
Buffoon, (male) 男丑 <i>naam- 'ch'au</i> , (female) 女丑 <i>nue- 'ch'au</i> .		Bumptious, 抗排 <i>k'ong'- p'uai</i> .
Buffoonery, 雜脚 <i>tsaap-k'auk'</i> .		Bunch, (a) 一把 <i>gat-pa</i> , 一 羣 <i>gat-k'ung</i> , 一球 <i>gat- k'an</i> , <i>gat-k'an</i> , <i>gat-k'an</i> .
Bug, 木虱 <i>muuk-shat</i> .		Bundle, 包 <i>paau</i> , 札 <i>chaat'</i> , 束 <i>ch'auk</i> .
Build, 起 <i>hi</i> , 建造 <i>hia'- to'</i> , 築 <i>ch'auk</i> .		Bung, 榨 <i>tsut</i> , 積 <i>chat'</i> .
Bulb, 頭 <i>t'au</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		Bungler, 劣工人 <i>lut'- k'ung-yan</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .
Bulk, (to break) 開釐 <i>hoi- t'ong</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		Buoy, 錨漂 <i>man-p'iu</i> , 錨 桶 <i>man-t'ung</i> , (to) 浮 起 <i>lan'-hi</i> , 泡起 <i>po'-hi</i> .
Bulky, 太大 <i>'t'ai'-t'ai'</i> , 大 個 <i>t'ai'-k'oh</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		Burden, 擔頭 <i>tsang'-t'au</i> , 負任 <i>loo-yam</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .
Bull, 牛公 <i>ngau-k'ung</i> .		Burglary, 夜竊 <i>ye'-sit'</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .
Bullet, 彈子 <i>taan'-t'ze</i> , 碼 <i>'ma</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		Burmah, 緬甸 <i>Miu-t'iu'</i> .
Bullock, 騎牛 <i>shin'-ngau</i> .		Burn, (to) 燒 <i>shiu</i> , 燒壞 <i>shiu-wai'</i> , (with an iron) 鎗 <i>naat'</i> .
Bullock's brains, 牛腦 <i>ngau'-na</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		
Bully, 眼 <i>ha</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> , <i>tsai'-k'auk</i> .		
Bulwarks, 欄檻 <i>lan-laam'</i> , 欄圍 <i>lan-wai</i> , (of a city or fort) 城垣 <i>sheng-won</i> .		

English-Cantonese Dictionary by John Chalmers
(VI reprint; Hong Kong 1891): at that time, there weren't any
Academic courses in Europe to learn Cantonese!

Sereni was probably the only Italian historical geographer who spoke and read a bit of Chinese (probably he wasn't fluent), and had direct access to Chinese publications in the '50s/'60s/'70s

And he was probably one of the very few in Western Europe in that period

谢谢!!