

Giotto Dainelli (1878-1968), Geographer, Geologist, Ethnologist, Explorer, Traveller, and Photographer



Patrizia
Pampana
Italy

Giotto Dainelli was the main geographer and geologist in the first half of the twentieth century. He used photography not only to support his fieldwork during his travels and to document his explorations, but also as a pure tool of analysis. In order to outline his versatile and charismatic character, we must refer to the Fond dedicated to him and kept in the Photographic Archive (P.A.) of the Italian Geographical Society (IGS). The first part of the donation was delivered to the IGS in 1951 personally by Dainelli. It consisted of nearly 18.000 negatives (silver bromide gelatine on film and glass, 9x12/13x18 mm and stereographic) put in order, inventoried, and preserved with particular attention by the author. Only one year earlier, Orazio Toraldo di Francia, IGS's President, thanked Dainelli in a letter dated 23 November 1950 for those memorabilia donated to the Society as proof of his explorer past. Moreover, the President committed himself to put them in the museum of the Society. These were six large size landscapes of the Karakorum mountain range, ice axes, and skis with sticks used by Dainelli in climbing the Alps and during his expeditions in Central Asia. In April 1994, the official receiver, Giuseppe Vedovato, assigned to the IGS all the materials belonging to Dainelli. In this way he increased the first collection through the precious documentary archive (122 cases containing registered files of 2850 correspondents from 1901 to 1960), other photographic materials and numerous volumes of Dainelli's bibliography containing more than 500 writings that cover the space of half a century. In November of the same year, the Giotto Dainelli Fond was completed by acquiring the important materials placed at its disposal by Dainelli's American nephew, Daniel B. Gerard, and preserved in the Ischia villa owned by Luca Dainelli, Giotto's son. These were books and atlases, several ma-



Timisgam. Women of Lbsa
Photographer:
Giotto Dainelli
Location: Timisgam (India)
Date: 1914/03/11
Technique: gelatin silver
developing out paper
Collection: De Filippi's
expedition in the Himalayas
and Karakorum,
Chinese Turkestan 1913-1914
Photographic Archive
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Society

nuscripts and typescripts (including *Spedizione Dainelli nel Caracorum 1930*, *Giornale di viaggio* and the autobiography entitled *Quasi un secolo di storia*) and 57 photo albums containing the positives (18.565) whose corresponding negatives Dainelli had donated in 1951. Each image is accompanied by a number referring to the respective caption contained in seventeen black notebooks with hard cover. These notebooks record all information: the author, the topic, the place and the date of the shot. The considerable photographic and documentary heritage is a valuable resource to study the work and the figure of Giotto Dainelli, which is well known to the academic world, but not yet to the general public.

An understanding of the main steps of the intense life of the famous scientist and explorer must start with the speech delivered by Prof. Riccardo Riccardi on occasion of the celebration of his 75th birthday, the consequent end of his teaching career, and the 50 years of his membership in the Society. This event was organized by IGS in 1954 in its headquarters in Villa Celimontana. During this official ceremony that took place in the presence of the leading authorities and international scholars, Giotto Dainelli was appointed honorary member and was awarded the gold medal of the IGS. «*He studied at the glorious*



Dainelli always matched the geographical eye to the photographic eye, producing in this way a large and extraordinary set of iconographic materials that are extremely worthy of research thanks to their cognitive, scientific, educational, and historical value.

Gembur Valley

Photographer: Anonimus

Location: Dras (India)

Date: 1930/05/11

Technique:

gelatin silver paper

Collection:

Dainelli's expedition in the

Western Tibet and the

Eastern Karakorum 1930

Photographic Archive ©

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Institute for Advanced Study of Florence (later a University) where he was the favourite pupil of the famous geologist Carlo De Stefani. So he also became a geologist, and especially, a geographer. He was a geographer who always considered geography a science of direct observation, which not only deals with physical phenomena but also turns its attention to the facts of human geography [...] He was an expert climber, a tireless traveller, a keen and brilliant observer with a wide, deep and rare scientific knowledge. Giotto Dainelli made study tours in Italy and abroad very early.» (Societa Geografica Italiana, 1954, pp. 26-27).

Born in Florence in 1878, after obtaining his degree in Natural Science he was very young when he published the results of his research in the field of geology and palaeontology. His dissertation was about the study of the Monte

Pròmina in Dalmatia, to which he was very attached. He started travelling very soon and he took pictures of the people and places of Mont Blanc (1899 and 1901). He went to Dalmatia and carried out studies of palaeontology in Britain and Morocco as a geographer. After graduation, he attended the specialization courses at the University of Vienna and at the University of Zurich, and in 1903 he was qualified as a university teacher in geology and physical geography in Florence. From 1914 to 1921 he held the chair of geography at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pisa; subsequently he became full professor of geology in Naples until 1924, when De Stefani died and he returned to Florence in order to succeed his master tirelessly until 1944. In this period he was appointed director of the Academy of



Babar Dar: members of the mission.

At the center Giotto Dainelli

Photographer:

Giotto Dainelli

Location: Ethiopia

Date: 1937/02/11

Technique:

gelatin silver film

Collection:

Dainelli's mission

at Lake Tana in 1937

Photographic Archive

© Italian Geographical Society

Italy and he followed Mussolini to Salò. After the war he started teaching until he was 75 years old (1953). He died in Florence in 1968.

From the early years of the twentieth century, Dainelli set out on several geographical-climbing explorations and scientific missions in Africa, Asia as well as in Europe. In 1905, he went to Asmara in order to participate in the Italian Colonial Congress (24 September - 15 October). When it was over he took part in an important fact-finding mission in the south-eastern Eritrean region of Akkala Guzai (between the Highlands, its slopes and the Danakil depression) together with the geographer Olinto Marinelli, the palaeontologist and physical anthropologist Aldobrandino Mochi and with the ethnologist Lamberto Loria. It was the first mission organized in an inter-

disciplinary approach in the Italian colonial context, sponsored by the Institute of Advanced Studies of Florence, funded by the Ministry of Education and by the Government of the Colony of Eritrea. The expedition started immediately after the Congress and it finished in January, 1906. The scientific results were collected in a book written with Marinelli (Dainelli and Marinelli, 1912). It is a detailed and complete work, still valuable as a prime source for scientific knowledge of that territory; some photographs taken during the expedition are published in this work. In its Introduction, the authors themselves pointed out the presence of *“some figures drawn from the rich collection of photographs, together with those of our fellow travellers consisting of nearly 1.300 negatives all together”*. In the Giotto Dainelli Fond of the P.A. IGS is kept a considerable part of this



heritage (1030 negatives, including 247 that are attributed certainly to Giotto Dainelli). The phototypes are divided into three series (lotto 500, lotto 632 and lotto 633). The represented subjects are very mixed: ethnic groups, animals, and landscapes.

The core of the collection is made up of the photographs taken during his stay in Asmara on the occasion of the celebration of Mascia (or the invention of the Cross). Other interesting information about the journeys made from one side to the other of the Colony, that is from the Highlands of Maria to the valleys of Assaorta, from the peaks to the desolate desert of the Danakil region, was found in the letters sent by Dainelli to his family, and then collected and published in two volumes of the collection *Monografie illustrate. Serie viaggi*, entitled *In Africa (Lettere dall'Eritrea)*.

After his experience in Eritrea, between August 1913 and November 1914, Dainelli joined the expedition led by Filippo De Filippi to the western Himalaya and Karakorum, until he reached Chinese Turkestan (the present Xinjiang) and Russian Central Asia. Also participating in the expeditions were Olinto Marinelli, the astrophysicist Giorgio Abetti, the meteorologists Nello Venturi Ginori and Camillo Alessandri, Lieutenant Alberto Alessio, the engineer John Alfred Spranger, Major Henry Wood of the Indian trigonometric office (which also provided two Indian surveyors Janma Pranad and Shib Lal), the alpine guide Joseph Petigax, and Lieutenant Cesare Antilli, an employee of the military photographic section. To the latter, De Filippi had entrusted the task to take care of the photographic works of the mission. Although it was strictly forbidden to the other members of the expedition to bring any kind of photographic equipment, Giotto Dainelli didn't respect the ban and

collected many images with his camera during his solitary explorations. The photographs of the expedition are preserved in the Historical Fond (lotto 82: 1.100 positives) and in the Giotto Dainelli Fund (lotto 548: 164 negatives, lotto 549: 1.221 negatives) of the P.A. IGS. The positives are collected in three albums: 533 in album I, 431 in album II and 136 in album III. The presence of these albums is already documented by Enrico De Agostini, IGS Secretary, who made the list *Raccolta fotografica* in 1946 on the occasion of the first reorganization of the iconographic collections. In many cases they were real "assemblages", namely shots captured in sequence, glued all together in order to create a panoramic view. The vast amount of collected data (samples of fossils, plants, surveys and photographs) was included in *Relazioni Scientifiche della Spedizione Italiana De Filippi nell'Himalaia, Caracorum e Turkestan Cinese* (1913-1914), published between 1922 and 1934 by Zanichelli editor of Bologna and in *Risultati geologici e geografici pubblicati sotto la direzione di Giotto Dainelli*. When the expedition reached the Karakorum Pass, it was coming to its end, while in Europe the war broke out.

Once back in Italy, Dainelli began to organize the wealth of materials that he had brought back from the expedition and started his first official course at the University of Pisa. At the same time he applied to the Ministry of War with the aim of being called up for military service, as soon as Italy had gone to war, to be temporarily attached to the task force in Isonzo Valley of whose Austrian part he had partially made a survey. His application to be a volunteer was for a long time unanswered because it raised bureaucratic difficulties due to his position of university professor. Therefore he wasn't sent to the front. Moreover, he was suffering for life from a serious tropical disease, lymphatic filariasis, which he had

Climbing the exercises rock in La Saxe

Photographer: Giotto Dainelli

Location: La Saxe, Courmayeur (Valle d'Aosta)

Date: 1912/08

Technique: gelatin silver glass plate negative

Collection: Negative Dainelli 9x12 II

Photographic Archive © Italian Geographical Society



contracted during the De Filippi Expedition after being bitten by an infected mosquito, and which caused him sudden high fever and swelling of the legs and lymph nodes. For these reasons he wasn't at the front line during the war, but he helped the soldiers of Friuli who took shelter in Florence after the defeat of Caporetto, giving them shelter at first in his own home and his father and sisters' city and country houses and then in the "Madre Patria" Shelter, of which he was the President.

In 1915 Dainelli was appointed Vice President of IGS, and in 1919 he resigned from his position and gradually left the Society. He was very successful in spending most of his life in journeys of exploration and receiving academic recognition (in fact he was member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and of the Accademia d'Italia). After his support for the Italian



Social Republic, informally known as the Republic of Salò, and after being appointed Podestà (Mayor) of Florence, the shadow hanging over his successful life came from the events mentioned above and consequently he was dismissed from the University of Florence and from the IGS. The IGS rehabilitated him only in 1947. However in 1930 Dainelli started to undertake an important fact-finding mission: he organized an expedition to the Siachen Glacier, located in the eastern Karakoram range in the Himalaya Mountains. This exploration involved a stay of at least five months of the participants in a completely uninhabited area, at an altitude of 4.800 meters. Dainelli selected as participants his student Ardito Desio, who renounced at the last minute, the Governor of the territory and the transhimalayan state of Casmir, Hashmatullah Khan and the alpinist Elly Kalau von Hofe, his loyal partner and regular host at the "Dainella", a comfortable house-shelter of Entrèves (Courmayeur). Dainelli gave news of the participation of two IGM's officers, Enrico Alfonso Cecioni and Alessandro Latini in the letters published as a report about the current journey in the daily newspaper "La Nazione". After organizing everything in detail, on 9 April Dainelli left Florence to undertake the summer campaign with a small group to Karakorum's magnificent glaciers and to the Nubra High Valley, famous for its difficult accessibility due to the frequent flooding of the river. On the way to Rimu glacier, the group had to face a snowstorm that didn't stop it from reaching over 6.150 metres above sea level in the Rimu-La Hills, between Tarim and Rimu – a feat that had never been achieved before by the previous explorations. For this reason, the hill was given the name of Hill of Italy, indicated in this way on geographical maps until the 1950's. Most of the photographic materials realized during this



journey are kept at the P.A. IGS and it consists of 60 positives (lotto 83, lotto 84 and lotto 367) of the Historical Fond and 3.355 negatives of the Giotto Dainelli Fond (lotto 597, lotto 598 and lotto 599).

In 1936, in order to promote scientific knowledge of the vast territory of Ethiopia, Dainelli proposed to the Royal Academy of Italy the creation of a Study Center for Italian East Africa and a mission to Lake Tana with the aim of studying the physical and anthropic aspects of the great basin of the lake and its outlet, the Blue Nile. In the early part of October 1936, Dainelli arrived in Addis Ababa in order to make the necessary deals with the local Government and to organize the mission in which participated: Carlo Busi (as the assistant of the commander), Giuseppe Morandini (responsible for physical research on the lake), Giorgio Bini (responsible for faunal research), Giovanni Penzo (responsible for limnological and ichthyological research), Bruno Castelli and Enrico Brolo (responsible for faunal collections), Enzo Minucci (responsible for geological research), Rodolfo Pichi Sermolli (responsible for botanical research), Lidio Cipriani (responsible for anthropological research), Vinigi Lorenzo Grottanelli (responsible for anthropogeographical research), Pier Francesco Nistri (responsible for agricultural research). The expedition departed on 4 January 1937 and came back to Italy on 3 May of the same year with all its collections, the work of five intensive months. The lake was the subject of the bathymetric survey, of the measurement of its depth and its diameter. They studied its movements, its physical and chemical aspects, and collected its rich fish fauna and flora. In addition to the natural and anthropological observations, the photographs taken during the tours of the islands that faced the shores of the great lake are very

important. The complete iconographic collection consists of nearly 6.500 negatives and it is kept in the P.A. IGS.

In 1938-39 Dainelli was busy working to the Geological Mission of AGIP for the exploration of Somalia and its neighbouring areas under the coordination of the engineer Carlo Ippolito Migliorini. Giancarlo Facca, Giovanni Merla (appointed to replace Francesco Scarsella, who had been the first choice but was held up at the Ministry of the Corporations) and the surveyor Guido Poletti were among the scholars. While his colleagues left for Africa between October and November of 1938, Dainelli joined them in the first half of December, and he was welcomed at Bender Cassim by Carlo Busi who helped the famous geologist during the mission to Lake Tana. The photographs, collected by Giotto Dainelli (467 stereoscopic negatives, 714 negatives and 1.088 positives collected in four albums titled “Somalia”) and kept in the P.A. IGS, document the different steps of the journey: the navigation in the Red Sea and the passage through the archipelago Dahlak; the stops at Aden and Berbera; the arrival to Bender Cassim (currently known as Bosaso); the walk from the coast to the base camp in Dolo, on the southern border with Ethiopia; the long survey in the area of Oltregiuba and in the country of Arussi and Borana (Neghelli-Mega, on the border of Kenya).

The results of these campaigns about pure geology were collected by Giotto Dainelli in the huge work divided into three volumes entitled *Geologia dell’Africa Orientale* published by the Royal Academy of Italy in 1943. In his “wandering tours” all around the world, Dainelli always matched the geographical eye to the photographic eye, producing in this way a large and extraordinary set of icono-



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Keren. The market of mats
 Photographer:
 Giotto Dainelli
 Date: 1905/10/24
 Technique: gelatin silver
 glass plate negative
 Collection: Eritrea
 Photographic Archive ©
 Italian Geographical
 Society

graphic materials that are extremely worthy of research thanks to their cognitive, scientific, educational, and historical value. The voluminous documentation produced, the large amount of landscape images of geographical and geological importance and anthropological and ethnological concerns tell about the “expedition in the expedition”, the routes that the scholar undertook in order to observe and describe the landscapes, the villages, the houses, the places of worship, the markets, the families, habits, and religious and ceremonial customs of people they visited.

The photographs testify to an insatiable curiosity of the author who, thanks to the shot, fixes meetings, people and events, extends his relationship with everything that is the subject of his own interests and allows us to take advantage of documents that are extraordinary for their quantity and quality. More than 7.200 images kept in the A.F. related to Giotto Dainelli are published in *EuropeanaPhotography*.



On the road to Malca Murri

Photographer:

Giotto Dainelli

Location: Ethiopia

Date: 1939/01/19

Technique:

gelatin silver film

Collection:

Geological mission

Agip 1938-1939

Photographic Archive

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