

In Memory of Piero Villaggio

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Piero Villaggio passed away on 4 January 2014. Professor Emeritus of the Mechanics of Solids and Structures at the University of Pisa and member of the celebrated *Accademia dei Lincei*, Piero Villaggio graduated in 1957 from the University of Genoa. In 1966 he was appointed Professor of Mechanics of Solids and Structures at the Engineering Faculty of the University of Pisa, a role that he held until his retirement in 2008. He was also Professor of Continuum Mechanics and Fluid Dynamics at the *Scuola Normale Superiore* of Pisa and, in consideration of his long, impassioned experience in rock climbing, a member of the prestigious CAAI (Italian Academic Alpine Club).

Right from the beginning of his academic career he manifested a keen research interest in a wide range of subjects—from Applied mathematics and engineering, to the philosophy of science. He delved into a number of basic issues, always aiming at the simplest possible solutions, always highlighting the fundamental physical aspects involved in the problem. From this perspective, it is not surprising that he chose the classical theory of elasticity—a theory whose elegance is matched only by its effectiveness—as a key instrument, one which he preferentially applied to a long list of mechanical applications: from the study of masonry elements and structures, to that of tunnels, avalanche and landslides; from the solution to contact problems, to joint design and the analysis of stress concentrations, to name only a few.

These few short lines, however, are by no means intended to commemorate, even summarily, his long-standing scientific and teaching achievements: a detailed presentation is instead contained in the article by Roger Fosdick and Gianni Royer (2014), recently published in the *Journal of Elasticity*, whose reading I strongly recommend to those who knew and loved Piero Villaggio. Here, as Director of the

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Ph.D. School of Engineering “Leonardo da Vinci” in Pisa, I only wish to recall the course that Piero Villaggio gave regularly since 1982 in differential equations of mathematical physics, firstly for our research doctorate in structural engineering, then for our doctoral school. I find it hard to imagine just how many students must surely recall his boundless love of knowledge, let alone his lessons—disarming in their simplicity, sometimes even elusive in their subtlety—his ability to delineate the mechanical significance of a problem with just a few chalk strokes on the blackboard, as well as the veiled elegance of his analytical solutions.

Those friends, colleagues and students who knew him will certainly remember him for his passionate, selfless love of knowledge, for his unbounded devotion to his work, as well as his moral rectitude and integrity. From these perspectives, Piero Villaggio represented and will always represent a role model for all those who have had the good fortune to work with him, or even to have had the opportunity to meet and exchange some thoughts with him, or simply to have watched him at work, seated at his desk, surrounded by his beloved books.

There are some individuals in this world who, like Piero Villaggio, are set ‘apart’ from all others by the intensity, the determination and constancy with which they immerse themselves in their personal pursuits. Such individuals certainly leave a great emptiness, but they also leave countless lasting traces of themselves in those who have known and admired them in many different ways: in this sense, Piero and his singular personality live on in all who loved him and have, if only in part, understood his profound message.

Reference

Fosdick, R. L., & Royer-Carfagni, G. (2014). Piero Villaggio: Representative of the Italian tradition of honored elasticians. *Journal of Elasticity*, 116, 103.