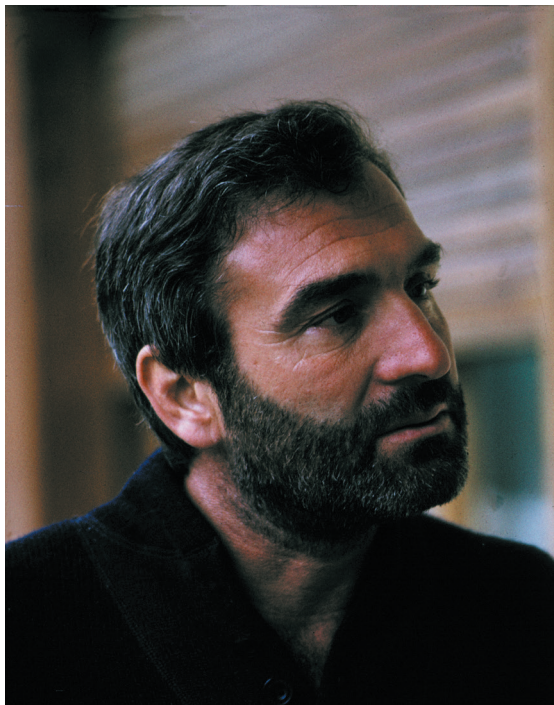

GIANLUIGI MAESTRI

Re-Remembering Maestri



Cesare Maestri. (Leo Dickinson).

In the *Alpine Journal* last year ¹, Alan Heppenstall gave a balanced and generous account of the life of the Italian climber Cesare Maestri without avoiding the issues that put Maestri among the more controversial figures of 20th century mountaineering. Given the assistance Heppenstall received from Maestri's son Gianluigi, the editor is happy to publish Gianluigi's rebuttal (in italics) to specific passages and our response.

On p80, Heppenstall wrote: '*El Arca di Los Vientos*, as it was called, presented extremely difficult climbing on rock and ice, and showed no signs of any previous ascent.' Maestri says:

1. A Heppenstall, 'Remembering Maestri', *Alpine Journal*, vol 125, 2021, pp65-83.

What you have written does not correspond with the truth, because up to a certain point signs were found of the ascent by Cesare and Egger. Further the first ascent of 'El Arca' did not follow the exact line that Cesare claimed to have followed. This is to leave aside the fact that the weather conditions on that mountain are such that visible signs of the passage of others can easily not be discovered.

Also on p80: 'Some who knew the circumstances thought that it might help his mental state if Cesare could be persuaded to reveal the true events of that period in 1959, but he remained stubborn to the end.'

These 'deductions' of yours appear to be out of place. You start from the premise that the events of 1959 were not as Cesare described them, and the fact that he remained stubborn to the end underlines the supposition that he was lying.

On p81: 'During the interview (with Charlie Buffet) Cesare slightly changed his story, but the true circumstances of Egger's death were not revealed.'

Here again you seem to be starting from the premise that Egger's death was not as Cesare has always described, and as I told you several years ago that is a serious accusation, which I must contest totally.

On p81: 'The full story of Cerro Torre died with Cesare on 19 January 2021.'

You continue to insinuate that the story of Cerro Torre in 1959 was falsified by secret information that Cesare was unwilling to reveal, thus stating as a fact that he was a liar, rather than presenting this as your opinion, and the opinion of others.

Editor's note: In his first comment, Gianluigi is presumably referring to the gear found comparatively low on the face, on the ledge below the triangular snow patch. This cache was discovered in 1974 by Jim Donini and others, barely 300m up a 2,000m climb, long before *El Arca di Los Vientos* was climbed. Nothing whatsoever, as far as we are aware, was found above this point and *El Arca* really begins above the col of Conquest. Cesare Maestri claimed to have placed 60 hand-drilled bolts above this cache. None has yet been found to corroborate his claim.

That Cesare was suffering in his latter years from some form of mental distress was based partly on Cesare's own writings, but also on the word of neurophysiologist Prof Marcello Costa who spoke to Cesare on the phone and reported that he seemed disturbed. Gianluigi asks: 'How do you imagine Cesare reacted to the death of his climbing companion and the endless controversies surround the climb that have continued until this day?'

We don't say in the article that Cesare was lying but the fact is Cesare himself changed several aspects of the story over the years. For example, the first version Cesare gave of Egger's death said he was lowering him at the

time the fatal avalanche struck and the rope parted. In the Charlie Buffet interview, he contradicted himself, saying that Egger didn't need lowering and was in fact abseiling. Since we have different versions of the story we cannot be sure which to believe. (Gianluigi says these discrepancies were a consequence of the passage of time and a fading memory.) The configuration of ropes discovered with Egger's body doesn't support either of these versions, looking more consistent with a crevasse rescue, although Gianluigi disputes this.

It is often overlooked that there were two men on the historic attempt in 1959 to climb Cerro Torre. So while the continuing controversy may seem a burden on the family of the recently deceased Cesare Maestri, it was agony for the family of Toni Egger. His mother and siblings never knew for certain what had happened to him. Maestri visited them soon after returning from Patagonia but Egger's sister Steffi (unlike her mother) did not believe the version of events he gave. Toni Egger was an assiduous diarist but his journals were never returned to his family. Even at the end of her long life, Steffi hoped that Cesare Maestri would explain why. He died a few months before she did, without that explanation.