

OBITUARY

BERNARDO BERNARDI

Professor Bernardo Bernardi, doyen of Italian Social Anthropologists and Africanists, died in Rome in May 2007. He played a vigorous role on the IAI Executive Council (1983–6), and through his good offices the Institute's profile in Italy was raised to the point where we received an annual grant, and other forms of support, from the Italian government. Having served in the Vatican secretariat with a future Pope, he trained as a missionary with the Consolata Mission Society, where his final post was Director of Education. As he travelled and carried out research in East and Southern Africa, he became steadfastly less a missionary and more a professional anthropologist. In Cape Town in 1950, he wrote his PhD in African Studies on the age system of the Nilo-Hamites under the supervision of Isaac Schapera; he was also influenced by Meyer Fortes, who spent a semester at Cape Town in this period. After studying at the Institute of Education, London, he embarked in 1954, with an IAI research fellowship, on fieldwork among the Tharaka of Kenya focusing on the mystical power of the Mugwe of Meru. He presented this in his IAI monograph, *The Mugwe, a Failing Prophet*—a title which, after criticism from his Meru informants, he changed to *A Blessing Prophet*, although the Mugwe was definitely losing his traditional powers. With this piece of professional anthropological fieldwork completed, Bernardo was appointed in 1970 as Professor of Cultural Anthropology in his hometown, Bologna, moving subsequently to the chair of 'Glottanthropology' in Rome (La Sapienza) where, apart from numerous visiting appointments in Europe and North America, he stayed for the rest of his life.

With these connections, Bernardo played a very important role in introducing modern social anthropology into the Italian system, insisting on the importance of intensive fieldwork in the Malinowskian style. With his warm personality, he gathered round him a wide circle of lively young scholars who rightly regarded him with veneration as well as affection. A prolific writer, he also encouraged anthropologists from other countries to publish in the formidable series 'Antropologia culturale e sociale' which he directed for the prestigious publisher, Franco-Angeli: by 2007 this included over sixty major works spanning an astonishingly wide range of topics in anthropology. Reflecting the influence of the Italian artist, Lilli Romanelli, whom he had married after his missionary life, this included major studies on 'primitive' art, and was perhaps the most telling evidence of Bernardo's extraordinary range of intellectual and aesthetic interests. Italian anthropology will be truly blessed if it finds an equally distinguished successor.

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Former Director, IAI