

## IRMA PIOVANO

### OSCAR BOTTO A LIFE DEVOTED TO INDIA

Professor Oscar Botto passed away at about 9.10 p.m. on Sunday, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008. He left this world discreetly and serenely, when most people were still on holiday, in the manner he would probably have chosen to do.

He was an acknowledged scholar of international eminence, a brilliant and paternal teacher, a thorough gentleman, generous and friendly. He left a deep mark and an everlasting memory in all of those people he had had the opportunity to meet.

He was open-hearted and cordial, caring and helpful, strict and severe when he demanded firmness and devotion to learning that he lavished joyfully. He was always eager to inspire new ideas, to spur on a pleasant debate, to encourage research and study projects, which he always offered generous insights to. He never spared his support, as a great Master is expected to. A Master who lived a peaceful and regular life, solidly rooted in family values, friendship, honesty, loyalty, the principles which he believed in. He had boundless patience and would always offer encouragement and hope so as achieve set goals, personal and professional alike. He maintained that everyone has something to contribute – be it big or small – to the progress of learning, spurred on by honesty of purpose and humility.

Even though he never went to India, partly because of his family situation that did not allow him to go away for long periods, he never lived a secluded life. In his view, a philologist works principally on

written texts and he learns about the thought and culture of a civilization from them. He studied the texts deeply and dedicated himself to them with such passion that scholars from abroad – many of them from India – vied for the opportunity to come to Torino to exchange ideas and discuss the outcome of their respective research. He was bound by a profound friendship to all of them and he never hesitated to treasure their advice.

Even the Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Sanskrit Studies “Shrī Lāl Bahādur Shāstrī Rāshṭriya Saṃskṛit Vidyāpeeth” in New Delhi in 1994 and the Indian Ambassador on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University came to Torino, in order to bestow honorary degrees on him in 1996.

His time was fruitful for Indological studies as there were many outstanding scholars who left their lasting mark as they improved and furthered Sanskrit and Indology. He was a close friend of many of them, such as B. Banerjee, André Bareau, Gregory M. Bongard-Levin, Colette Caillat, R.N. Dandekar, Jean Filliozat, Ananda Guruge, Siegfried Lienhard, V. Raghavan, Louis Renou, Ludwik Sternbach, K.V. Sarma, Satya Vrat Shastri, mentioning only a few of the foreign scholars. He shared a deep friendship and mutual admiration – as well as intense and fruitful cooperation – particularly with Colette Caillat and Siegfried Lienhard. Their combined expertise has generated a special intellectual *humus* out of which sprang intuitions and projects of great relevance for the progress of Indological studies. One of them was the International Prize “Torino e l’Oriente”, under the High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic. It was created in 1986 aiming to “confer a solemn and tangible recognition to an Italian or foreign scholar, whose scientific merits are unanimously recognized and whose works are considered, by general consent, as a contribution of fundamental importance to the progress of Oriental studies”. Unfortunately, the Prize was short-lived, lasting only two editions (1988 and 1990)<sup>1</sup> before being definitively suspended owing to

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1. In 1988 Prof. Jan Gonda was awarded the prize. One of the most outstanding scholars of Indology ever, his works – as stated in the prize motivation – left an indelible mark in the field of linguistic, philologic, literary and religious studies. In 1990 Prof. Jacques Gernet was awarded the prize: his works – according to the motivation – played a decisive role in contributing to a deeper knowledge of the thought and the civilisation of ancient China.

lack of funds. Another important project was organized through their mutual cooperation and through suggestions from Ludwik Sternbach: it is the “Corpus Iuris Sanscriticum”, created in 1999, which was awarded the Prize “Ikuo Hirayama” by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres of the Institut de France in Paris in 2000.

Among his closest friends were Carlo Della Casa, with whom he had shared his years as a student, and colleagues from other academic fields, such as the archaeologist Sabatino Moscati, an expert on the Phoenician and Punic Civilisation, the Sinologist Lionello Lanciotti, the Glossologist Romano Lazzeroni, the scholar of Himalayan History Luciano Petech, the outstanding Biblist Piero Rossano, to quote but a few. Indeed, Oscar Botto treasured his friends – including the architect Sandro Amerio from his childhood days, his comrade-at-arms Valter Agostini, who later became an efficient collaborator, and Carlo Caselli from Biella. He also enjoyed talking to strangers as he was friendly and helpful towards everybody.

The news of his decease was spread worldwide by his collaborators and friends and met with genuine shock: a full page appeared in the Italian daily “La Stampa” and obituaries in his memory were published in numerous scientific journals.

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He was born in Torino on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1922. His parents were from the Biella District, a land he had always been very fond of<sup>2</sup>.

He attended a secondary school, Liceo Cavour and he was an outstanding student; but he did not disdain from helping his father in the family machinery workshop.

He used to remember that the Sanskrit language had fascinated him while listening to a lesson on Schopenhauer. The lesson, which his philosophy teacher held, included a great number of references to the *Upaniṣads* and the Sanskrit, which immediately attracted him because of its magical beauty in spite of the fact it was extreme difficult.

He attended the Sanskrit course held by one of the most outstand-

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2. He became an Honorary Citizen of Biella (1997), of the village of Mosso (2002), where his father was born, and later of Condove (1989), a pleasant town in the Susa Valley where he loved to spend his summer holidays.

ing scholars of those times, Mario Vallauri at the University of Torino. He plunged into these studies under the rigorous guidance of such an eminent Master, whom he had always had a deep feeling of gratitude and affection for, constantly remembering his extraordinary worth and teachings. His feelings were so strong that in 1988, during an interview, he declared: “At that time I let myself be attracted both by the mystery of the language and the greatness of the Master”.

His inclination to devote himself completely to learning was not affected by the military training he had in order to become an army officer (from December 1942). His fellow cadets remembered him fondly, engrossed in his books, and greatly admired his cordial and helpful attitude. Though not particularly interested in military disciplines, thanks to his innate and surprising mnemonic skill, he turned out to be among the top five cadets in his course. Back in Torino, he entirely devoted himself to the study of Sanskrit, graduating with honours in the Academic Year 1943/44 with a dissertation on *Narasimhapurāṇa*.

On Mario Vallauri’s advice, he spent a long time in Paris attending courses held by the eminent scholar Louis Renou while carrying on with his research. His intellectual skills and gentle disposition earned him widespread appreciation and he was soon appointed member of the Société Asiatique, sponsored by Renou himself and Jean Filliozat, Professor at the Collège de France. This would mark the beginning of a life-long commitment to the Parisian cultural world. He returned to Paris the following year, in order to attend the 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Orientalists.

In 1948 he was appointed Assistant Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Torino. He also taught Greek and Latin at the prestigious “Liceo San Giuseppe” in Torino in those years, where he was highly appreciated by the teaching staff and the students alike, thanks to his reliability and to the great value of his teaching.

In 1957 he attended the 24<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Orientalists, held in Munich, and in the same year he was appointed Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Torino. He became the Director of the Piedmontese section of the prestigious Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO), chaired by the great Orientalist Giuseppe Tucci.

In 1959 he held a lecture in Essen-Bredeneby as a representative of

Italian Indology studies at the Workshops on Indology organised at the Villa Hügel discussing the Historical Aspects of Swat and Documents, in relation to the Development of the Buddhist Thought<sup>3</sup>. In the same year he published an exhaustive volume on *Buddhism*.

In 1960 he was appointed Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

In the years from 1960 to 1969 he organized and directed a comprehensive History of Oriental Literatures<sup>4</sup> in the Italian language in four volumes. It is considered to be one of the most important works in this field. There were about thirty scholars who contributed to this impressive work. J. Brough declared in his review: “Many of us will surely welcome such an opportunity to learn something of the scope of other branches of Oriental studies – a glimpse into a neighbour’s garden”.

In 1961, in the context of UNESCO’s Major Project – Meeting between East and West, he organized a series of lectures devoted to Oriental traditions in Torino.

Even though he was very young, the outstanding results he achieved through his research in the field of Indology earned him an appointment as Full Professor of Indology at the University of Torino in 1963, where he also taught Philosophies and Religions of India and the Far East. He was appointed Emeritus Professor of Indology in 1997, towards the end of his shining academic career.

The future of these studies was not threatened when the Piedmontese section of IsMEO (1964) closed down<sup>5</sup>, as Oscar Botto had founded,

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3. “Historical aspects of Swat and documents (in relation to the Development of the Buddhist Thought)”, Sonderdruck aus «*Indologen-Tagung*», Göttingen, 1959 (Verhandlungen der Indologischen Arbeitstagung in Essen-Bredeneu, Villa Hügel 13-15/7/1959), pp. 266-271.

4. *Storia delle Letterature d’Oriente*, 4 vols., Milano, Casa Editrice Dr. Francesco Vallardi, 1969.

5. This crucial moment has been described by Oscar Botto himself as follows: “This activity, that proved very successful, has now come to an end. And yet this is an end in the form, not in the substance of the subject matter. Because its substance, on the contrary, grows stronger and acquires new dignity. In the context of new activities concerning our near future, the teaching of Oriental languages will soon become available at University, because the City of Torino, responding to today’s emerging needs, has decided that our University shall be enriched by a degree course in modern Oriental Languages. Torino will thus soon have – besides the courses of Indology and Religions and Philosophies of India and the Far East, already active – the teaching of

practically at the same time, the Institute of Indology, that later became the Department of Oriental Studies, that he directed till 1996. Thus, thanks to the new teachings and his scholarly scientific projects, Oriental Studies at the University of Torino were greatly enhanced: many of Botto's competent pupils were to become great scholars at the University.

In 1966 he was appointed Correspondent Fellow of the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino<sup>6</sup>. In December 1970 he held a series of seminars at the Sorbonne University, while in April 1972 he held a series of lectures on topics concerning the economy and commerce in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. India at the University of Utrecht, in the context of the cultural exchanges between Italy and Holland. On this occasion, he was also appointed the official speaker for the celebrations in honour of the great Dutch scholar of Indology Jan Gonda.

In 1970 he was among the speakers at the International Conference on Epic Poetry organized by the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei<sup>7</sup>, and he was appointed Fellow of this Academy in 1971.<sup>8</sup>

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Chinese, Japanese and Arabic, Persian and Hindi, completed on a cultural level by other courses concerning the history and institutions of Eastern peoples. Such teachings will not be isolated anymore, thus preventing the risk of being an end in themselves, but will constitute an organic, systematic and coordinated body of disciplines. A greater enhancement of the past, a greater awareness of the present, a more solid and appropriate training for the future". O.Botto, "Anche nel cuore dell'Asia, Archeologia significa rivelazione di rapporti umani, sui quali si fonda tanta parte dell'eredità spirituale del nostro passato" (Also in the heart of Asia, Archaeology means revelation of human relationships, on which such a great amount of the spiritual heritage from our past is based), in *45° Parallelo* (Periodico dell'Associazione Stampa Subalpina e del Circolo della Stampa), n. 12 (gennaio-febbraio 1966), pp. 38-39.

6. "Correspondent Fellow", Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, since 1966; "National Fellow" since 1979. He directed the Section of Moral, Historical and Natural Sciences (1987-1994). He was Vice-President from 1994 to 2000; President "in pectore", in 2001, because of serious health reasons he was compelled to renounce the chairmanship of the prestigious Academy, although he maintained (from 1996 to 2008) the direction of the *Atti e Memorie* (Proceedings and Memories) of the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Section of Physical, mathematical and natural Sciences, and of the *Atti e Memorie* (Proceedings and Memories) of the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Section of Moral, historical and philological Sciences.

7. His speech was later published with the title "Origins and development of Indian epics", in "Origini e sviluppo dell'epica indiana", in *La poesia epica e la sua formazione*, Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1970 (Anno CCCLXVII, Quaderno 139), pp. 655-677.

8. First as "Correspondent Fellow" since 1971; then as "National Fellow" since 1988.

In April 1971 he chaired the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Indological Studies, that was held in Torino. It attracted scholars of Indology from all over the world. Its Proceedings were published in the first volume of the Journal *Indologica Taurinensia* (1973).

From 1973-1978 he held the prominent assignment as Member of the Consultative Committee of the Vatican Secretary for Non-Christians.

In 1973, during the XXIX International Conference of Orientalists held in Paris, the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS) was founded and soon he was called to be the Vice-President. He was also appointed as Regional Director for “Roman-speaking countries of Europe” of the prestigious Association from 1994 to 2006. In 1976 he founded the Italian Sanskrit Studies Association and he was President until 2004.

Torino had acquired widespread success and international fame thanks to him, so it was chosen as the seat of the Second World Sanskrit Conference of the IASS in 1975, where Oscar Botto was Convenor and Chairman.

In Torino he hosted and chaired other important international conferences organized by Cesmeo: the Weber’s thesis of the rationalisation with regard to Hinduism and Buddhism (1983), the 9th International Rāmāyaṇa Conference (1992); the 11<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference, in cooperation with I.A.S.S., with hosted 300 speakers from all over the world (2000); the International Conference “East and West: different theories and medical systems” attended by 600 people (2001).

In 1984, on behalf of the Italian Academic Union and the Centre for Buddhist Studies of the Academy of Copenhagen he directed a lexicological research in view of the publication of the *Critical Dictionary of the pali language*, in collaboration with Mariangela D’Onza, and on behalf of CNR – the Italian National Research Council - he directed a research on Society and State in India in the Gupta period.

In 1981 he was appointed Member of the Board of the Examiners for Ph. D. Degrees, Pañjāb University (Chandigarh), Kerala University (Trivandrum) and University of Roorkee (Roorkee).

The Cesmeo, International Institute for Advanced Asian Studies<sup>9</sup>, was set up by O. Botto in 1982 with the aim of promoting and devel-

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9. A non profit institution founded by the University of Turin, the Piedmontese Region and Province, the Municipality of Turin.

oping relations and cultural exchanges among Piedmont and Asian Countries, of spreading the knowledge of Asian languages and cultures and of strengthening the relevant scientific research. Cesmeo is one of the most qualified and renowned institutes for scientific research and the cultural spreading of Oriental studies.

At Cesmeo Oscar Botto devoted his activity untiringly to promoting research and organizing editorial projects and cultural events.

He was awarded the “Premio Nazionale del Presidente della Repubblica Italiana per le Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche” (1986)<sup>10</sup>; the “Grand Sceau” awarded by the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1987<sup>11</sup>.

He was honoured with the Degree of “Vidyāvācaspati *Honoris causa*” (Dr.h.c.), of the Shri Lāl Bahādur Shāstri Rāshṭriya Saṃskrit Vidyāpeeth, New Delhi (1994)<sup>12</sup>; the Degree of “Dr. Litt. *Honoris Causa*” of the Banaras Hindu University, 1996<sup>13</sup>; and the Degree “Docteur *Honoris Causa*” of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 2000.

Prestigious acknowledgements he received thanks to his life completely devoted to Indology brought about his election as a Member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, Paris (2000) and the awarding of the prizes “Rabindranath Tagore Birth Centenary Gold Plaque for 2005” and the “International Academy of Buddhism Honoree for the Year 2005” (Los Angeles, University of the West, 2006).

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His studies show that Oscar Botto had a wide variety of interests. His interest in Indian Literature ranged from the epic to lyric poetry, from theatre to *artha* and *dharma*. He carried out thorough studies on

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10. Motivation of the prize in *Rendiconti delle Adunanze solenni*, vol. VIII, fasc. 10, 20.6.1986; articles on this prize in UTET, *Panorama di Lettere e Scienze*, n. 155, Anno 30, 1986; “Una vita per l’India: il riconoscimento allo studioso Oscar Botto”, *Il Tempo*, Roma, a. XLIII, no. 165, 21.6.1986; *La Valsusa*, 5.7.1986; *Il Giornale*, 21.6.1986; *Eco di Biella*, 30.6.1986.

11. Articles on this prize in *La Stampa*, 3.2.1987; *Eco di Biella*, 29.1.1987; *Il Biellese*, 30.1.1987, p.14.

12. Articles on this degree: *Eco di Biella*, 2.5.1994, No. 33; *La Stampa*, 3.5.1994; *La Voce Repubblicana*, 13-14.5.1994; ‘*l Caval ’d Bròns*, January 1995

13. *Eco di Biella*, 7.3.1996; *La Stampa*, 8.3.1996; *La Repubblica*, 9.3.1996.



specific topics based on the edition of challenging unpublished texts and translations which were particularly difficult to interpret. He had assimilated a rigorous philological technique through Vallauri that has always constituted the essence of his methodology which he added a personal refined style to.

His works can be divided into four main sets: the first set concerns a vast range including epic-artistic poetry, lyric-artificial, didactic-moralizing, dramatic poetry; the second one focuses on juridical and political doctrines; the third one concerns the epics; the fourth one is centred on the history of religions and particularly the Buddhist doctrine.

He also wrote numerous articles on these topics that were greatly appreciated and published in leading Italian newspapers. He believed that “culture functions as an intermediary, while reaffirming its primacy. Promoting the learning of foreign languages and establishing cultural agreements means strengthening the bond with other people and civilisations, opening a door leading to yet more doors. When you get to know the people of a specific country through its language, its past, its traditions, its expectations, you get to know your neighbour, and consequently – since we all live in the same building – you open up the way to mutual understanding and a wealth of opportunities.”

His edition of the abridgement by Vināyaka of the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin was published in 1956<sup>14</sup> and belongs to the first set. It was drawn up on the basis of an unpublished manuscript and it is very important because it enlightens the intricate question connected to the authenticity of Daṇḍin work that is the first romance of Indian Literature. Oscar Botto comes back to this question also in his general work on Ancient Indian Literature published in 1969. The translation, which follows the edition of the Sanskrit text, confirms Oscar Botto’s deep knowledge of language, his careful observance of the original text and the soundness of his translation criteria.

His philological and historical research on Kṣemendra also belong to this set. This was an arduous task because of the affected style, syntactic refinements and recurring new words which characterize the texts of the famous Kāśmirian writer. In spite of these undeniable difficulties

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14. “Una epitome inedita del *Daśakumāracarita* di Daṇḍin: la *Daśakumārapūrvapīṭhikā* di Vināyaka”, in RSO 31 (1956), pp.259-278 [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp.128-150].

that arose when he attempted to understand and explain the text, Oscar Botto translated Kṣemendra's *Daśavatāracarita* in 1951<sup>15</sup>. Thanks to his experience and his exceptional sensibility as a philologist, this work on Sanskrit studies placed him in the forefront of the experts. His translation of the *Upadeśaśataka* of Gumāni<sup>16</sup>, with explanatory notes and a detailed analysis of the sources, may also be included in the same set.

We can include Botto's works on ancient Indian polity in the second set; they are a very useful contribution to understanding this important aspect of Indian civilization. His studies in this field began in 1950 with his analysis of the fourth and fifth chapters of the *Arthasāstra*<sup>17</sup>, it continues with his research on the role of the Minister and the Counsellor in ancient India<sup>18</sup> and leads to the publication of the *Nītivakyāmṛta* of Somadeva Sūri<sup>19</sup> considered by Louis Renou to be a true milestone. Later, his studies on the ancient Indian law<sup>20</sup> proved to be essential to the foundation of the Series *Corpus Iuris Sanscriticum*.

The third set concerns the epic about which he wrote a learned essay on the origin and development of Indian epics published by the

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15. *Il poeta Kṣemendra e il suo Daśavatāracarita*, Torino, 1951 ("Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia di Torino", vol. III, fasc. I) [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp. 44-86].

16. "L'*Upadeśaśataka* di Gumāni", in *RSO* 27 (1952), pp. 93-110 [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp. 87-104].

17. "Un testo politico indiano. I capi IV e V del Trattato di scienza politica di Cāṇakya (*Cāṇakya-rājanīti-śāstra*)", in *Rivista di Filosofia*, 41, fasc. 3 (1950), pp. 298-313 [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp. 28-43].

18. "«Consigliere di Corte» e «Ministro» nell'antica politica indiana", in *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere*, Classe di Lettere, 89-90 (1956), pp. 639-662 [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp. 105-127]. Rev. in: *Paideia* 14, pt. 5-6 (1959), p. 411, by V. Pisani.

19. *Saggi dal Nītivakyāmṛta di Somadeva Sūri*, Torino, Ramella, 1953; and *Il Nītivakyāmṛta di Somadeva Sūri*, Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Fondazione Parini-Chirio, Torino, 1962. Rev. in: *JA* 250, pp. 304-306, by L. Renou; *JAS* Calcutta 4, pt. 2 (1962), pp. 71-72, by U.N. Ghoshal; in *JAOS* 83, pt. 1 (1963), pp. 139-140, by L. Sternbach; *IJ* 7 (1963-64), pp. 224-225, by R. Morton Smith; *JOR* 32, pt. 1-4 (1965), pp. 31-33, by George T. Artola; *VJ* 4, pt. 1 (1966), pp. 130-131, by K.V. Sarma.

20. "L'antico diritto indiano: fondamenti e metodi", in *Literature Comparete. Problemi e metodo* (Studi in onore di E. Paratore), Bologna, Pàtron, 1981, vol. I, pp. 23-37.

Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei<sup>21</sup>. When considering the two great epic poems of India the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* he preferred the latter as the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the most important literary source of Hinduism. He also wrote a critical *Rāmāyaṇa* bibliography which remained unpublished because of his health that was getting worse. He was a Member of the International Editorial Committee for the “Critical Inventory of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Studies in the World” of the Sahitya Akademi<sup>22</sup> and directed a new *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* for the Series “I Classici delle Religioni Orientali” (Classics of Oriental Religions, UTET, Torino), series that he directed himself. This work is the result of cooperation among some distinguished Italian Sanskrit scholars<sup>23</sup> and includes an Introduction by J.L. Brockington, a famous world wide specialist of Indian epics.

Two articles on Indian epics, published in the Italian daily “La Stampa”, are a great example of scholarly clarity.<sup>24</sup>

His exhaustive history of ancient Indian Literature<sup>25</sup>, included in the third volume of his History of Oriental Literatures, is still unsurpassed; it testifies his ability, that is somewhat rare, to collect, synthesize and make the most difficult subjects clearer. On referring to this work the famous scholar J.W.de Jong wrote: “It is an excellent and lucid survey in which no branch of Indian literature is omitted. There is probably a work of similar scope in no other language”. V. Pisani wrote: “Among the various treatises, I believe that Botto’s deserves special praise: it contains board and reliable information and it provides summaries and excerpts of the works mentioned, so as to place

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21. “Origini e sviluppo dell’epica indiana”, in *La poesia epica e la sua formazione*, Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1970 (Anno CCCLXVII, Quaderno 139), pp. 655-677 [Repr. in *S.S.O.B.*, pp. 210-237].

22. *A Critical Inventory of the Rāmāyaṇa Studies in the World*, edited by K. Krishnamoorthy, Published by Sahitya Akademi, in collaboration with Union Académique Internationale, 2 vols New Delhi, 1991, 1993.

23. The *kāṇḍas* were translated by Carlo Della Casa, Vincenzina Mazzarino, Agata Pellegrini, Tiziana Pontillo and Saverio Sani.

24. “*Mahābhārata*, tutto il mondo dell’India. Dal disordine il messaggio dell’obbedienza al dovere”, in *La Stampa* 3.9.1989, e “Un Omero dal Gange. L’epopea del «*Rāmāyaṇa*»”, in *La Stampa* 22.1.1991.

25. “Letterature antiche dell’India”, in *Storia delle Letterature d’Oriente*, diretta da O. Botto, Milano, Vallardi, 1969, vol. III, pp. 1-374; also printed separately.

the reader in direct contact with the Indian world".<sup>26</sup> The aim of this work was to sum up all the theories that had been put forth up to that time and provide comprehensive and updated evidence of all the studies carried out in the field.

The fourth set of his works is principally devoted to Buddhist doctrine. He wrote an outstanding book in this field on Buddha and Buddhism, which was published in 1974, but it is still read and reprinted<sup>27</sup>. In Italy a lot of people have found out about Buddhism thanks to this book. The same significance has to be given to his scientific activity that encouraged the spreading of a correct knowledge of Buddhist doctrine. His critical judgements on misleading handbooks are still very precious. In 1959 O. Botto published a short study on Buddhism, many entries for the 1981 and 1995 editions of the prestigious *Enciclopedia Italiana* known as "Treccani", and for the 4th edition of the Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary published by UTET in 1989. He also wrote an interesting study on the comparison between Buddha and Christ, published in 1985, a critical analysis of an Italian bibliography on Buddhist studies published in *Tucci Commemoration volume*, a study on Early Scholars of Asia and Buddhism in connection with Oriental Studies in Italy, published in *Jean Boisselier Felicitation Volume* (1997) and some contributions to a correct reading of Buddhism published in some newspapers: noteworthy are his articles about the conflict between Buddha and Māra, on the role of the Buddha message on suffering today and on the fascinating Buddhist philosophy of life.

His articles on this matter<sup>28</sup> also proved extremely valuable and es-

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26. *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 14, pts 1-2 (1972), pp. 83-84, by J.W.de Jong; *Paideia* 24, n. 3-6 (May-December 1969), pp.359-360, by V. Pisani: "Oscar Botto is the meritorious exiter of energies in the unceasing deepening of our knowledge of the most lively and productive ideological traditions of the Middle and Far East". *Il Tempo* 18.9.74 by E. Paratore: "We like to see, at the beginning of this impressive and sumptuous editorial project of Francesco Vallardi, the name of Oscar Botto as its director: the young and valiant scholar of Indology from Torino".

27. O.Botto, *Buddha e il Buddhismo*, Fossano, Esperienze, 1974 (Repr.: Milano, «Oscar» Mondadori, 1984, 1997).

28. "Il duello di Buddha col genio del male", in *La Stampa* anno 113, n. 204 (9.9.1979). "I maggiori studiosi [di Buddhismo] in Italia", in *Il Buddhismo in Occidente, Il Settimanale* VIII, 33-34 (18.8.1981), pp. 64-65. "La voce di Buddha per le angosce d'oggi. Religione, filosofia, modo di vita: nuovi studi in Occidente", in *La Stampa*, anno 118, n. 220 (16.9.1984) [Repr. as "La via del Buddha", *Paramita* 13

sential in order to understand the doctrine better, making him a key reference for the Buddhist communities constituted in Italy starting from the early Seventies. He chaired some prestigious Conferences of National and International Buddhist Associations<sup>29</sup>. It confirms his fundamental role in contributing to the spreading of the Buddha message.

A series of works of pregnant intensity devoted to the concept of non-violence<sup>30</sup>, the dimensions of death and the concept of suffering in Oriental religions<sup>31</sup> are also remarkable.

Oscar Botto was also particularly interested in Indian theatre, about which he wrote an in-depth study and a vast collection of bibliographic materials for an editorial project that was unfortunately never completed.

He was asked to direct important editorial projects: they are the “Classics of religions – Orient” and the “Universal History of Art – Orient” (UTET Publishing House). He also directed a series of volumes on the Masters of spirituality – Orient (Esperienze Publishers), a series including works on Guru Nānak and Sikhism (by S. Piano, 1971), Confucius and Confucianism (by P. Corradini, 1973), Śaṅkara and the rebirth of Brahmanism (by M. Piantelli, 1974), while he personally wrote the already mentioned volume on Buddha and Buddhism (1974).

He was ahead of his times and consequently he understood the need and the relevance of creating networks so as bring scholars together, to stir up debates and create a common ground for discussions. With

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(gennaio-marzo 1985), pp. 30-31]. “Buddhismo. Fascino di una filosofia di vita”, in *Nuovo Progetto Sermig*, anno 3 (gennaio 1998), pp. 6-7.

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this purpose in mind he founded *Indologica Taurinensia* in 1973, one of the most prestigious Journals of the world concerning Indological Studies. In 1976, on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Human Sciences of Asia and Northern Africa<sup>32</sup>, it was chosen as the Official Organ (then “Journal”) of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS), while in 1996 it was acknowledged as a “Journal of High Cultural Value” by the Italian Ministry for Culture.

The previously mentioned *Corpus Iuris Sanscricicum* is a Series on Social and Religious Law of India, South-East and Central Asia, which publishes critical editions and translations of legal texts and relevant monographs; it is published under the scientific patronage of the International Union of Academies (Union Académique Internationale) and Italian Academic Union.

Another ambitious project realized by Oscar Botto was the compilation of the first *Sanskrit-Italian Dictionary*. It was started in the Eighties as an international research to deepen particular lexical fields of the Sanskrit language and carried out at the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Torino and supported by the Italian Ministry of the University. The project later became the core of a future Sanskrit Dictionary and joined the Centre of Asian Lexicography promoted by IsMEO<sup>33</sup>. Oscar Botto’s serious illness prevented him from following the various stages, so the scientific direction was entrusted to Saverio Sani, Full Professor at Pisa University.

Besides the already quoted academies, he was also fellow of many other Italian and foreign Academies: Distinguished Member of the Akhila Bhāratīya Saṃskṛt Pariṣad, Lucknow, from 1983; Member of the Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm, from 1985; Honorary Member of the Accademia di Studi Mediteranei, Agrigento, from 1988; Honorary Member of the Kālidāsa and Max Müller International Sanskrit Society, Ghaziabad, from 1989; Member of the Academia Europaea, London, from 1989.

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32. Città del Messico, 3-8 agosto 1976.

33. The Centre was officially presented in 1986 in the Main Hall of the University of Torino.

Oscar Botto firmly believed that knowledge should not be exclusively reserved to specialist circles, but should rather be made available to all those who wish to learn or are attracted by it.

The numerous articles<sup>34</sup> he wrote with academic scholarly attention and humility testifies the above mentioned conviction and deals with a variety of the multifaced Indian culture. His descriptions were clearly expressed and appreciated also by non-expert readers.

Everything that concerned spiritual values attracted him: when he was a young student he joined a group of poets in dialect<sup>35</sup>, to whom he nourished a deep friendship and enjoyed talking and spending time with them. In dialect he wrote some elegant poems and an article on the eminent sanskritist Michele Kerbaker (1835-1914)<sup>36</sup>,

Endowed with a keen sense of humor and curiosity he enjoyed becoming a character in a cartoon created by one of his former pupils<sup>37</sup>.

He was awarded many prestigious prizes; besides the ones quoted beforehand: the Medals awarded by the City and the University of Torino, 1986; the Premio Internazionale “I Cavalli d’oro di San Marco”, Venezia, CE.VE.S.C.O., 1987; the Prize “Il Torinese dell’anno”, Torino, 1988<sup>38</sup>;

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35. See O. Botto, “Žl mond poetich ëd Pinin Pacòt e dij Brandé”, in *XIV e XV Rëscontr Antërnassional dë Studi an sla lenga e la literatura piemontëisa* (1997-1998), ed. by G.P. Clivio, D. Pasero, C. Pich, Ivreja, Edission “La Slòira”, 2002, pp.113-117.

36. “Michele Kerbaker”, *Piemontëis Ancheuj*, Maggio 2000 (rist.da *Ij Brandé* n. 48 del 1.9.1948).

37. In 1993 and 1995 it was published in “Topolino” (Mickey Mouse).

38. Articles on this prize in *La Stampa*, 10.6.1988; *Eco di Biella*, 13.6.1988; *Eco di Biella*, «Speciale giugno 1988»; *Stampa Sera*, 13.6.1988.



the Prize “Imago”, Biella, 1990<sup>39</sup>; the “Premio Internazionale Empedocle per le Scienze Umane: Andrej Sacharov”, Agrigento, Accademia di Studi Mediterranei, 1993; the “Premio Circolo della Stampa”, Torino, 1993; the Prize “Piemonte Vip”, Novara, 1995; the Prize “Torino libera”, Torino, Centro Culturale di Studi e Ricerche “Mario Pannunzio”, 2000.

The decease of Oscar Botto has bereaved the world of Indology of a great savant and a tireless cultural promoter. However, he has left behind him a rich legacy made up of scientific and editorial projects and programmes to be carried on. With worthy perspicacity he prepared the basis for their future and constituted organising committees that he entrusted to some of his collaborators.

In this way his creatures can survive to the benefit of everybody and, at the same time, his memory kept alive.

The prestigious CESMEO Library, that Oscar Botto greatly desired and is totally devoted to Asian Studies, participates in the aim of paying gratitude and keeping a revered memory of its founder alive as it is now named “Oscar Botto Oriental Library”.

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In 1993 Mariangela D’Onza Chiodo, Emanuela Panattoni and Stefano Piano edited a collection of Oscar Botto’s works in *Scritti Scelti di Oscar Botto* (Torino, Promolibri, 1993).<sup>40</sup>

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39. Articles on this prize in *Eco di Biella*, 5.4.1990 and 14.5.1990; *Il Biellese*, 6.4.1990.

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Professor Oscar Botto in the Library of the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino  
(*photograph by Ernani Orcorte*)



Award of the “Plaque” of the Città di Torino. The Mayor of Torino Giorgio Cardetti and Oscar Botto speaking (Municipality Palace, Torino, 1986).



Jean Boisselier, Colette Caillat and Siegfried Lienhard who were awarded the “Plaque” of the Città di Torino (Municipality Palace, Torino, 1986).





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Opening section of the event "Conoscere l'India": Mario Bussagli, Oscar Botto speaking, H.E. Akbar Mirza Khaleeli, Indian Ambassador in Italy (Fondazione Agnelli, Torino, 1987).



Inauguration of the exhibition “Dipinti Madhubani, strumenti musicali e maschere” (Circolo degli Artisti, Torino 1987).



Some of the Members of the Commission of the Prize “Torino e l'Oriente” (Oscar Botto, Colette Caillat, Sören Egerod, Henry Henne, Bernard Kölver, Siegfried Lienhard, Frits Vos, Irma Piovano) and Jacques Gernet, who was awarded the prize in 1990 (National Library, Torino).





The Speakers and the Members of the Organizing Committee of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Rāmāyaṇa Conference (Villa Gualino, Torino, 1992).



Award of the Degree of «Vidyāvācaspati» (*Dr. Honoris causa*) of the Shri Lāl Bahādur Shāstrī Rāshṭrīya Saṃskṛit Vidyāpeeth, New Delhi (Main Hall of the University of Torino, 1994).



Award of the Degree of «*Doctor Litterarum Honoris Causa*» of the Banaras Hindu University (Main Hall of the Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, 1996).



Award of the Cesmeo's Prizes for Oriental Studies. Oscar Botto awarding Luigi Santa Maria (Main Hall of the University of Torino, 1999).



Oscar Botto with P.L. Bhargava, Ananda Guruge and some of the speakers and guests of the 11<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference (Villa Gualino, Torino, 2000).



Oscar Botto with J.L. Brockington, R.K. Sarma, S. Lienhard. Closing Session of the 11<sup>th</sup> World Sanskrit Conference (Villa Gualino, Torino, 2000).





Award of the Cesmeo's Prizes for Oriental Studies. Oscar Botto awarding Carlo Della Casa (Archivio di Stato, Torino, 2002).



Award of the Cesmeo's Prizes for Oriental Studies. Oscar Botto awarding Lionello Lanciotti (Archivio di Stato, Torino, 2002).