IN MEMORIAM
Jeremy Fergus Boissevain (1928–2015)

Despite his blessed age, it was a shock to receive the news that Jeremy Boissevain died at his home in Amsterdam on 26 June 2015. Just a few days earlier, he had read with much pleasure and satisfaction a positive review by Michael Herzfeld in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* of his recent collection of “explorations into aspects of some societies in and from the Mediterranean” (*Factions, Friends, Feasts. Anthropological Perspectives on the Mediterranean* [Berghahn Books, 2013]). He had worked very hard on this volume, which turned out to be his final one.

Jeremy Boissevain was born in London in 1928 of an American mother and a Dutch father. He came to social anthropology by a detour. He completed a BA in Liberal Arts at Haverford College, Pennsylvania in 1952. After spending several years in the Philippines, Japan, India, Malta, and Sicily working for US CARE relief programs, Lawrence Wylie, one of his teachers at Haverford, advised him to take up the study of social anthropology. Jeremy did so at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the late 1950s with Raymond Firth and Lucy Mair. He did one month of fieldwork in Fezzan, Libya in 1959 then moved to nearby Malta where he conducted fourteen months of dissertation research in 1960–1961. This was the beginning of a lifetime commitment to the study of Maltese politics and religion. He received his PhD in 1962; a few years later his dissertation was published as *Saints and Fireworks* (Athlone Press, 1965).

His early grassroots involvement in aid projects may explain his lifelong interest in local-level politics and his focus on individual agency rather than social structure, pragmatic choice rather than constraint. His two monographs on rural Malta, in which he paid systematic attention to the interactions between village life and wider society, belong to the classics in Mediterranean ethnography and social anthropology. In 1969 his

Following his fieldwork in Sicily and Malta, Jeremy became involved in developing a comparative anthropology of the Mediterranean region of which he was a leading advocate in the 1970s and 1980s but about which he had second thoughts at the time he was working on his collection of articles titled *Factions, Friends, Feasts*.

During his studies at the LSE, Jeremy developed a critical stance towards the paradigm of structural-functionalism that had dominated Anglo-Saxon anthropology between 1930 and 1970. Inspired by his teachers Firth and Mair, as well as by Leach’s book on Highlands Birma, Bailey’s work on politics and social change in Orissa, and Barth’s study of political leadership among the Swat Pathans, he became a prominent advocate of an actor-oriented approach. In his seminal *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Basil Blackwell, 1974), he set forth a processual perspective on people, groups, quasi-groups, and institutions as interlinking, multi-level networks. Being averse to grand theories, network analysis allowed him to remain close to the small politics of people in their daily interactions. Although he was well aware of the methodological limits this approach, he made a forceful plea to include it in the tool kit of every ethnographer.

Jeremy’s innovative work also includes contributions to the study of local power relations and ethnicity (an early book on Italian immigrants in Montreal and a later study of small entrepreneurship among the Surinamese of Amsterdam), of tourism and environmentalism, mainly with regard to their impact on Maltese society and culture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he revisited his early interest in ritual and social change by studying the revival and expansion of celebrations throughout Europe as a reaction to the homogenizing pressure of the market, mass media, and Eurocrats (*Revitalizing European Rituals* [Routledge, 1992]).

Jeremy Boissevain was full professor of social anthropology at the University of Amsterdam where he worked from 1966 to 1993, fellow of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research and sat on the advisory boards of several scholarly journals, among them *Journeys: The Interna*
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*International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing.* He was an enthusiastic traveler himself, an inspiring teacher and supervisor, a prolific writer, and a visiting professor at several universities in Europe and the United States. After his retirement he remained active as participant in academic meetings and always interested in the work of his colleagues and friends. Jeremy was a curious, amiable and convivial personality. He is survived by Inga-Britt, his wife during more than sixty years, four daughters, and seven grandchildren.

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