

REVIEW

SCHOLARLY EXCHANGES IN MOMMSEN'S ITALY

Marco Buonocore, ed., *Lettere di Theodor Mommsen agli Italiani*, 2 vols. Studi e Testi 519–20. Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2017. Paperback, €120.00. ISBN 978-88-210-0991-4.

Here are two volumes, comprising nearly 1,200 pages (numbered very conveniently in one sequence), and transcribing 883 letters of Mommsen to his Italian colleagues. It is all prefaced by a wonderful introduction on Mommsen (henceforth M.) and Italy by the incredibly prolific editor, stressing M.'s love of the country—his *seconda patria*—, his inspiration as a liberal, anti-Catholic, and, of course, the main subject of these letters, Latin epigraphy, his care for this vital source, and his epigraphical method (see [8]).¹ This gargantuan task has required a collaboration to equal the *CIL*: twenty-six people in archives and libraries, and thirty-two transcribers, all listed, and the transcribers indicated by initial at the end of each letter.

That is not all. There are two biographical dictionaries in the front of volume 1: M.'s 160 correspondents (75–142), and then almost everyone mentioned within the letters (143–287), taking us back to the Renaissance. This is, then, not only a monumental *epistolario*, but also a marvellous work of reference. One cannot imagine how the dates of birth and death of almost everyone have been provided. One might suggest only that the second index would have benefited from the same style as the first, putting the names in bold. One misses occasionally a vital note, such as with Ligorio, that he was M.'s leading bugbear: the mere sight of his name produced a flurry of asterisks. Here, however, M. admits that in his MSS in Turin in volume 15, by exception, there are some undoubtedly authentic inscriptions (352). And we find, for example, only in the text (101) that de Vit's *sylloge* comprised 20,000 inscriptions.

There is only one regret, but obviously nothing can be done here. The letters are like hearing one side only of a conversation. This sometimes causes difficulties, which the footnotes might have helped, as they do, especially with de Rossi (380, 822, 823, 1001, 1025, 1079).

The footnotes are very generous, and show an astonishing control of epigraphic commentary and of the Vatican archives. They often, however,

¹ Numbers in square brackets are to the number of the letter, where it is relevant in its entirety.

take the form of merely name and dates of the person referred to, when by definition, they can be found in the second ‘dictionary’. If, for example, by p. 353 you do not know who Borghesi is, you have not been paying attention. Oliver Twist famously asked for more. I do not wish to appear churlish by following suit, but often we need more than a name and dates: an indication of the work or matter referred to; for example, p. 404, footnotes 372, 375, 376. Very often, but erratically, no date is given for a publication (much more important than place of publication). What were the troubles between Germany and Italy in 1861, caused by ‘the sad steps of some individuals from the rubbish of our nation’ [99]? What was the fuss over the *foglio Biraghiano* [359]? What domestic reasons caused the postponement of the trip to Ascoli to 1878 [406]? Were they connected to the death of M.’s youngest son Otto in August 1877? The marriage of M.’s eldest daughter Marie, on the other hand, appears in four footnotes (757, 761, 764, 767). The total mystery of [745] is explained on p. 1072. There are important notes on the sixtieth birthday celebrations of de Rossi (948–9), and his last two years (1086). We never do learn when Francesco Daniele was president of the Accademia Ercolanese (957)—he was *socio* from 1787—but Castaldi, Ciampitti, and Cassani do not know either.

Mommsen’s Italian shows, of course, unimpeachable grammar, and the expected clarity of expression, and lack of convolution. M. writes, naturally, of his mistakes and maltreatment of the language (552). To certain Italians, however, he wrote in French, notably to Carlo Promis in Turin. He began with French to Borghesi, but changed to Italian by 1846. M.’s mode of address reveals much: Borghesi is *mio carissimo* by 1849 [44], but M. still used the *Lei* form, because of his seniority. De Rossi was also *mio carissimo* [45], then *amico* [51]. Here, instead of *tu*, M. used *voi*. The longest letter in the collection (23 pp.) is the dedication of M.’s Neapolitan inscriptions to Borghesi [54]. There are a few letters in German to Giuseppe Müller [607–8, 612, 614].

The first letter is to Bartolomeo Borghesi in January 1845, in French, seeking his help. From the first, we are sure of M.’s favourites: Borghesi, revered master; Giuseppe Fiorelli, leading Italian archaeologist (538), ‘un uomo senza pari’ (673), and free of all jealousy (964); and Giovanni Battista de Rossi, continuer of the school of Marini and Borghesi, indispensable collaborator on the *CIL* (see [70] for the offer), and recipient of more letters than anyone else (136!). De Rossi was M.’s closest Italian colleague, although they were very different in outlook: he a fervent Catholic and M. an atheist (880 n. 385)—showing that faith has nothing to do with scholarship and friendship. This contrasts with the very severe judgement which M. made on Italian scholarship, especially in epigraphy, at the time: tense relations with Agostino Gervasio, for example [8, 62] were marked by M.’s famous frankness! There is more on Neapolitan epigraphers (p. 407). M. had the highest regard, on the other hand, for Giulio Minervini. It is interesting to see also his contacts

with Rodolfo Lanciani, rising star of the next generation: epigraphy and prosopography were not the archaeologist's forte [489, 492, 514, 524–6, 523–30, 532]: 'Sorry, but this restoration which you propose is inadmissible' (!), but, on the other hand, M.'s admission that 'the hoe is much wiser than we literary hacks' (*la zappa è assai più savia di noi altri litteratucci*).

Even with some of these closest friends, there could be trouble: with Borghesi over the edition of his *opusculi* [37]; with de Rossi over precedence in publication [46]; about acknowledgement of the co-editors in *CIL* [100]; or again over readings in the *Einsiedlensis*: 'You do not approve of my supplements—rightly—but you will allow me not to approve fully of yours' (409). And his young collaborator in northern Italy, Ettore Pais, was always uncontactable (959, [625])!

The most fundamental subject of all is, naturally, epigraphy. M. identified the two main problems of this science as the movement of the stones, and forgeries (511). There is much to illustrate the history of *CIL*: its beginnings [55, 66]; for volumes 1–3, p. 452; for volume 2 [114, 118]; for volume 5, for which M. travelled all over northern Italy, [149–51, 157, 159, 160, 162]. There was always insufficient time for these travels [337–8], and he relied so much on Italian friends. There is a fascinating extensive note on M.'s travels in Sicily (744–5). The indexes to volume 5 cost him a winter (704). He was always asking for squeezes, to obtain the most accurate reading (p. 697). On volume 8 [410, 475], and volumes 9–10 [475, 482, 527, 605, 628], M. expresses constant gratitude to the multitude of helpers (for example, 761). He admitted that the volumes of *CIL* were too bulky and too expensive (695). One can also follow developments here simply through the meticulous identification of inscriptions in the footnotes. It is fascinating to see that M. could be puzzled by an inscription [64]. He notes the establishment of *Ephemeris Epigraphica*. He was, on the other hand, helping de Rossi with Christian inscriptions [95], and was interested even in Etruscan examples and how to detect forgeries [700]. He warned Lanciani against the intrusion of patriotism into epigraphy, and noted that false inscriptions could turn out to be authentic (966). We can read directly of the fuss over the publication of *Ludi saeculares*, and M.'s initial withdrawal of it from the Lincei (it was finally published in *Mon. Ant.* 1891 and *Eph. Epig.* 1892). It is revealing that he remarks of a colleague that he rightly preferred reading Cicero and Tacitus to reading stones (691)!

Some important matters of topography are discussed at length: Janus in the Forum [48], and the arch of Fabius [94], but this letter to de Rossi was published in the same year (1858). It is interesting that M. states that he did not have access to Roman scholarship.

A fascinating aspect of his work was the need to compare manuscripts. He notes that he had on his desk in 1864 MSS from Wolfenbüttel, Leyden, and Paris [123]! He was a fierce advocate of this system of loans, which was

arranged at government level, claiming that the texts were more liable to damage in their home libraries than on loan. That was to be put to the test when his library burned down in 1880. Why he writes of this to Domenico Comparetti, professor of Greek at Pisa, however, is not explained. Not only MSS and books were lent, but also stones [775]. In 1876 M. spoke of obtaining the Lancellotti MSS from Fabretti in Torino for several months (700).

The letters here include the best known of all, those to the people of Italy in the light of the Franco-Prussian War [214, 217–8]. Mommsen favoured the annexation of Alsace because it was ‘German’. He described the war as ‘horribly barbarous’ and wondered how relations could ever be re-established with French scholars (582). Germany was now comparable to Rome after 202 BC, with ‘Catos’ calling for the total destruction of Carthage. This was incited by ‘French civilization, brilliant in the salon, but lacking on the field of honour’ (583). By 1878 he was still cautious about writing to any Frenchman (761), and in 1880 protesting about hopeless French scholars in Algeria (864).

There are some precious personal references. M.’s political position in 1850 [50], his thoughts of moving to Rome in 1851 (358), taking the position in Zurich, hoping to find the peace which he could not find in his unhappy homeland, dominated by *vae victis* (360), and his discussions with the liberal Luigi Frati in Bologna in 1863 on German lethargy and indolence [115]. He was deeply affected by the death of Carlo Promis in 1873 [289]. He wanted to escape Berlin and move to Leipzig in 1874 (650). He was elected to the Lincei in 1876 [322]. He was devastated by the death of his darling son Otto aged one year in 1877 [372: *oculus noster et lux domus universae*]. M. admitted that ‘impudence’ was one of his leading traits (822). There are occasional allusions to his work load (824). 1880 dealt a devastating double blow: first, the loss of his library (M. dropped a candle!) [499]; for the effect on *CIL*, see 852–3; the library was ‘restored’ by friends and even royalty [518]. Second, the death of daughter Käthe, aged sixteen (870). There followed in 1882 the loss of his infant grandchild [595]. There are references to the *Staatsrecht* [724]. We learn about M.’s depression from the 1870s (1092). His kindness is often on show: his care for the completion of the work of Adolf Studemund (*povero orfano*) and regard for the continuator Edmund Hauler [778]; his horror at the treatment of the Jewish scholar Emanuel Löwy [780]; and his detailed advice to Pais (*affezionatissimo amico*) about posts [789]. One of the drawbacks of M.’s fame, incidentally, was the arrival of unsolicited parcels, on which he had to pay customs—so that he regularly sent them back [76]. M. charmingly believed that, in scholarship, rivalry fortunately did not create enemies, as it did in the silk trade (408)!

His election to parliament is mentioned (470). M., in fact, was a deputy in the Prussian parliament 1863–6, 1873–9, and in the German parliament 1881–4 (he called the Reichstag ‘an unhappy cage’, 949). He then became secretary of the Berlin Academy in 1874, a taxing duty. His combination of all these

duties is almost incredible. As my wife always reminds me, however, he never made a cup of tea in his life. But he also slept only some three hours every night, and led a most disciplined life.

M.'s sense of humour can be detected: de Rossi will have trouble with his *Römische Geschichte*, 'quella Tedescheria' (433). He tells the Jesuit Raffaele Garucci that he is 'un grand pecheur', in need of absolution [92]; there is further irony about the Jesuits (550–1), and although he was 'not fit by his Latin or his morals to belong to the holy order of Jesus', he wished that 'it might be blessed by God through his plenipotentiary Bismarck' (612)! Then out of the blue comes *l'uomo propone e la moglie dispone* [791], to Pietro da Ponte in 1897.

Letters have many uses. One can, for example, track M.'s addresses in Berlin: Bernbergerstr 1858, Neuenbergerstr 1860–1, Alte Jacobstr. 1862–5, Schönebergerstr. 1866–74, and finally Charlottenberg from 1875. One can also trace his tireless journeys around Europe, and especially Italy. The demise of letter-writing in the last generation has deprived history of one of its most important, charming, and revealing sources.

There are very few slips: *peur être* (433); cf. *peut-tre* (614). What is an *irrispondente* (448)? The marchese di Canossa cannot be Signora (465). Presumably che *da un conte* (?) (467). What is 'une Piemont' (615)?

The volumes are framed by bibliographies and indexes, the product of further enormous labour—but one must be aware that there are two bibliographies: one for the letters (43–54), the second of general reference (55–73). The indexes are meticulous: of names (1179–221)—only King Umberto is missing [518]—and also of inscriptions (1255–81). These are indispensable helps for anyone consulting the volumes, vastly enhancing their use. It is strongly recommended, however, that rather than checking to see if any individual or your favourite inscription is mentioned, to open the volumes and begin reading!

The above matters are simply my own choices of the treasures within. Everyone will have his or her own discoveries to make. In short, this is a work of exemplary and moving scholarly collaboration, and the indefatigable editor and all assistants are to be congratulated, not to forget the incredibly productive and most generous Vatican press for publishing so accurately and attractively these 1,280 pages. It is, in sum, a *monumentum scientiae nostrae aetatis*.

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