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**« Writing Mommsen »
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Federico SANTANGELO

In a codicil to his will Mommsen made the memorable provision that he did not wish the letters he had received ever to be published, and instructed his heirs not to hand over any papers to potential biographers.¹ The significant section of his correspondence that has appeared in print over the last century exempts Marco Buonocore (henceforth B.) from addressing that potentially thorny methodological issue in the Introduction to this major work, where the general aims and ethos of the project of a complete edition of Mommsen's letters to his Italian correspondents are set out.² B. identifies the editions of letters of Mommsen to some German scholars (p. 5) as an obvious precedent for his undertaking: in doing so, he does not do his own project the best of services. Those works shed light on Mommsen's ties with some individuals, but provide nothing approaching a general overview.³ Nothing comparable to what B. has achieved has ever appeared

¹ An English translation is readily available at the end of the first issue of *Past and Present* 1 (1952), 71, where it appears to serve an elusive programmatic function. G. PASQUALI, «Il testamento di Teodoro Mommsen», now in *Pagine stravaganti di un filologo*, II, ed. C. F. Russo, Florence 1994, p. 383-396 (first published in 1949) remains essential reading.

² M. BUONOCORE (ed.), *Lettere di Mommsen agli Italiani*, a cura di M. BUONOCORE, Studi e Testi 519-520, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2017, 2 vols.

³ See esp. W. M. CALDER III-R. KIRSTEIN (eds.), «Aus dem Freund ein Sohn.» *Theodor Mommsen und Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf. Briefwechsel 1872-1903*, Hildesheim, 2003 (replacing the 1935 edition by F. HILLER VON GAERTRINGEN); S. REBENICH, *Theodor*

in print. Brian Croke's envisaged project on the letters of Mommsen to British scholars – a much smaller network, involving a much narrower chronological range and evidence base – never came to completion.⁴ Nothing like that has even been planned for the ties between Mommsen and France.⁵ What we are presented with in these two tomes is something quite simply unparalleled in the history of classical scholarship.

It is not by chance that the editor of these extraordinary volumes first developed the idea of a comprehensive edition of Theodor Mommsen's letters to his Italian correspondents after taking part in a conference on epigraphy and antiquarianism in nineteenth century North East Italy.⁶ The core of Mommsen's engagement with Italian history entailed the detailed study of local contexts, of their specific historical and topographical settings; only once those were placed on a reasonably firm footing would he turn to the following stage and establish wider regional or national connections. Mommsen understood that Italy could best be studied by building a rich and diverse body of local knowledge: his lifelong connection with the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica in Rome and the prominence he reached in German intellectual life gave him the material means to pursue that complex and laborious process, but the decisive enabling factor were the dozens of allies – friends, acquaintances, correspondents – that he found in all corners of the country. In some respects, he had a more lucid understanding of *campanilismo* (and its occasional rewards) than many of his interlocutors.

The two volumes edited by B., published at the end of an undertaking that took up more than a decade, stand out as powerful testimony to the quality and range of the connections that Mommsen formed across the space of nearly six decades: the first letter dates to January 1845, and the telegram that closes the edition was sent to the municipality of Benevento («prima papalina e poi italiana») in early September 1903 (B. rightly stresses the importance of Mommsen's bond

Mommsen und Adolf Harnack. Wissenschaft und Politik im Berlin des ausgehenden 19. Jh. Mit einem Anhang: Edition und Kommentierung des Briefwechsels, Berlin-New York 1997; J. SCHEID-E. WIRBELAUER, «La correspondance entre Georg Wissowa et Theodor Mommsen (1883-1901)», in C. BONNET - V. KRINGS (eds.), *S'écrire et écrire sur l'Antiquité: L'apport des correspondances à l'histoire des travaux scientifiques*, Grenoble, 2008, p. 155-212.

⁴ B. CROKE, «Mommsen in Oxford», *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 16 (1991), p. 50-57; see also P. W. M. FREEMAN, *The Best Training-Ground for Archaeologists. Francis Haverfield and the Invention of Romano-British Archaeology*, Exeter, 2007, p. 606-609.

⁵ F. SARTORI, «Theodor Mommsen radiato dalla Società des Antiquaires de France», in F. BROILO (ed.), *Xenia. Scritti in onore di Piero Treves*, Rome, 1985, p. 183-190 is valuable testimony to the potential of the topic.

⁶ See p. 5 for B's comments on the genesis of the project.

with that city, p. 11). The notion of ‘letter’ on which B. and his collaborators have been working is a very wide one, and its breadth is in turn revealing. This edition includes the great prefatory letter to the *Inscriptiones Regni Neapolitani Latinae* (March 1852, no. 54), later republished as an introduction to *CIL* X and XI, along with brief notes of apology to scholars that Mommsen did not get round to meeting while in transit in their hometown (e.g. no. 108, to Pietro Kandler); detailed comments on specific inscriptions, whether recently discovered (e.g. the municipal law from Tarentum: see no. 777 and 779, to Luigi Viola) or in need of a new reading, next to firm ripostes to scholars who were unhappy with his published assessment of their work (the letter to Agostino Gervasio of March 1847 is especially significant: no. 41); notes of thanks for the arrival of offprints along with messages of political importance, most impressively the letter to Pasquale Villari on the future of the Pompeii excavations, written in September 1869 (no. 192). This diversity might be confusing or dispersive at first, but is in itself the best testimony to the nature of the connections that Mommsen formed: he employed a whole range of modes of discourse and conversation. The image that this body of material conveys is one of unfettered generosity towards those who sought his expertise, matched by the same degree of candour in seeking information, advice, and practical help in the pursuit of his own projects.

The lack of unnecessary formality that appears to mark most of Mommsen’s interactions with his peers (B. points out that he often appears to us «quasi ‘in veste da camera’», p. 23) does not amount to a denial of his foreignness: far from it, in dealings with Italian scholars Mommsen predicates his whole scholarly persona on his position as outsider. The references he makes on a number of occasions to the different scholarly practices in Italy and Germany, and the negative impact that the tendency to lavish unreserved praise on published work in Italian culture has on the progress of knowledge is emphatically lamented. That attitude did earn Mommsen some enemies in Italy, not just during his lifetime. B. quotes (p. 9 n. 8) a remarkable letter to Domenico Comparetti from the Papist bibliophile Gaetano Ferrajoli (1838-1890) from April 1869, in which Mommsen is accused in so many words of hating Italians, and of writing in poor Italian, and poor Latin as well: the latter comment being a good testimony to the overall reliability of the accusation. Quite apart from Ferrajoli’s misconceptions, Mommsen’s apparent mastery of the Italian language is a further reason of interest. This body of 833 letters powerfully shows the degree of control of the language that he could claim, and is in itself a measure of his engagement with Italy as a country – as well as a place that is laden with history. One of the rewards of this major reference work is that it now equips an historical linguist with the tool they would need to produce a full-scale study of Mommsen’s bilingualism.

In some respects these two volumes have the makings of a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί. In others they are a starting point. Two areas for further work readily become apparent.

First, as is almost unfailingly the case when a corpus is produced, a set of addenda are likely to become available. There will be a fresh lease of interest in Mommsen and *Mommseniana*, and it is a fair guess that newly (re)discovered archives will yield more material. The potential is readily conveyed by the considerable set of *addenda* that round off this edition (1123-1176), consisting of 54 letters that came to B.'s attention when this work was already in proofs. New items are likely to come to light soon. The edition of a letter to the Ateneo of Brescia, now at the local Archivio di Stato, which promises to shed valuable light on the edition of the Latin inscriptions from that city, is imminent.⁷

Secondly, and more substantially, this collection is too important to be allowed to stand in isolation. New creative solutions have to be devised to link this material up with evidence that is available in other countries. On the one hand, the contacts with scholars in France and Great Britain will have to receive closer attention, or indeed a revived interest. On the other, and perhaps even more urgently, this edition must be fully linked up with the vast body of the Mommsen *Nachlass* at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften and at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. That is, in many ways, the other side of the coin of this project. Many of the letters that Mommsen received from his Italian correspondents are in the Berlin archive, and only a small fraction of those have been published so far.⁸ The edition that B. and his collaborators have produced is squarely focused on Mommsen's role in the intellectual conversations with his Italian correspondents. The contributions, aims, and concerns of his counterparts are left to be guessed by the readers, largely on the basis of the formidably helpful set of notes that accompany the edition of each text. The main focus of those annotations, though, is biographical: every mention of an individual scholar is given factual clarification; moreover, and even more helpfully, every discussion (no matter how cursory) of a document or a source is suitably referenced in the footnote. The detail of the debates between Mommsen and his correspondents, however, is not set out, and that is virtually inevitable. A follow-up project that seeks to bring out what the Italian correspondents to Mommsen had to say would be the only way of doing full justice to the intellectual conversations that these epistolary exchanges enabled.

Questions of implementation and feasibility immediately come to the fore. Time is the first obvious factor. This would be the very sort of demanding collaborative project that entails years of research, and which some funders would probably not look upon favourably: yet the rewards of a collection of that

⁷ I am grateful to Professor Alfredo Valvo for valuable information on this point.

⁸ See e.g. two letters by Pasquale Villari edited by A. M. Voci in *“Un anello ideale” fra Germania e Italia: corrispondenze di Pasquale Villari con storici tedeschi*, Rome, 2006.

sort are potentially great. The second major issue is the format that a project of this kind would have to take. Both the nature of the endeavour and the challenges and opportunities presented by Open Access publishing strongly point towards an online publication of this material, which would readily present a full tabular overview of each epistolary relationship with Mommsen, providing links to the digitised versions of the letters and, even more helpfully, to the epigraphical databases in which the inscriptions discussed or mentioned in the letters may be accessed, typically with a link to the image and with a full survey of the scholarly work that has been carried out on them since their discovery. There is already a platform for this potential endeavour: the website of B's project, (<http://www.mommsenlettere.org/>), is home to dozens of letters of Mommsen to forty-two addressees, and provides an exciting, if selective preview of the volumes under review here.

It is to the books that one should turn by way of conclusion, though. Pointing to the digital ramifications of this project should in no way distract from the achievement of B. and his team and from the quality of the volumes that they have produced. That the *Studi e testi* series at the Vatican Library should produce books of such outstanding editorial and typographical quality should come as no surprise, but the very appearance of a work of just under 1,300 pages should not be taken for granted either. Moreover, there is something truly exceptional about this work, which will be of direct interest and use not just to Mommsen enthusiasts. It promises to establish itself as a major research resource for anyone who wishes to any serious work on classical tradition in Italy during the long nineteenth century. B. has provided over 200 pages of bio-bibliographical notes on every single Italian correspondent of Mommsen and on every single character mentioned in these letters, whether Italian or not. None of these entries is merely derivative and none eschews the duty of providing guidance to future research. What we are presented with is a prosopography of a sizeable section of the Republic Italian of Letters that will prove an invaluable working tool for generations of scholars to come, and a gateway into the subject for anyone with an interest in this area. The opportunities to triangulate the set of information provided by this book with the freely accessible online version of the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* are truly exciting. This opening section, which takes up a significant portion of Volume I, is powerful testimony to B's scholarship, if one was at all needed; it is also a factor that will make this work an indispensable presence in any serious Italian Studies library.

It is hard to imagine a comparable endeavour for the letters of another ancient historians to the members of a community of scholars in one particular country. This is the function of Mommsen's unrivalled standing in the field, and indeed well beyond: the set of plaques commemorating Mommsen's presence in town across a number of small or smallish centres in Central and Southern Italy

(p. 18-19, 29-32) suggests that he was part of popular culture, as well as he was of the world of the *cognoscenti*. It is also a direct consequence of the nature of much of the work he did: the *CIL* project required him to be gregarious, and was predicated on his ability to gain a deep level of local knowledge and cooperation; his correspondence is both a crucial enabler of that and the key source to our understanding of its workings. Yet this exceptional edition is also a model that should be followed in any attempt to do anything comparable. The starting point must be the sound philological establishment of the text, and the second major requirement is the availability of a full set of factual clarifications on the people, events, and sources discussed in the text itself. These two fundamental requirements will apply to any attempt to produce a scholarly edition, whether printed or digital. It does, however, replace indexes with search functions; only in that respect is the task of the editor made easier, or at least less time-consuming. B. and his collaborators have fulfilled that aspect of their brief admirably, and one could not have been looking for a fuller set of indexes: there is an index of names, one of manuscripts and archival sources, one of «sources» (mostly literary; the inclusion of *PIR* entries is rather surprising), and one of inscriptions. That set of material is not just a wonderful resource in its own right, but also a living display of the range and quality of Mommsen's epistolary discourse. I reckon that is something that no digital edition will quite be able to convey: there is something illuminating in the cumulative effect created by this body of work – even by its sheer physical size.

It would be unhelpful, though, to end on a point on format and presentation. The emphasis must be on a matter of content: this is a resource that has no equal in its field, and a display of outstanding scholarship. It is a work that changes the way we work on the history of classical scholarship in nineteenth century Italy. It is a monument to the learning and achievements of a scholar that had no match in his time. But it is, first of all, a repository of ideas and a testimony to a distinctive way of working on documents: the sort of book that will be consulted, but that people will also be well advised to browse through and read in long stretches.⁹

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⁹ I should like to thank Professor Leandro Polverini for his comments on a previous draft.