

VII

The Relics of Two 19th-Century Scientists

Carlo Giacomini and Cesare Lombroso

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The preservation and display of parts of the bodies of anatomist Carlo Giacomini (1840–98), and anthropologist–psychiatrist, Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), was certainly due to special circumstances. They both lived and died in Turin, which Norberto Bobbio called “perhaps Italy’s most Positivist city.”¹ The fact that both studied the brain—albeit in very different ways—and both assembled important anatomical collections, were certainly two crucial elements in the decision that persuaded them both to leave instructions in their wills that a post-mortem be performed on their remains. The two, however, worked within a general context that influenced their decisions regarding their bodies. Firstly, they were persuaded of what the philosopher Roberto Ardigò—correspondent of Lombroso—called *Ethics of Positivists* in 1878, independent of any religion or spiritualistic vision, and whose fundamental principle of moral was based on the social ideal. Ardigò acknowledged his debt to physiologist Jakob Moleschott’s *The circulation of life*, which Lombroso translated into Italian in 1869, and which conceived the eternity of matter, and life and death

¹ Norberto Bobbio, *Prefazione, Il positivismo e la cultura italiana*, ed. Emilio R. Papa (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985), p. 13. I would like to thank Giacomo Giacobini, Cristina Cilli, Natale Spineto, Fausto Barbagli, Paolo Mazzarello and Valentina Cani for their valuable cooperation, both in the identification of the documentary sources, and in discussing ideas and considerations about the subject of this work, which was funded by San Paolo Foundation—University of Turin.

as purely natural phenomena.² On another plane, but closely intertwined with it, Giacomini and Lombroso shared the ideals of the Italian Risorgimento, living their commitment as scientists who were part of a collective task for the construction of a new Italy. Within the national movement, the bodies of great figures of the past assumed a strong symbolic value. As early as 1848, but especially after the Unification of Italy, the remains of conspirators, fighters and leaders, but also of the artists whose works had given voice to the spirit of the nation, were subjected to thanato-political practices. Other European countries also tended to these uses of human remains, but in late-nineteenth-century Italy the practice took on a special intensity because of its overlap with nation-building, the spread of Positivism and the crisis in relations between the State and the Catholic Church. There are countless compelling examples: the disputed discovery of Dante's bones during the sixth centenary of the birth of the great poet; the exhumation of the corpse of Ugo Foscolo in London, transported to Florence and buried with solemn ceremonial in Santa Croce, the "temple of Italian glories" whose praises he sang in his *Sepolcri*; the body of Giuseppe Mazzini mummified by the leaders of the Republican Party in the hope of preserving his charisma; the body of the first king of Italy, buried in Rome in the face of Savoy tradition and to proclaim the inviolability of the capital of the kingdom; the breach of Garibaldi's last wishes when the authorities prevented his cremation—which he had planned in every detail—in a gesture affirming the victory of the State over the revolutionary hero.³ Phrenologists and anthropologists were quick to make their contribution to these liturgies celebrating the antiquity of the nation, the heroic phase of patriotic awakening, a political party being constructed, the unity of the State, the pacification of memory. Others, including Giacomini, added to their agenda the determination of Italian anatomical features—starting

² Eugenio Garin, "Il positivismo italiano alla fine del secolo XIX fra metodo e concezione del mondo," *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, no. 59 (1980): 1–27; Giorgio Cosmacini, *Il medico materialista. Vita e pensiero di Jakob Moleschott* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2005).

³ Paolo Mantegazza, *Il cranio di Ugo Foscolo* (Firenze: Pellas, 1871); Umberto Levrà, *Fare gli italiani. Memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1992), pp. 3–40; Erminia Irace, *Itale glorie* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003), pp. 150–164; Alberto Carli, *Anatomie scapigliate. L'estetica della morte tra letteratura, arte e scienza* (Novara: Interlinea, 2004); Dino Mengozzi, *Garibaldi taumaturgo. Reliquie laiche e politica nell'Ottocento italiano* (Manduria: Lacaita, 2010); Sergio Luzzatto, *La mummia della repubblica. Storia di Mazzini imbalsamato* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011).

with the brain—in a project that involved work over several generations of scholars and different disciplines, not only natural and medical sciences, but also linguists, glottologists, historians, and archaeologists. They came to this because of questions circulating in Europe, but were also animated by patriotic ideals and the particular significance of the debate on the origins of the first inhabitants of the Italian peninsula.⁴ What with new secular religions, Church-State conflict and the nation's martyr cult, lingering Romantic sensitivities and emerging Positivist inclinations, recourse to thanato-metamorphic interventions was therefore frequent in Italy at the time of Lombroso and Giacomini. I will try to give an account of how these practices, a combination of science, politics and ideology, influenced the fate of their corpses.

“Urgent. Right Honourable Mosca. Via Messina 13, Palermo. Will 1907 states burial after post-mortem in his laboratory. If intentions changed, telegraph urgently.”⁵ In a fraught exchange of telegrams on 19 October 1909, two of Italy's greatest intellectuals of the day, historian Guglielmo Ferrero and political scientist Gaetano Mosca, found themselves deciding the fate of the corpse of Cesare Lombroso, a scientist they had both admired and loved as a master, and who had died the previous night. Michael Hagner's book researched with great finesse the cultural meanings of the studies conducted in the last two centuries on the brains of prominent political, artistic and scientific figures, and devoted significant space to the story of this autopsy, and to that of Giacomini.⁶ Lombroso's theory of pathological genius, which sustained that a degenerative syndrome produces an epileptic fit triggering an unconscious and unpredictable creative process, was embraced from the 1870s to the end of the century, even by artists, writers and historians. It was harshly rejected by some of the greatest scholars of brain anatomy and psychiatry, who—conversely—were persuaded of the

⁴ Claudio Pogliano, *Il cervello degli italiani*, in *Giovanni Canestrini zoologist and darwinist*, eds. Alessandro Minelli and Sandra Casellato (Venezia: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2001), pp. 351–377; Antonino De Francesco, *The Antiquity of the Italian Nation. The Cultural Origins of a Political Myth in Modern Italy (1776–1943)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1–180.

⁵ *Gaetano Mosca—Guglielmo Ferrero. Carteggio (1896–1934)*, ed. Carlo Mongardini (Milano: Giuffrè, 1980), pp. 166–167.

⁶ Michael Hagner, *Des cerveaux de génie. Une histoire de la recherche sur les cerveaux d'élite* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2014), pp. 178–197.

link between health and brilliance, and the harmonious, balanced, methodical nature of the genius.⁷ The figure of Nietzsche seemed to embody the portrait of the Lombroso degenerate genius, while German anatomists and psychiatrists countered with that of Helmholtz, the “chancellor of physics,” a scientist of extraordinarily versatile ingenuity, who lived to a venerable age and enjoyed enormous social prestige, the icon of the best virtues of Kaiser Wilhelm’s Germany.⁸ It was also the retort of the supreme spheres of scientific culture, of monarchist-conservative orientation, to a thinker like Lombroso, who had made criticism of the Italian ruling class a constant in his work as an essayist and politically-aligned columnist, which culminated in his shocking decision to join the Socialist party in 1893.⁹ The fact that Giacomini did not agree with the theory that some configurations of the brain could determine particular behavioural tendencies, and like Lombroso left testamentary instructions for a post-mortem of his own body and parts then to be displayed in a museum, justifies the important role that these Italian events played in Hagner’s work. Later, the author found that Lombroso’s post-mortem results were just one example of the ironic twists of fate befalling many researchers (then as now) when seeking to identify the morphological imprint of genius. Lombroso’s brain was actually slightly below average weight and, if observed according to his own theories, showed criminal tendencies.¹⁰

While Lombroso was compulsively present, eclectic, and driven to writing, Giacomini was a cautious and meticulous researcher. It is therefore surprising that the post-mortem reversed these roles: the skeleton of the father of criminal anthropology was preserved in a crude cabinet of

⁷ Andrea Rondini, *Cose da pazzi. Cesare Lombroso e la letteratura* (Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001); Gianfranco Venturini, *Vite d'autore. L'uomo di genio nelle patografie della scuola lombrosiana*, PhD dissertation, University of Pisa, 2012; Enrico Artifoni, *Ascesa e tramonto della medievistica psichiatrica e criminologica in Italia al tempo di Arturo Graf. Alcuni esempi*, in *Il volto di medusa. Arturo Graf e il tramonto del Positivismo*, eds. Clara Allasia and Laura Nay (Alessandria: Edizioni Dell’Orso, 2014), pp. 115–134; Francesco Galluzzi, *Positivismo in nero: le ricerche spiritiche, Il Museo di Antropologia criminale “Cesare Lombroso” dell’Università di Torino*, ed. Silvano Montaldo, in collaboration with Cristina Cilli (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2015), pp. 226–233.

⁸ Hagner, *Des cerveaux de genie*, pp. 193–210.

⁹ Marco Scavino, *L’interesse per la politica e l’adesione al socialismo*, in *Cesare Lombroso cento anni dopo*, eds. Silvano Montaldo and Paolo Tappero (Torino: Utet, 2009), pp. 117–126.

¹⁰ Hagner, *Des cerveaux de genie*, p. 187.

coarse material, and his soft tissue in ampoules no longer on display to the public, while the remains of Giacomini were reassembled in an extraordinary monument, whose image, not by chance, was recently reproduced by *Nature* magazine.¹¹ (fig 01) A glass and walnut case with neoclassical friezes exhibits the skeleton of the anatomist. At its feet, the brain prepared by the method the man devised himself in 1878 for the conservation of post-mortem remains in a procedure that would avoid the complications and costs of conservation in liquid.¹² The nervous mass was treated with solutions of zinc chloride, calcium dichromate, alcohol, and glycerine. Giacomini had collected, studied and preserved over a thousand human brains in this way, and many are shown in the room that also houses his remains in the Museo di Anatomia Umana “Luigi Rolando,” a museum the scientist worked hard to create right up until his death, in 1898.¹³ A unique place, a symbol of the age of Positivism and its particular aesthetics of death, because the artefacts used for important contributions in various fields (from neuroanatomy to topographic anatomy, embryology, anthropology, and primatology) and the researcher who made them, mirror one another. (fig 02) All housed in a museum whose architecture, in turn, transmits a loud, clear message of ideological stance. In this exhibition space, along with its lecture rooms and laboratories in Palazzo degli Istituti Anatomici, human organs—prepared, reproduced in wax or variously preserved in many ways—are arranged in display cabinets installed under the vaulted arches of a sort of secular temple, a solemn cathedral of science whose aisles reveal the hierophany of the great anatomists of the past, dominated by portraits of Darwin and Luigi Rolando, the father of Turin’s studies on the encephalon. His funerary monument, decorated with one of the first sculptural reproductions of the human brain, is now installed at the foot of the great staircase leading into the museum, not far from the marble memorial to Giacomini, with

¹¹ Alison Abbott, “Hidden treasures: Turin’s anatomy museum,” *Nature*, 455 (October 9, 2008): 736.

¹² Francesco Loreti, *Carlo Giacomini (1840–1989). Contributo alla storia dello «studio» anatomico della Università di Torino* (Memorie dell’Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, Classe di scienze fisiche, matematiche e naturali, serie 4°, n. 2, Torino, 1963), pp. 49–54; Paolo Perrini, Nicola Montemurro, Aldo Iannelli, “The contribution of Carlo Giacomini (1840–1898): The Limbus Giacomini and Beyond,” *Neurosurgery*, 72, no. 3 (march 2013): 475–482.

¹³ Giacomo Giacobini, Cristina Cilli, Giancarla Malerba, *Il Museo di Anatomia umana*, in *La memoria della scienza. Musei e collezioni dell’Università di Torino*, ed. Giacomo Giacobini (Torino: Fondazione CRT, 2003), pp. 143–154.

the bust of the scientist above a full-length écorché.¹⁴ And it was precisely in reference to his own, very personal donation, supported by the bequest of 2,000 lira (equal to about four of his monthly salaries), that Giacomini (usually an introverted fellow, closed in a scientific rationale sufficient unto itself) revealed the secret of his system of values: “Since I care not for cremations or cemeteries, I prefer my bones to rest in the institute where I have spent the best years of my youth and to which I have devoted all my energies.”¹⁵ Giacomini was dedicated to science to the point of donating his own body and trusting in the immanent destiny of humankind, but not only. It is not difficult to perceive in his statement traces of debates and controversies arising about a decade before his death, not only in Turin but around Italy with regard to the newly-arrived cremation movement. There are also hints at the painful and humiliating difficulties that scholars of the human body had long encountered when seeking access to the study of cadavers. The latter was only partially overcome by the Royal Decree of 28 October 1885, which disciplined nationwide a matter as sensitive as the use of human remains for scientific purposes.¹⁶ For a Positivist like Giacomini, little changed if the human body was removed from scientific study by incineration or by burial: in both cases it was a missed opportunity. While his unconventional decision to allow dissection of his body was attributable to the special atmosphere in which developed the mobilization of radical scientists who founded the Parisian *Société d'Autopsie Mutuelle*, in 1876, the more unusual idea of creating a museum display of Giacomini's remains was not only an ideological manifesto in favour of ennobling anatomical studies, but its results erased the distance between the bodies of scientists and those “other” bodies that Western science had collected for decades from prisons, hospitals and non-European territories.¹⁷ If we want to surmise further meanings, beyond the documentary evidence, we might even think that Giacomini's decision was also intended to reinforce the sense

¹⁴ Giacomo Giacobini, *I musei dell'Università di Torino: strumenti di conoscenza scientifica e patrimonio in beni culturali*, in *La memoria della scienza*, p. 19; Luca Avataneo, Silvano Montaldo, *La «città della scienza» al Valentino*, in *La memoria della scienza*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Archivio storico dell'Istituto di Anatomia umana normale dell'Università di Torino (ASIAUMUT), Carlo Giacomini papers, f. 35/309, no. 26.

¹⁶ Guido Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra. Esposizioni etniche e invenzioni esotiche in Italia (1880–1940)* (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2013), pp. 323–326.

¹⁷ Adriano Favole, *Le tanatopolitiche coloniali e il dibattito sulla restituzione dei resti umani in Oceania*, in *Morte e trasformazione dei corpi. Interventi di tanatometamorfosi*, ed. Francesco Remotti (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2006), pp. 151–153.

of belonging to the Turin school of anatomy. A bachelor with no direct descendants, Giacomini was deeply involved in his teaching, repaid by the strong loyalty of his students, who voiced solemn tributes and challenged the choice of successor made by the medical faculty.¹⁸ During the funeral service, colleagues acknowledged the special bond that Giacomini had built with his students. They found it to be an explanation for his decision: the institute of anatomy was “a family of which he was the head,” in which he had declared he wanted to “stay a while longer [. . .] leaving his body to the anatomy museum.”¹⁹ It was a coherent conclusion of a life in which “students, science and school were family, religion, shrine.”²⁰ The institute had thus become the shrine dedicated to “achieving that eternal Truth, which he sought in life [. . .] this place, where the body of Carlo Giacomini lies, a peaceful guardian, like a tutelary spirit.”²¹ The museum is also home to the right hand and part of the forearm of another anatomist, Lorenzo Restellini, who died in 1870, and while this adds little to our theory, it does prove that in Turin there was at least one precedent to the instructions left by Giacomini for the use of his cadaver.²²

The secular and rationalist logic reflected in Giacomini’s anatomical studies has recently been called into question, along with Lombroso’s *Contributo sull’antropologia dei Dinka*, deemed an expression of “mania for collecting, classifying and exhibiting typical of Positivist, capitalist and scientific Europe.”²³ For Guido Abbattista, the *Annotazioni sopra l’anatomia del negro* is indeed an example of how medical science appropriated and tampered with the bodies of Africans who died in Europe, denying

¹⁸ “In memoria del prof. Carlo Giacomini,” *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 53, no. 84 (March 5, 1900); “La riapertura dell’Università,” *La Campana degli Studenti*, I, no. 4 (April 8, 1899); “Il Romeo della scienza,” *La Campana degli Studenti*, I, no. 4 (April 8, 1899); “Le punizioni disciplinari,” *La Campana degli Studenti*, I, no. 4 (April 8, 1899); *Le onoranze al prof. Carlo Giacomini promosse dagli studenti della facoltà medico-chirurgica della R. Università di Torino* (Torino: Tipografia Pietro Celanza, 1900).

¹⁹ *Discorso pronunciato dal Prof. R. Fusari direttore dell’Istituto anatomico*, in *Le onoranze al prof. Carlo Giacomini*, pp. 16–17.

²⁰ *Discorso inaugurale pronunciato dal prof. G. Romiti direttore dell’Istituto anatomico della R. Università di Pisa*, in *Le onoranze al prof. Carlo Giacomini*, p. 19.

²¹ *Discorso inaugurale pronunciato dal prof. G. Romiti*, p. 30.

²² Giacomo Giacobini, Lorenzo Restellini e Carlo Giacomini, *docenti di anatomia al servizio dei feriti nelle battaglie risorgimentali*, in *Dall’Università di Torino all’Italia unita. Contributi dei docenti al Risorgimento e all’Unità*, ed. Clara Silvia Roero (Torino: Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 2013), pp. 266–272.

²³ Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, p. 335.



FIG. 1 Carlo Giacomini's skeleton exhibited in the "Luigi Rolando" Museum of Human Anatomy (University of Turin, Italy).

them the dignity of a burial of the entire body. Abbattista is undoubtedly correct in assuming that this research was part of studies that aimed to contribute to the advancement of medical and anatomical knowledge, but also to "establish with reliable objective data the place of black Africans on the scale of beings, compared on one hand to white humans and on the



FIG. 2 Main Hall of the “Luigi Rolando” Museum of Human Anatomy (University of Turin, Italy).

other to baser animal species.” Nonetheless we should avoid picking out only those passages in which the dissection findings were interpreted by Giacomini as signs of racial inferiority, since there are statements in which (for example regarding increased eye pigment) an African body is revealed to be “truly superior” compared to that of the white person. In others, the nineteenth-century scholar showed an enlightening prudence in not wanting to come to final conclusions given the small number of cases he was able to observe, and he showed anything but icy detachment towards the person whose body he dissected.²⁴ The study of human variants of any kind—microcephaly, insanity, criminal tendencies, different skin colour, genius even—was considered a promising research angle for perusing the secrets of the human brain. In that cultural context—as we stated above—the word “race” made reference to a much larger sphere than just skin colour, since it affected the theme of early Italian populations, which some

²⁴ Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, p. 310; Carlo Giacomini, *Annotazioni sopra l'anatomia del negro. Terza memoria con due tavole e figure intercalate nel testo* (Torino: Tipografia Celanza e Comp., 1884), p. 6; Carlo Giacomini, *Annotazioni sulla anatomia del negro. Appendice alle prime tre memorie* (Torino: Loescher, 1887), p. 22; Loreti, *Carlo Giacomini*, p. 44.

scholars sustained came precisely from Africa. We should also be honest enough to admit that if display in a museum and dissection were a “cruel” destiny (perhaps nothing more than a burial that differed from tradition, and not without dignity?), then these Positivists were consistent to the last, reserving this treatment for their own bones too. Nor is it true that prior to the 1885 law, studies on corpses in Italy hovered in a legal vacuum and shrouded in illegality. Specific legislation was already in place in the pre-Unification states, updated in 1870, although often difficult to apply.²⁵ Finally, and most importantly, it seems to me that a research perspective borrowed from post-colonial studies cannot be the most appropriate for approaching a work on nineteenth-century science and scientists because it would pay little heed to the differences and ruptures inherent to this world, described to us as rigid “in the construction of medical-naturalistic knowledge that it was thought should accompany the physical control of the Western World over the non-European world, completing its extension in terms of scientific knowledge.”²⁶

What, then, of Lombroso? On one hand in 1895, when he saw a performance in Turin of the Dinka, a company of black acrobats with a European manager, it confirmed for him the concept of continuity between the savage and criminal behaviour, because both were averse to work; on the other, he was one of the greatest exponents of Italian pacifism and an antimilitarist who denounced loudly and at length the crimes of European colonialism, also revealing amazing foresight for the Italian government’s expansionist plans for Libya.²⁷ In short, while Giacomini and Lombroso were certainly endowed with an evolutionary vision of humanity, with the whites Anglo-Saxons at the top of the ladder of civilization, scholars like Antonello La Vergata suggested discerning between different positions in

²⁵ Archivio storico dell’Università di Torino, Uncataloged Correspondence, 1/131; 1/186; *Statuti e ordinamenti della Università di Pavia dall’anno 1361 all’anno 1859 raccolti e pubblicati nell’11 centenario dell’Ateneo* (Pavia: Tipografia cooperativa, Pavia, 1925), p. 219; “Regolamento per le sezioni cadaveriche relative alle cliniche,” *Giornale della R. Accademia di Medicina di Torino*, no. 33 (1870): 601–602.

²⁶ Abbattista, *Umanità in mostra*, p. 310.

²⁷ Cesare Lombroso, *Le piaghe d’Italia*, in *Il momento attuale* (Milano, Casa editrice moderna, 1903), pp. 21–26; *Il nuovo secolo*, in *Il momento attuale*, pp. 29–32; “Per le riforme,” *Avanti!*, XI, no. 3142 (August 31, 1905); “Che cosa possiamo imparare dalle bestie,” *Avanti!*, X, no. 3266 (January 3, 1906); “Facciamo noi i birri del mondo?,” *Avanti!*, X, no. 3272, (January 9, 1906); “L’Italia armigera d’Europa,” *Avanti!*, X, no. 3469 (July 26, 1906); “Il primo passo al disarmo,” *Avanti!*, X, no. 3477 (August 3, 1906).

social Darwinism, which on closer examination is revealed to be a container of ideologies that may also be diametrically opposed, and distinguishing various types of racism.²⁸ How much do we really know of what a scientist like Giacomini conceived of others? In his relatively short life story we find he was a pioneer of the Italian Red Cross, participating in the *ambulance turinaise* mission during the Franco-Prussian War (writing an essay on the food shortage in besieged Paris). He spoke repeatedly to his acquaintances of his ideals of universal brotherhood, which would explain why he took on Mario Bacchetto, a young Sudanese attendant for his team, and was photographed with him.²⁹ Paternalism? Probably, but there was worse, much worse. Lombroso was a monogenist; he did not think that “racial” inequalities were established for eternity and that there was a natural limit to the progress of the “inferior races.” Changing environmental conditions, will change the destiny of the people.³⁰ When Lombroso introduced his *Uomo bianco e uomo di colore* to versatile author Angelo De Gubernatis, another progressive Positivist, he wrote that he wanted to explain that his research, “exploring since 1868 [. . .] the inequality of human races, an historical, linguistic and natural topic, had the white derive from the transformation of the black, and the latter from a fossil ape! There is enough to damn us three times over.”³¹ In short, his was a quest to renew Italian culture steeped in traditional Catholicism by circulating scientific thought, rather than the expression of a desire for power over the world of a poverty-stricken country that had just been unified, which the anthropologist saw as increasingly burdened with archaic tares over the years, and on the brink of chaos. So the decisions he made about his own corpse had a political value that went far beyond the scope of the studies on the brains of famous—even brilliant—people (which he undoubtedly considered himself to be). Studies to which he had already made contributions in 1875, with other psychiatrists,

²⁸ Antonello La Vergata, *Colpa di Darwin? Razzismo, eugenetica, guerra e altri mali* (Torino: Utet, 2009), pp. 73–86, 95–103.

²⁹ Giacomo Giacobini, *Il Comitato torinese dell'Associazione italiana di soccorso ai militari malati e feriti in tempo di guerra, dalla nascita al 1870*, in *Storia della Croce Rossa in Piemonte dalla nascita al 1914*, eds. Costantino Cipolla, et. al., (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2015), pp. 26–30, 33–48; Loreti, *Carlo Giacomini*, p. 17.

³⁰ Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e la varietà delle razze umane* (Padova: F. Sacchetto, 1871), p. 214.

³¹ National Central Library of Florence, De Gubernatis Papers, cass. 77, no. 16, Lombroso to De Gubernatis, August 20, 1871.

when they sought permission from the Volta family to exhume and examine the body of Alessandro.³²

In those years of such intense nation-building, in which the remains of great Italians were exhumed, transferred, collected, and displayed, with the dead returning for anthropometric measurement of their bones, in search of the matrix of Italian genius, the news of the initiative did not go far beyond the circle of insiders. What remains are three plaster casts of the skull of the inventor of the battery, found in the Lombroso museum, (fig 03) the University of Pavia, and the Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettere, and mentioned in a few scientific articles. Omnivorous and restless, attracted by novelty, and driven by a desire to assert his opinion, Lombroso dealt with many themes, not following up with any other post-mortem research on genius until 1909, when he bequeathed his own brain to scalpel. The decision taken by Lombroso for his own remains provoked an uproar, and some qualms in his family, as seen in the aforementioned telegram sent by his son-in-law Ferrero to Mosca, the executor chosen by Lombroso for his will. However educated and progressive, vaunting die-hard Positivist imprinting, his relatives agreed with distress to the last wishes of the anthropologist, and to some extent rejected them. The other son-in-law, Mario Carrara, withdrew, as he did not wish to dissect his father-in-law's body, as had been specified in the will, leaving the task to a faculty colleague, Camillo Tovo.³³ This may explain why the display cabinet for the skeleton was so humble: it was not, unlike the case of Giacomini, a monument designed to be admired. Moreover, the family honoured the anniversary of Lombroso's death going to his tomb, placed in the monumental arch for illustrious citizens, in Turin city central cemetery, where the ashes of what was left of his corpse after the autopsy and removal of organs were buried in a secular ceremony.³⁴ The decision to donate his body to science by a character so well known was extensively reported by the press of his time. Judged the result of "eccentric intentions," the episode was seized as an opportunity for heavy sarcasm on the part of Catholic and right-wing newspapers, especially in France, who had not forgotten his attack against anti-semitism,

³² Gianfranco Venturini, *La follia dell'uomo di genio: il calco del cranio di Alessandro Volta*, in *Il Museo di Antropologia criminale "Cesare Lombroso"*, pp. 179–182.

³³ Archive of the Institute of Forensic Medicine, Turin, Register of autopsies, 1909.

³⁴ Archivio Contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti," Gabinetto G. P. Vieusseux, Florence (ACGV), Gina Lombroso Papers, Paola Lombroso to Gina, October 17 and 18, 1941.

militarism and clericalism at the time of the *affaire Dreyfus*.³⁵ Thus the legend was born, and is still in circulation on social networks, saying that the brain of Lombroso showed variations typical of cretinism.³⁶ Conversely, for the liberal *Corriere della Sera* it was a way of “dying as a scientist” and “one final posthumous homage of himself to science,” a praiseworthy gesture of humility and encouragement to philosophical considerations on the transience of human life.³⁷ Lastly, for Socialist, Radical and Liberal press, and for the freethinkers of the Società del Libero Pensiero, of which Lombroso had been one of the founders, this was a consistent gesture to be imitated and touching in its opposition of that “breath of idealism [that] gradually shatters what we believed to be infallible dogma of Rationalism and Positivism.”³⁸ “La mort, la vie, il n’y a pas de coupure. Est-ce que je vis? Souvenez-vous que mon corps doit être porté à mon laboratoire, je suis curieux de savoir ce qui en sortira. Vous le suarez bientôt”: these are the words that daughter Gina attributed to Lombroso in the screenplay that she wrote about the life of his father in 1939.³⁹

In fact, what else could that choice for his body have been, if not the fruit of an intention to remove it from the attention of religion and donate it to science? (fig 04) A typical if somewhat untimely example of Jewish “secularization,” but nonetheless a “paradigmatic figure for understanding

³⁵ “L’autopsia del cadavere. Lo scheletro al museo antropologico,” *Corriere d’Italia*, October 22, 1909; “I funerali di Cesare Lombroso. Il feretro,” *Il Momento*, VII, no. 292, (October 21, 1909); “Le cerveau de Lombroso,” *Peuple Français*, October 21, 1909.

³⁶ Silvano Montaldo, “La ‘fossa comune’ del Museo Lombroso e il ‘lager’ di Fenestrelle: il centocinquantesimo dei neoborbonici,” *Passato e presente*, 30, no. 87 (2012): 105–118; “Sudismo: guerre dei crani e trappole identitarie,” *Passato e presente*, 22, no. 93 (2014): 5–18; Maria Teresa Milicia, “La protesta «No Lombroso» sul web. Narrative identitarie neomeridionaliste,” *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, no. 2 (2014): 265–286.

³⁷ Nino Berrini, “La salma di Lombroso a servizio della scienza,” *Corriere della Sera*, 34, no. 292 (October 22, 1909).

³⁸ Alexandre Lacassagne, “Cesare Lombroso,” *Presse Médicale*, no. 89 (November 6, 1909); “Lombroso minato dall’arteriosclerosi. L’autopsia della salma,” *Avanti!*, XIII, no. 294 (October 23, 1909); “Les Obsèques du Professeur Lombroso. Il lègue son Cerveau à la Science,” *Progres de Lyon*, October 21, 1909; “Le cerveau de Lombroso,” *L’Action Bonoise*, October 24, 1909; “Lombroso lègue son cerveau à la science,” *Dépêche des Ardennes*, October 21, 1909; “Les Obsèques du professeur Lombroso. L’autopsie de son cerveau,” *Journal de Roubaix*, October 21, 1909; “Obsèque d’un mort illustre,” *Petit Comtois*, October 21, 1909; “Professor Lombroso Brain,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, October 22, 1909.

³⁹ ACGV, Gina Lombroso Papers, Writings on Cesare Lombroso, Criminal Anthropology and Ethnography, Treatment du Film *Cesare Lombroso, 1939. Histoire de l’homme qui a voulu aider les autres hommes*.



FIG. 3 Cast of Alessandro Volta's skull. "Cesare Lombroso" Museum of Criminal Anthropology (University of Turin, Italy)

the complexity of the phenomenon of 'assimilation,'" Lombroso criticized traditional religious rites strongly in his 1894 *Antisemitismo e le scienze moderne*, starting with the practice of circumcision, prompting significant unease in the Jewish press.⁴⁰ His vision of a "Jewish regeneration" was no stranger to the criticism voiced by close friend Max Nordau (a Hungarian physician living in Paris who had become a successful journalist and writer) against the influence that religions still exercised over the habits and behaviour of cultured, rationalist men. Nordau was an admirer of Lombroso's theories on genius and, in turn, aroused in his friend a pro-Zionist sentiment in the later years of his life. With *The conventional lies of our civilization*, published for the first time in Germany, in 1883, and translated immediately, Nordau included religion, "the most powerful and

⁴⁰ Emanuele D'Antonio, "Aspetti della rigenerazione ebraica e del sionismo in Cesare Lombroso," *Società e storia*, no. 92 (2001): 281–309; Jean-Yves Frétygné, *Entre fascination et répulsion: la place du discours sur les juifs dans les débats autour de l'anthropologie criminelle italienne (1880–1900)*, in *Antisémythes. L'image des juifs entre culture et politique (1848–1939)*, Marie-Anne Matard Bonucci ed. (Paris: Nouveau monde éditions, 2005), pp. 95–106; Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861–1918)* (Bologna, il Mulino, 2011), pp. 36–37.



FIG. 4 View of the collection of instrument and of Cesare Lombroso's skeleton in the Museum of Criminal Anthropology (University of Turin, Italy).

widely extended of all the institutions bequeathed to us by the past,” among those forces that box in human intellect.⁴¹

“Ah, l'église catholique est encore bien formidable et les quelques pauvres ouvriers de la pensée qui depuis 2 or 3 siècles cherchent à répandre un peu de lumière ne l'ont presque pas entamée,” he wrote in 1906 to Lombroso about the story of Linda Murri, and added: “combien des cas comme celui-ci nous montrent notre devoir!”⁴² The autobiography written by daughter Gina described Lombroso's long conversations with Nordau during a holiday in Stresa, a few weeks before his death.⁴³ It is therefore likely that during those conversations the two intellectuals discussed how— from cradle to grave—humankind was constantly accompanied by religious rites, and even in death the man “is laid to rest in consecrated ground,

⁴¹ Max Nordau, *The conventional lies of our civilization* (New York, Arno press, 1975), p. 31.

⁴² Columbia University, New York, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Guglielmo Ferrero Papers, I, Cataloged Correspondence 1890–1942, box C, Max Nordau to Cesare Lombroso, February 6, 1906. Valeria P. Babini, *Il caso Murri. Una storia italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2004).

⁴³ ACGV, Gina Lombroso Ferrero Papers, IV. I. I. I, Gina Lombroso, *Il papà mi lascia* (manuscript).

surrounded by the tokens and symbols of Religion.”⁴⁴ In conclusion, we can assume that Lombroso wanted to keep faith with the conversations he had with his pupil and confidant, choosing to “shaken off [. . .] the autocratic yoke of Religion,” something that is always very difficult, particularly upon reaching the end of life.⁴⁵ A hint of this can be found in the 1904 will, saying he wanted “no flowers or invitations or priests or rabbis” at his funeral.⁴⁶ In the 1907 version, however, his thoughts had turned to his family, whom he consoled for the imminent separation, inviting them to reflect on the fact that he “abandon[ed] with joy a life at a time when being Italian was almost something of which to be ashamed.”⁴⁷ This must be said with all due respect for those who, from the 1960s, considered Lombroso an organic intellectual of the Italian bourgeoisie, a real forerunner of Fascism for some. Perhaps they were unaware of the fact that the father of criminal anthropology had already been pinpointed by Fascists as the true symbol (with Freud and Marx) of the grip of “materialistic Jewish culture” on Italian society, removing him from place names and monuments, and that his family had been prominent figures of antifascism, paying hard for their opposition to the regime.⁴⁸ We should not be too surprised by these twisted memories of a character as famous as he was controversial for his extreme theories. However, we should point out another aspect: precisely because Lombroso was a symbol—real or perceived—of the birth of a State that the movements of the 1960s and 1970s intended to fight, a revival of his figure was triggered by the publication of the Giorgio Colombo’s book on the museum of criminal anthropology and photography exhibition curated by Ando Gilardi. Here the facial mask of Lombroso, preserved in liquid, was shown as a macabre fetish of the struggle against the Italian middle-class establishment, and the remains of Lombroso, which had never really been elevated to the rank of scientific relic, embarked on a new life as a controversial icon, now easy to encounter when browsing the web.⁴⁹ This

⁴⁴ Nordau, *The conventional lies*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Nordau, *The conventional lies*, p. 33.

⁴⁶ Historical archives of the Museum of Criminal Anthropology “Cesare Lombroso” University of Turin (ASMACCL), testament 1904.

⁴⁷ ASMACCL, testament 1907.

⁴⁸ Giuseppe Maggiore, “Logica e moralità del razzismo,” *La difesa della razza*, 1, no. 3 (September 5, 1938): 31–32

⁴⁹ Giorgio Colombo, *La scienza infelice. Il Museo di Antropologia criminale di Cesare Lombroso* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1975); Giorgio E. Colombo, “Le stimmate del galeotto,” *Phototeca*, 1, no. 1 (1980): 129.

was the astonishing fate of the remains of a Positivist scientist, which not even the skeleton of Giacomini escaped recently. After mounting guard for a century as the patient sentinel of the contents of his collection, and observing the opening to the public of the museum in 2007, it experienced a dramatic pop moment in the winter of 2014, when it was exhibited by the artist Maurizio Cattelan, in the exhibition *Shit and Die*, hosted in the stately interiors of Palazzo Cavour, in Turin.⁵⁰ The heedless remains of Lombroso's authoritative colleague were placed in a space dedicated to portraits of famous figures of politics, entertainment and enterprise, as a solemn *memento mori*, much appreciated—it seems—by tens of thousands of visitors, who saw it as a new episode in the irreverent criticism of power that often inspired the works of this artist, while others, perplexed, went away to brood on the rulings of contemporary art.

⁵⁰ Marina Paglieri, "Il provocatore Cattelan porta una forca a Palazzo Cavour," *La Repubblica—Torino*, 39, no. 258 (November 1, 2014); Emanuela Minucci, "Cattelan e i ritratti mai visti. L'ironia contro i vip della città," *La Stampa—Torino*, 148, no. 305 (November 6, 2014); Roberta Olcese, "'Artissima' debutto con polemica. Fa discutere la mostra di Cattelan," *Il Secolo XIX*, 128, no. 264 (November 7, 2014).