

GAETANA SILVIA RIGO (ed.), *Emilio Veratti e Camillo Golgi. Corrispondenza inedita e altri documenti*. Firenze: Olschki, 2008. VII+113 pp., ISBN 978-88-222-5859-5.

The book, edited by Gaetana Silvia Rigo, contains a number of letters written by

Camillo Golgi to his pupil and collaborator Emilio Veratti from 1896 to 1915. Four chapters are also included, two of which deal with the life and work of Veratti, whereas the other two analyse unusual aspects of Golgi's scientific attitude and social contribution.

The correspondence, so far unpublished, bears a certain interest since it may contribute to a better knowledge of Golgi's character and duties as well as of his human attitude toward his pupil. Unfortunately, however, the letters are devoid of those comments and information that are required for understanding some topics historically less trivial than the personal relationship between professor and assistant. For example, in a letter of July 23, 1901, Golgi suggests that it would be appropriate to show the muscle histological specimens to Kölliker. This is very important since it reveals that Golgi was aware of a possible relation between the sarcoplasmic structure described by Veratti and the «granules» (mitochondria) observed by Kölliker in the muscle fibre. Hence the interest for the opinion of Kölliker who was at that time the most authoritative histologist in Europe and author of very important contributions to the knowledge of muscle sarcoplasm. We do not know the answer since Kölliker never mentioned Veratti's work on sarcoplasm in his vast correspondence with Golgi (*Mem. Ist. Lomb. Sci. Lett.*, XXVI, 4, 1975).

An adequate comment should also be required to comprehend the Golgi's complaint about «dishonest attacks» made against him by Celli in Parliament (letter of August 12, 1909). In fact, they were both engaged in the struggle to prevent malaria in Italy, but they strongly disagreed as to the means to be used (G. Cosmacini, *Storia della medicina e della sanità in Italia*, Roma, Laterza, 1995). It is surprising that in her introduction to the chapter regarding the life and work of Veratti, Dr. Rigo states that: «perhaps for the first time the book makes it apparent, in a right and appropriate way, the personality of

Veratti». Apparently, the author disregards the International Congress dedicated to Veratti, organised by the Accademia dei Lincei in 2002. The contributions presented, that can be easily found also on the Internet, report, *inter alia*, the penetrating analyses by Margreth and by Berlucchi of Veratti's human and scientific personality (*Rend. Fis. Acc. Lincei*, s. 9, v.13, 249 e sgg.). Furthermore, no consideration has been given to the review, published in 2003 in a top-level international journal, that analyses the scientific milieu in which Veratti operated and discovered the sarcoplasmic reticulum, as well as the disappearance of his discovery from scientific literature and the events that finally led to its rediscovery more than 50 years later (*Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology*, 4, 69-74, January 2003).

In recalling the number of difficulties that hindered the academic career of Veratti, it would have been more appropriate to refer his personal events to the history of his scientific School rather than to his hypercritical and shy character. In fact, Golgi's School was characterised by a precise working methodology and by a definite epistemological orientation, a situation that facilitated its development as a scientific and academic block, but also caused its rapid scientific and academic decline in which also Veratti was involved (*Annali Storia Università Italiane*, vol. 7, 165, 2003). This could better account for the unfairness of the Medical Faculty of Pavia towards Veratti, as revealed by the fact that he was proposed for nomination as Emeritus Professor only in 1962, i.e. twenty years after his retirement and only when his important investigations on sarcoplasm were rediscovered by foreign scientists.

It is astonishing to find in the book so many inaccuracies. In the first instance, it is scientifically wrong to state that the isotropic (I) and anisotropic (A) banding of muscle fibre was revealed by the electron microscopy: on the contrary, the proper technique for its observation is the polarizing microscopy: electron microscopy provided an explanation later. Moreover, it

is stated that Veratti became a Professor after his retirement! Finally, in figure 3 the lady near Veratti is not professor Piera Locatelli as stated in the text. The presence of such inaccuracies as well as the lack of adequate information and references somewhat limit the value of this book.

UMBERTO MUSCATELLO