

## REVIEW-DISCUSSION

Alfred Heuss: *Theodor Mommsen und das 19. Jahrhundert*. Mit einem Vorwort von Jochen Bleicken, reprint of the edition Kiel 1956. Pp. 285. Steiner, 1996. DM 76.

In 1953 Alfred Heuss, then professor of Ancient History at Kiel, followed the invitation of the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Universitäts-Gesellschaft* to deliver a memorial lecture on the 50th anniversary of Mommsen's death, since the latter 'prince of scholars', as George Peabody Gooch once wrote,<sup>1</sup> had studied law and submitted his Latin dissertation on Roman Associations (1843) at the provincial university of Schleswig-Holstein. A substantially enlarged and revised version of the lecture was published under the programmatic title *Theodor Mommsen und das 19. Jahrhundert* in 1956 when Heuss had already moved to Göttingen where he held the chair of Ancient History until his retirement. In later years the author frankly admitted that the book, despite some difficulties due to lack of time, was great fun.<sup>2</sup> The concise and well disposed study was immediately welcome; Arnaldo Momigliano, for instance, characterized it as an *eindringende und sympathische Untersuchung*.<sup>3</sup> The limited edition was soon exhausted and first the publisher, then the author himself, refrained from reprinting. The book has nevertheless reached a wide audience and influenced the popular as well as scholarly perception of Mommsen.

The reason for Heuss' success is, as far as I can see, threefold. To begin with, the favourable response which the book met immediately after its publication is best understood in the political context of post-war Germany. In those days, there was a vivid interest in Mommsen as an active politician who was thought to represent the liberal traditions of the German *bourgeoisie* and was thus incorporated into the intellectual palladium of the newly founded German democracy. It is therefore not surprising that in the same year Albert Wucher tried to prove that political convictions had heavily influenced Mommsen's historiographical writing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G.P. Gooch, *History and Historian in the Nineteenth Century* (2nd edition, Boston 1959) 468.

<sup>2</sup> A. Heuss, 'De se ipse', in: J. Bleicken (ed.), *Colloquium aus Anlass des 80. Geburtstages von Alfred Heuss* (Kaißlitz 1993) 211 (= A. Heuss, *Gesammelte Schriften* I (Stuttgart 1995) 817).

<sup>3</sup> A. Momigliano, *Gnomon* 30 (1958) 1-6 (2) = Id., *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome 1960) 421-427 (422).

<sup>4</sup> A. Wucher, *Theodor Mommsen: Geschichtsschreibung und Politik* (Göttingen 1956; 2nd edition, 1968).

Secondly, Heuss based his study on a wide range of published and unpublished sources and brought to light many articles, notes and papers out of archives and libraries illustrating Mommsen's political activities which were until then unknown or just ignored.

Finally, Heuss met with lasting approval since he convincingly depicted Mommsen's life and personality in all its complexity. After dealing with Mommsen's intellectual and political formation, his academic teachers, his foundation of the Corpus of Latin Inscriptions and his participation in the 1848 revolution, Heuss painstakingly describes Mommsen's wide-ranging scholarly activities, analyses his productive relations with predecessors and contemporaries in the field of classical studies and emphasizes his achievements and limits. An enlightening chapter is devoted to Mommsen's juridical expertise, and Heuss was the right man to do so, since he himself had written not only a historical, but also a juridical dissertation in Leipzig.<sup>5</sup> A chapter on the *Römische Geschichte*, which brought its author the Nobel Prize for Literature (1902), follows, in which Heuss illuminates its historical setting and its position within Mommsen's intellectual biography; he concludes that Mommsen was not able to write the fourth volume on the Imperial period, which was eagerly expected by his contemporaries,<sup>6</sup> since the circumstances under which he had composed the first three volumes were no longer reproducible. Heuss then evaluates Mommsen's important rôle in liberating the academic discourse on Roman history and culture from the philhellenic, aestheticizing classicism and in transforming the German *Altertumswissenschaft* to a positivistic, highly specialized discipline of research firmly based on data and sources.

The remaining pages of the book, however, are restricted to Mommsen's political biography. Heuss describes his activities in the stirring events of 1848, when he sacrificed his academic position in Leipzig to his convictions, and elucidates his political evolution as liberal politician, who was a temporary member of the Prussian *Abgeordnetenhaus* and the German *Reichstag*, supported the unification of Germany, bitterly quarrelled with Bismarck after the latter's break with the liberals, fought the outbreak of anti-Semitism led by Adolf Stöcker and Heinrich von Treitschke, opposed various conservative bills regarding schools and universities as obscurantism

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Heuss, *Die völkerrechtlichen Grundlagen der römischen Außenpolitik in republikanischer Zeit* (Leipzig 1933).

<sup>6</sup> Despite its promising title, the recently published lecture notes—Th. Mommsen, *Römische Kaisergeschichte. Nach den Vorlesungs-Mitschriften von Sebastian und Paul Hensel*, hrsg. v. B. u. A. Demandt (München 1992) = Th. Mommsen, *A History of Rome under the Emperors*. Based on the lecture notes of Sebastian and Paul Hensel (London 1996)—are not an adequate substitute for the missing volume.

and, in 1902, advocated a coalition between left-wing liberals and Social Democrats. Heuss stresses Mommsen's significance as political publicist and pamphleteer who ultimately broke under the harsh political reality of the Wilhelmine period which was so diametrically opposed to his liberal ideals. It is due to Heuss that all attempts made by contemporaries and biographers to marginalize or minimize Mommsen's political statements (and outbursts) are cogently rejected once for all.<sup>7</sup>

Mommsen is thus represented as paradigm, indeed as perfect personification of the German *bourgeoisie* in the 19th century, tormented with deep political frustrations and combining firm belief in scientific progress and historical cognition with persevering zest for work and assiduous sense of duty. This coherent conception, which caught alike the scholar, the organizer and the politician in his timeless grandeur and in his historical dependence, has replaced the heroized picture of the *epigoni* by a more down-to-earth portrayal, and is still the best introduction to Mommsen, his time and his oeuvre, especially since the major biographical project carried out by Lothar Wickert remained a torso. The latter failure is also due to Heuss' devastating review article of the first three volumes<sup>8</sup>.

There are, of course, short-comings. Heuss surely underestimated the importance of Mommsen's unpublished correspondence for reconstructing the latter's scholarly and especially political activities,<sup>9</sup> as for instance Mommsen's exchange of letters with the theologian Adolf Harnack proves.<sup>10</sup> Also his achievements in the field of late antiquity and his contribution to Patristic projects, like the edition of the ante-Nicene Greek church fathers and a prosopography of the later Roman empire, are sometimes underrated or even disregarded.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Mommsen's outstanding work in the organization and politics of scholarship could have been treated in greater detail. But this criticism cannot detract from Heuss' merits in writing a pioneering biography, and we should be grateful to the new publishers for re-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. his remarks on Eduard Schwartz' evaluation of Mommsen's political acitivities (in Schwartz' obituary note on Mommsen) which Heuss unmasks as '*eine wunderbare Klimax eines denaturierten politischen Bewusstseins*' (279f.).

<sup>8</sup> *Gnomon* 43 (1971) 772-801 (= A. Heuss, *Gesammelte Schriften* III (Stuttgart 1995) 2574-2603); cf. *Gnomon* 56 (1984) 633-637 (= op.cit. 2604-2608).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Heuss 238 and 241, where he conjectures that 'für eine ausführlichere Darstellung von Mommsens Leben und Werk der Grundstock der "Quellen" in der gedruckten Hinterlassenschaft steckt'.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. St. Rebenich, *Theodor Mommsen und Adolf Harnack. Wissenschaft und Politik im Berlin des ausgehenden 19. Jahrhunderts. Mit einem Anhang: Edition und Kommentierung des Briefwechsels* (Berlin 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also B. Croke, 'Theodor Mommsen and the Later Roman Empire', *Chiron* 20 (1990) 159-189.

printing the book so long out-of-print. It is, however, deplorable and difficult to understand why Heuss' major contributions on Mommsen and Barthold Georg Niebuhr,<sup>12</sup> a topic which always fascinated him,<sup>13</sup> on Mommsen's famous testamentary clause,<sup>14</sup> on Mommsen and the revolutionary structure of the Roman empire<sup>15</sup> and on Mommsen as historiographer<sup>16</sup> have not been collected in this volume; this would have also done justice to Alfred Heuss who, in his later days, had refused a reprint of his book on Mommsen without revisions and *addenda*. The editor was obviously content with summarily referring to Heuss' *Gesammelte Schriften* which are—surprisingly enough—published by the same company.

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(Note: The reviewer's excellent English has been lightly revised by the *Histos* team.)

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<sup>12</sup> A. Heuss, 'Niebuhr und Mommsen. Zur wissenschaftsgeschichtlichen Stellung Theodor Mommsens', *A&A* 14 (1968) 1-18 (=Id., *Gesammelte Schriften* III (Stuttgart 1995) 1699-1716).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. Heuss, *Gesammelte Schriften* III (Stuttgart 1995) 1608ff.

<sup>14</sup> A. Heuss, 'Theodor Mommsen über sich selbst. Zur Testamentsklausel von 1899', *A&A* (1957) 105-117 (= op.cit. 1717-1729)

<sup>15</sup> A. Heuss, 'Theodor Mommsen und die revolutionäre Struktur des römischen Kaiseriums', *ANRW* II 1 (1974) 77-90 (= op.cit. 1730-1743).

<sup>16</sup> A. Heuss, 'Theodor Mommsen als Geschichtsschreiber' in N. Hammerstein (ed), *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft um 1900* (Stuttgart 1988) 37-95 (= op.cit. 1744-1802).