

MOMMSEN'S ROMAN HISTORY

Editor's note: this paper is divided into three parts:

1. Mommsen's Roman History: Genesis and Influence (Thomas Wiedemann)
2. Mommsen's Influence on Chinese Historians (Wang Naixin)
3. Mommsen, Denmark and England (Thomas Wiedemann).

The material (especially that in parts 1 and 3) overlaps interestingly with S. Rebenich's review of A. Heuss, *Theodor Mommsen und das 19. Jahrhundert* (*Histos* 1 [1997] 188-91)

1. Mommsen's Roman History: Genesis and Influence

Theodor Mommsen (1818-1903) wrote the three volumes of his narrative account of Roman history up to 46 BC in the 1850s, mostly in exile in Zurich, where he had fled after being dismissed from his post as a special professor (*Extraordinarius*) at the University of Leipzig for his involvement in the revolutionary events of 1848/49.¹ Volume V, known in English as *The Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian*, appeared three decades later, in 1885. But although for many years Mommsen gave lecture courses both on the Principate and on Late Antiquity, no 'Volume IV' was ever published. The existence of notes of these lectures by several of Mommsen's students has long been known; so has the fact that in the view of Mommsen's son-in-law Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff their academic level was such that their publication would have been an embarrassment.²

This lack of interest in Mommsen's views on the age of the emperors has been reversed in recent years, as the history of the development of our discipline has come to be recognised as a valid field of enquiry for ancient histo-

¹ Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* I-III (Leipzig 1854-6). The standard English translation by W.P. Dickson (London 1894) is to be republished by the Thoemmes Press in 1997, with a short introduction by Thomas Wiedemann. The standard biography of Mommsen is L. Wickert, *Theodor Mommsen, eine Biographie* in 4 volumes (Frankfurt 1959; 1964; 1970; 1980—the final volume does not share the same level of scholarship as the first three). There are surveys of Mommsen's life and work in English by A. Demandt in: W. W. Briggs and W. M. Calder III, *Classical Scholarship* (N.Y. & London 1990) 285-309, and by A. Wucher, 'Mommsen's Historical Writing' in: W. Laqueur & G. L. Mosse (eds), *Historians in Politics* (London 1974) 37-58.

² Wilamowitz's reservations about publishing the lectures: W.M. Calder & R. Schliesier, 'Wilamowitz on Mommsen's *Kaisergeschichte*', *Quaderni di Storia* 21 (1985) 161 ff. Victor Ehrenberg knew of these lecture notes, but was not impressed: 'Theodor Mommsen's Kolleg über römische Kaisergeschichte', *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 4 (1960) 94 ff. = *Polis und Imperium* (1965).

rians. However little help students' notes of Mommsen's lectures on the emperors may be towards a better understanding of the Roman empire, they certainly tell us a great deal about Mommsen's interests, preconceptions and prejudices, and about the way in which these were the products of his own background and of the intellectual and political climate of the Europe of his day.

A substantially complete text of Mommsen's lectures was discovered in a Nuremberg bookshop in 1980 by Alexander Demandt, Professor of Ancient History at the Free University of (west-) Berlin. The text was transcribed and edited by Barbara and Alexander Demandt, and published by the C.H.Beck Verlag in Munich in 1992 under the title *Römische Kaisergeschichte*. It aroused enormous interest in Germany, where its relevance to the issues of state power and of the alternative federalist and centralist models for Germany's constitutional development since the 19th century was immediately apparent to a wide readership in the aftermath of the collapse of the centralised East German socialist state, the re-establishment of federal *Länder*, and their social and economic integration into the West. I was asked to assist with the preparation of an English edition of the book, which was published by Routledge in June 1996 as *A History of Rome under the Emperors*.

I thought that this publication would be an appropriate occasion for a colloquium on the background to, and influence of, Mommsen's view of Roman history. The colloquium was held on the afternoon of June 20th, 1996, at the German Historical Institute in Bloomsbury Square, London, with the support of the Director, Prof. Peter Wende, and with the encouragement of Richard Stoneman of Routledge, and attended by about twenty classicists and ancient historians.

Perhaps the most interesting point which emerged was how differently Mommsen's political stance can be perceived. Western scholars are particularly struck by his support for a strong centralised state (and, one might add, strongly centralised scholarship, in both cases centred on Berlin), which seems to contradict his liberal opinions and insistence on popular sovereignty. This issue was addressed by Andrew Lintott (Worcester College, Oxford), whose paper showed that for Mommsen magisterial *imperium* and the sovereignty of the popular assembly at Rome were by no means contradictory principles. Other contributions reminded participants that in political systems which make use of concepts such as 'democratic centralism' or 'supra-class democratic monarchy' rather than emphasising liberalism or local autonomy, Mommsen could be claimed as a progressive intellectual: not just in China (see below for Dr Naixin Wang's summary of the reception of Mommsen there in recent years), but more surprisingly in (east-) Berlin: Barbara Demandt read and discussed an English translation of the east German writer Heiner Müller's poem 'Mommsen's Block', in which Müller

comes to terms with his own writer's block in the aftermath of the collapse of socialism (and the revelations about the corruption of its leaders) by comparing it with Mommsen's unwillingness to write about the comfortable world of the Julio-Claudians:

*I understood for the first time your writer's block
Comrade Professor with respect to the age of the Caesars
as is commonly known
the happy age of Nero
knowing the unwritten text to be a wound
from which the blood comes that nurses no fame
and the gaping lacuna in your historical work
was a physical pain in my
how much longer breathing
body.³*

These contributions, as well as an analysis by Professor Demandt himself of the factors which made Mommsen (perhaps along with Edward Gibbon) the most famous Roman historian there has ever been, provoked considerable discussion, and some disagreement: there was, for instance, no consensus on whether Mommsen's attitude to Kaiser Wilhelm II was fundamentally positive (because he had always seen Prussia as the core of a centralised German state, as well as because of the Kaiser's support for military archaeology, and specifically *Limesforschung*) or negative (because of the Kaiser's lack of respect for parliamentary forms and his desire to rival Britain as an imperial power). Two of the papers in particular presented new information or approaches with which English-speaking scholars might be unfamiliar, and *Histos* seems to be an appropriate means to circulate them. The first is the study of Mommsen's influence on Chinese historians already mentioned. Dr Wang (who is working at Nottingham University in 1996/97 as a British Academy K. C. Wong Research Fellow) was unfortunately unable to attend the colloquium himself as a result of the regrettable failure of the British Embassy in Beijing to process his visa application in time, and his paper was read out by Dr John Rich. Readers will find that it gives a particularly interesting insight into the kinds of issues of interest to contemporary Chinese

³ *Verstand ich zum erstenmal Ihre Schreibhemmung
Genosse Professor vor der römischen Kaiserzeit
Der bekanntlich glücklichen unter Nero
Wissend der ungeschriebne Text ist eine Wunde
Aus der das Blut geht das kein Nachruhm stillt.*
(English translation is by Michael Redies.)

historians, including historical inevitability and the degree of credibility to be extended to accounts of archaic history. The other is my own contribution on ‘Mommsen, Denmark and England’.

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THOMAS WIEDEMANN

2. Mommsen’s Influence on Chinese Historians

Theodor Mommsen was an outstanding German historian of the 19th century, yet his *Römische Geschichte* spread his fame throughout the world. China, however, was an exception: there Mommsen did not become well-known to historians until the Chinese government determined to carry out the policy of reform and openness. At the First Academic Conference on Greek and Roman History that was held in Qufu, Shandong Province in 1979, a few scholars cited Mommsen’s *History of Rome* as their authority in order to strengthen their own arguments. At this conference, their comments attracted the attention of one of the editors of the Commercial Press, who had never heard of Mommsen. After the meeting he returned to Beijing and advised the Director with great enthusiasm to publish a translation of Mommsen’s *History of Rome*. In 1994, Volume I, translated from German into Chinese by Mr Li Jianian, was published by the Commercial Press in Beijing.

Professor Guo Shengmin, a distinguished Chinese historian, published a work entitled *A Short History of Western Historiography* (Shanghai People’s Press, 1983), in which he highly evaluated Mommsen’s *History of Rome*. He said that Mommsen’s *History of Rome* represented the climax of Western historiography, and that the author had opened new ways, introduced new methods, and drawn new conclusions for Roman studies. He added that for Mommsen historical research should be based on primary sources and avoid readily placing trust in the ancient legends and records of the annalists. This was why Mommsen could put forward many original views about some hitherto unquestioned problems of Roman history.

As a politician, Mommsen wished Germany at his time to be a unified country, so he highly praised Julius Caesar, calling him a great hero who had great success. To Mommsen’s mind, it was an inevitable historical trend that Rome went from division to unity, from Republic to Empire. The Germany of his own time also needed a person like Caesar, who was skilful in completing the unification of his own state by the sword.

One year later, Professor Sun Bingying wrote *A History of Historiography in Modern Europe* (Hunan People’s Press 1984), in which he portrayed Mommsen-

sen as the greatest historian in the field of Roman history in modern Europe. He said that, politically, Mommsen disliked despotism, but admired aristocracy, despised democracy, and even thought that general elections resulted in tyranny. He added that, as a liberal, Mommsen considered a republic to be the ideal state; however, he was quite content with a constitutional monarchy. In addition, Mommsen actively fought against anti-Semitism. However, the bulk of Sun's comments on Mommsen can be found in *A History of Historical Writing* edited by James W. Thompson. This was translated from English into Chinese by Sun Bingying and Xie Defeng in 1992. The translation into Chinese of another book on the subject, George P. Gooch's *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, also helped Chinese readers to understand the fundamental ideas of Mommsen's *History of Rome*.

Mommsen's *History of Rome* embodied a new historical method, namely vigorous criticism of sources. He seriously examined traditional records, and refused to idealise antiquity, particularly early Rome before 300 BC.

More than 100 years later, this historical method was introduced into China. For example, Yu Guixin, the Professor of the Department of History at Jilin University, wrote *A History of Ancient Rome* (Jilin University Press, 1988), in which he made many references to Mommsen's ideas about particular historical events. In his view, Servius Tullius divided the Roman population into five classes not on the basis of money, but of land (see p. 28). Another classicist, Li Yashu, also believed that in the period of the monarchy, 'As' coins had not yet come into being, so that property at that time could be calculated only in terms of land (Li Yashu and Yang Gongle, *A History of Ancient Rome*, p. 40, n.1).

Mommsen, however, did not reject the reality of all traditional stories. For instance, he believed the statement of Dionysius about the origin of the plebeians. In his opinion, the plebeians were originally under the protection of the patricians of the city of Rome, and then 'out of the clients arose the Plebs' (Mommsen, *History of Rome*, trans. H. P. Dickson, vol. I, p. 90; Dionysius, II.11). Li Yashu thought that this view was possibly true in part, in so far as those clients who escaped from the client relationship became part of the plebeians (*A History of Ancient Rome*, p. 68).

Mommsen's *History of Rome* related the entire period from the fall of the Tarquinian monarchy at the end of the sixth century BC to Caesar's victory at Thapsus in 46 BC. In Mommsen's opinion, the Roman republic as a whole began and ended with an absolute monarchy. Hence revolution served as the driving force of the internal development of the republic. Mommsen was the first to consider the crisis of the final century of the republic, beginning in the time of the Gracchi, as the Roman revolution. James F. McGlew correctly points out that the attention given to the con-

cept of revolution was one of the chief novelties of the *Römische Geschichte*. He goes on to say that fifty years later, Ronald Syme's *The Roman Revolution* emphasised this concept once more, and at that time the phrase 'Roman revolution' became thoroughly commonplace (see 'Revolution and Freedom in Theodor Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte*', *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 426).

Mommsen's concept of revolution made a notable impact on research on Roman history in today's China. The author of *An Outline of Ancient History* wrote that the historical figures from the Gracchi to Caesar and Octavian had the same task, the overthrow of the Republic. They hoped that the old system that inherited and retained clan relationships would be eliminated, and fought against a Senate controlled by the nobles who attempted to defend this old system and old relationship (*An Outline of Ancient History*, People's Press 1981, p. 284). For the author, as for Mommsen, the last generation of the republic was obviously a 'legitimate revolution' that ended the history of the Roman republic. They both believed that the course of history from the Gracchi to Caesar and Octavian was inevitable, and that no other end was possible.

An objective assessment of the worth and significance of Mommsen's *History of Rome* can be seen in the paper 'On Caesar' written by the deceased Chinese scholar Wang Geshen. He said that the assessments of modern historians, such as Mommsen, Ferrero, Meyer, Syme and others, were of course full of modern colourings although they had escaped from the political bias of the ancient sources. He added that in Mommsen's mind, Caesar was an unrivalled talent in the world, and above all, a famous statesman who had a character of the most self-sufficient harmony, and who carried out supra-class policies, bringing various classes of society under his control. In other words, Caesar was an ideal autocrat resting on a supra-class democracy. Wang Geshen argued that this view of Mommsen revealed his vision of the unification of Germany under the conditions of supra-class and 'democratic monarchy'. However, the history of German unification in the 60s and 70s of the 19th century made Mommsen's illusion of democratic monarchy crumble (*World History* 1981, No.3, pp. 31-2). This seems to be why Mommsen did not continue the *History of Rome* past the death of Caesar. The fourth volume, covering the Principate, was never written, and the fifth volume, *Provinces of the Roman Empire from Caesar to Diocletian*, appeared in 1885 as a continuation of the original three volumes. Although Mommsen said that he disliked making guesses about antiquity in the absence of reliable material, the lack of sufficient primary evidence was only a secondary reason.

Mommsen considered the Augustan Principate to be a dyarchy, a joint rule of Princeps and senate, under which the Princeps administered one part of the Empire, and the senate the other. This interpretation is not now gen-

erally accepted by Chinese classicists, because in appearance the Augustan Principate seems to be a restored republic but in essence was an autocracy. Professor Li Yashu says that under the Principate the various political organisations, such as the popular assemblies, the consulship, and other magistrates of the Republic, still remained but existed in name only, and all the real powers were kept in Octavian's grasp (*A History of Ancient Rome*, p. 270). However, Mommsen's *History of Rome* does not lose its significance, and is regarded by many Chinese scholars as a starting point for Roman studies. Recently Cong Riyun, a young scholar, has published *The Western Politico-Cultural Traditions* (Dalian Press 1996), in which many of Mommsen's words and views are cited. It is clear that this scholar has fallen heavily under Mommsen's influence.

Besides the *Römische Geschichte*, Mommsen has also left to the world the following works: the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, *Römisches Strafrecht*, etc. These works continue to be masterpieces of Roman studies even today. The fact that Mommsen was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1902 confirmed that he was indeed the brightest star in the field of Roman history that arose from Europe in the 19th century. Theodor Mommsen belonged not only to Germany, but also to the world and that world now includes China.

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[*Note*: this contribution has been lightly edited by the *Histos* team in such a way as to preserve the spirit of the original.]

3. Mommsen, Denmark and England

Andrew Lintott in his paper has made sense of some apparently contradictory elements in Mommsen's picture of the Roman constitution. I would like to continue along the same lines by seeing whether some other apparently unconnected or contradictory aspects of Mommsen's thinking cannot be similarly explained.

One of the fascinating things about Mommsen is just how diverse his interests were: in terms simply of his academic output, there is numismatics, epigraphy, Roman law, and the editing of late Roman texts like the *Liber Pontificalis* and Cassiodorus for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. Some of these interests have long been seen to have a common root: most obviously, his interest in non-literary sources in terms of a desire to find more reliable sources of evidence for archaic Rome than the historical tradition, the prob-

lematic nature of which had been demonstrated at the beginning of the century by Niebuhr.

It has been customary to see this in terms of what Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) was doing with the archives of the Venetian republic (accessible to German scholars since Venice had become part of the Habsburg territories in 1815), and some of the language Mommsen uses, e.g. to describe the value of religious ritual or linguistic evidence, has been taken as a direct reference to Rankean archives ('Wie in einem Archiv', *RG I* p. 14 in the standard [sixth] German edition; 'diese Urkunde' with reference to Roman festivals, I p. 161). I am not so sure about this: there seems to be no direct evidence that Mommsen had been influenced by Ranke's method. Rather, I would see the explanation for Mommsen's high regard for archival evidence in another area: that of Mommsen the trained lawyer looking for documentary evidence as superior to the testimony of witnesses.

Which brings me to one of the crucial problems about Mommsen: how was it that the greatest ancient historian of 19th century Germany, the Germany of Humboldt's *Gymnasien* and of a secondary and university system founded on respect for classical literature, was not a classicist at all but had trained and qualified as a lawyer?

There are many other peculiarities about Mommsen: the fact that he continued to be not just a liberal, but a left-wing liberal until his death; his Anglophilia—it may be worth quoting from the letter he wrote to the London *Times* explaining why he objected to the British war aiming to destroy the independent Boer republics in South Africa: 'Now the Dutch of the Cape will form a second Ireland, and the avenger will come sooner or later. Believe me, every friend of England mourns over such victories'.⁴

Mommsen's friendly feelings towards England do not have to be connected with his equally negative attitude to the Irish: one would not expect that lack of sympathy for Ireland from a liberal who took national self-determination as a natural right. I think that Mommsen's attitude can largely be explained by one particular incident during his first great journey in November 1844, when an over-enthusiastic Irish Catholic tried to convert him during the boat trip from Marseilles to Genoa. Of course it is also true that Mommsen will have inherited anti-Catholicism from his Lutheran father, though it is interesting that he did not think that it contradicted his radical liberalism, as he clearly thought that anti-Semitism did. It may be worth making the point that there were various liberalisms in pre-1848 Germany, and that Mommsen seems to have had no direct experience of

⁴ *The Times*, 27.3.1900: cited in J. Malitz, 'Theodor Mommsen im wilhelminischen Reich', in: K. Christ & A. Momigliano (eds), *L'Antichità nell'Ottocento in Italia e Germania* (Bologna 1989) 349 n. 117.

the Catholic liberalism of the Rhineland, heavily influenced by the two decades of incorporation into revolutionary and Napoleonic France.

That tradition reminds us that in the context of Germany before the 1870s—when battle-lines were re-drawn as a result of both Vatican I and Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*—it is helpful to distinguish between anti-Catholicism, anti-clericalism, and anti-Ultramontanism. The Catholic liberalism of the Rhineland was frequently both anti-Ultramontane and anti-clerical, and sympathetic towards England and the English parliamentary tradition. It is interesting that, of all the 'liberal' histories of England, it was Lingard's Catholic version which was translated into German and had the greatest influence in the 1840s. But Mommsen had no sympathy for Catholics, the French, or the Irish. He saw both these peoples as fickle Celts, in contrast to the orderly Romans and Germans: one of the most valuable aspects of the *History of Rome under the Emperors* is that, because it represents what Mommsen felt free to say in his lectures, his prejudices about Celts ancient and modern come across much more clearly than in works he intended for publication.⁵

So I think that Mommsen's anti-Irish prejudices may have a particular explanation, and of course we do not have to believe that there is one overarching explanation for everything that Mommsen did and thought. But I think that there may be a single explanation, or at least factor, for many of the apparently diverse things that Mommsen did and thought: his belief in constitutional rule, but not hereditary monarchy; in popular sovereignty, but not a sovereignty that was expressed through violent revolution; his interest in Late Antiquity, and particularly in the earliest surviving evidence about the Germanic peoples; his interest in collecting the folk-songs of Schleswig-Holstein; his opposition to slavery—explicitly, his condemnation in the *History of Rome* of the slave-owners of the American south, who he correctly predicted would wage war against the Republican government rather than see their privileges legislated away. That condemnation of slavery was so unusual amongst German historians that Mommsen's successor Eduard Meyer said in a speech to German industrialists in Dresden in 1898 that it was 'unverständlich': about as far as one German Ordinarius could go in suggesting that a colleague was mad.⁶

⁵ E.g. *History of Rome under the Emperors*, 285: 'Rome had as fierce a struggle against this [sc. Druidic] nationalist priesthood as England has today against the Irish Catholic priesthood'; 292: '... the greater congeniality of these two nations [sc. Romans and Germans] and the irreconcilable antipathy between the Celtic and Roman national spirit'.

⁶ Mommsen clearly sees Roman slavery from an anglophone perspective: e.g. *Römische Geschichte* II.397: 'Wenn man sich England vorstellt mit seinen Lords, seinen Squires und vor allem seiner City, aber die Freeholders und Pächter in Proletarier, die Arbeiter und Matrosen in Sklaven verwandelt, so wird man ein ungefähres Bild der damaligen

The common explanatory factor I would like to draw attention to is that Mommsen came from Schleswig-Holstein. That is hardly a new explanation, and it has been obvious for decades that resistance to the Copenhagen government's attempt to impose uniformity on Schleswig-Holstein against the wishes of the majority community was the major factor behind both Mommsen's liberal constitutionalism and his nationalism. What I would like to do is look at the context of pre-1848 liberal nationalism in north Germany, and see whether some of Mommsen's peculiar interests can be linked to it.

I want to begin by drawing your attention to another obvious fact. The German territories north of the Elbe were not part of Denmark: that is the way in which the 19th Danish liberal nationalists (the Agrarian party or 'Friends of the Peasant') wanted to see it, but in the context of the 18th century, before Napoleon had destroyed the Holy Roman Empire, they were two Duchies whose Duke happened to be the king of Denmark, and which were administered from Copenhagen because that was where their Duke resided. Incidentally, they were administered through a German-speaking chancellery which also dealt with most of Denmark's foreign affairs, for the historical reason that Holstein (but not Schleswig) had been part of the Holy Roman Empire and was now part of the German Confederation, and the King of Denmark, as Duke of Holstein, was required to keep a permanent representative at Frankfurt as he had one at Regensburg before 1803.

A point I would like to make is that up to 1837, when Mommsen was 20, the situation was virtually identical south of the river Elbe. The King of Hannover was also king of Britain. That did not make Hannover part of Britain any more than Holstein was part of Denmark. Although Hannover was administered by locally-trained civil servants (one of the main functions of the university the Hannoverians founded at Göttingen in 1737), ultimate decisions were taken by a German-speaking chancellery sited at the place where the king of Hannover usually resided: Windsor Castle. The result of this was that in NW Germany—Lower Saxony—constitutional thinking, and that of Göttingen intellectuals in particular, was strongly influenced by British, or rather English, constitutional mythology: freedom was a birth-right of Saxons, whether Anglo- or Lower, with popular resistance to arbitrary government originating under the greenwood tree, whether in Sherwood Forest or the Teutoburger Walde—we may recall how Mommsen's contemporary Marx, representing the quite different radicalism of the

Bevölkerung der italischen Halbinsel gewinnen', and especially III.533: '... erst wenn Nordamerikas Drachensaat reift, wird die Welt wieder ähnliche Früchte zu ernten haben'. Eduard Meyer's remarks are in 'Die Sklaverei im Altertum', in *Kleine Schriften* (1924), 169-212.

Rhineland, pours scorn on such romanticism—and in particular the idea that parliamentary sovereignty was legitimated by unbroken continuity. Whether that continuity was as artificial as the Hannoverian dynasty's claim to descent from pre-Norman Anglo-Saxon kings (manifested in different ways by the cult of King Alfred, the completion of Edward's Westminster Abbey, or the appearance of two Saxon kings on roundels over the fireplace of the 'Caesars' Hall' at Kedlestone in Derbyshire) was neither here nor there. Not just the English parliament, but the estates of Lower Saxony and of Schleswig-Holstein, were legitimate not because they represented the *volunté populaire*, but because they were in direct and ideally unbroken descent from the early Germanic Things. In 1835, the Speaker of the Schleswig Estates Nikolaus Falck proudly pointed to the survival of such a Thing on the island of Sylt, meeting three times a year.

I think that it is that view that authentic constitutions develop organically, rather than some kind of Hegelian essentialism, that lies behind Mommsen's idea that the Roman constitution develops while its essential features (especially the magistracy) remain. Hegelian language is so universal in 19th c. academic German that we should not put too much emphasis on Mommsen's constant references to the 'Wesen' of the Roman constitution or its elements such as the *Magistratur*.

The organic view of constitutional development was most spectacularly propounded by the so-called Göttingen Seven, the Göttinger Sieben. When William IV died in 1837, the union between Hannover and Britain came to an end: the rules of the Act of Succession made Victoria Queen of the United Kingdom, but Salic Law prevented her from inheriting Hannover because she was a woman. The throne passed to the Duke of Cumberland, Ernst August, who almost immediately set aside the constitution in accordance with the absolutist principles followed by most other German princes after 1830. Seven Göttingen professors publicly protested, were required as public servants to retract, refused, and were sacked by the King on December 11th, 1837. The Göttingen Seven became—and perhaps continue to be—symbolic of the tension between academic freedom and government funding in Germany. The two most famous of the seven professors were the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. We may note that the ideas of the Grimm brothers, like that of Mommsen, combined belief in constitutionalism with political liberalism and cultural nationalism; and that their academic work combined collecting local folk-tales and songs with comparative philology and with the study of the earliest evidence for the history of Germanic-speaking peoples.

1838 was the year when Mommsen matriculated at Kiel—the university which since the re-integration of Schleswig-Holstein in 1773 had been used by the Danish Crown for the training of its German-speaking administra-

tors, much like Göttingen for Lower Saxony. It is unthinkable in general terms that the case of the Göttingen Seven did not have a major effect on Mommsen's thinking. But there is something more specific. The leader of the Göttingen Seven, who was responsible for the publication of their manifesto, was the constitutional historian F.C. Dahlmann. The figure of Dahlmann unites the liberal movement in Lower Saxony with that in Schleswig-Holstein.

Dahlmann's (1785-1860) family background was that of Scandinavian civil servants. His paternal grandfather had been a State secretary to the Swedish court. His maternal grandfather had been a state counsellor at Kiel, and a barrister at the Danish High Court in Copenhagen. Perhaps significantly, he had also translated Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-9) into German. Friedrich Christian Dahlmann studied at Copenhagen, and after taking his doctorate there in 1811 he was appointed to an extraordinary professorship of history at Kiel in 1812. Here he became increasingly uneasy about the Copenhagen government's policy of imposing uniformity on Schleswig Holstein. It was Dahlmann who argued that the rights of the estates of the two Duchies were based on history, like that of the British parliament, and in particular he raised to the status of a sort of Magna Carta an agreement of 1460 known as the Ripener Freiheitsbrief. This became symbolically so crucial to the struggle between German and Danish speakers in the two Duchies that it requires a brief historical digression.

Holstein had always been part of the Empire (and after the Treaty of Vienna, the German Federation). North of the river Eider was Schleswig, where Mommsen was born, which had been ceded to king Canute by the emperor Konrad II in 1025. During the 13th century it had developed into a secondogeniture of the Danish royal house, under the protection of the Schauenburger Dukes of Holstein. The population of Schleswig was more or less evenly divided between German and Danish speakers. Danish liberals (the Agrarian party)—like German or any other liberals—wanted a unitary constitutional state, but they wanted it to be based on the Danish language. Hence no more German chancellery in Copenhagen running their foreign policy. They were prepared to accept that Holstein could not be integrated into a Danish national state and ought to be allowed to become part of a future united Germany, but had much better arguments for integrating all of Schleswig. (Hence 'Eider-Danes'.) The Ripener Freiheitsbrief of 1460 provided the German-speakers with an answer. When the Estates of Holstein and Schleswig had invited the Danish king Christian I to become their Duke after the Schauenburger dynasty had died out in 1459, they had insisted that the two Duchies should always remain united: 'Dat se bliwen ewig tosamende ungedelt'. What that referred to in the context of 15th c.

dynastic politics was that if the Danish realm was ever to be partitioned among a number of dynastic successors, Schleswig and Holstein should always go to the same ruler; what Dahlmann made it mean in the context of 19th nationalist politics was that Schleswig and Holstein should be considered a single entity, with of course a German-speaking majority, and should become part of a German, not a Danish national state. That was of course what was brought about by a joint Austro-Prussian army in 1849 and again in 1864 (on the first occasion the British insisted in the London Protocol of May 8th 1852 that the two Duchies be returned to Denmark, since they felt that their trade connections with the Baltic would be threatened by a Prussian presence in the peninsula). It is worth noting that in fact Schleswig and Holstein had in no way remained united during the whole of the early modern period. In 1544 and 1581 they were divided between the Danish royal house ('Schleswig-Holstein-Glückstadt') and a Ducal line ('Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp') which in the 18th century passed to Russia; only in 1773 were the Gottorp territories returned to the Danish line, when the Russian Grand-duke Paul exchanged them for the Duchy of Oldenburg at the Treaty of Tsarskoje Selo.

If this seems to be getting us rather far from Mommsen, I would like to suggest that Mommsen would try to do for Rome what Dahlmann tried to do for Schleswig-Holstein: find a constitution which had developed organically over the centuries, which had not been imposed as a result of revolution and yet was representative of the community (if that is the translation for 'Volk' in contemporary English), which could not be set aside by people like the Duke of Cumberland or King of Denmark, and whose legitimacy was authenticated both by archaic survivals like the Sylt assemblies (Swiss cantonal assemblies, particularly that of Appenzell, also began to acquire symbolic value in this context), and also by documentary evidence—archives.

Dahlmann himself was no longer at Kiel when Mommsen studied there; he had gone to Göttingen in 1829, and after his dismissal by Ernst August was given posts by the (remarkably liberal) Prussian government at the universities of Jena in 1838 and then Bonn in 1842. The integration of the Duchies continued: Dahlmann himself, in a history of Denmark which he started while at Jena and continued but failed to complete in Bonn, drew attention to the symbolic importance of a Royal Ordinance of 1834 which required the use of the spelling 'Danmark' rather than 'Dännemark' in official correspondence. That history of Denmark placed considerable emphasis on social and economic history, and it seems to me that it is likely to have been very influential in helping Mommsen to define the material which he was to include in his history of Rome. Another, perhaps more important, symbolic act occurred on November 11th 1842, when a deputy named P. H. Lorenzen

spoke in the Schleswig Assembly in Danish. That was six months before Mommsen's assessor examination; it must have made it clear to him that a German-speaker's chances of a secure job for life in the Danish administration were highly unlikely.

When Mommsen went to Kiel in 1838, he had still been able to believe that his future career lay in being a civil servant working for the Danish crown in Schleswig Holstein. He was still loyal to the king (as his Duke); in 1836, he expressed his horror at the way the citizens of Hamburg celebrated a false rumour of the death of Christian VI. In my view it is entirely plausible to assume that Mommsen studied law, and not classical philology, because he considered that a civil service career would give him the security and especially the financial rewards which his father had not enjoyed. Mommsen was not, or not yet, a classicist; I am not sure that it makes sense to apply that category to him—even at the end of his life, he was very conscious of his lack of authority with regard to knowledge of classical literature, most obviously in discussions with his son-in-law Wilamowitz,⁷ and some of the things which the Hensel lecture notes report him as having said suggest that he was certainly right. He was still a lawyer, not a classicist, and therefore (as he explicitly says in the introduction to his dissertation⁸) interested in Rome rather than in Humboldt's Greece. It was only because of the increasing tension between German and Danish-speakers that it became clear to Mommsen by the mid 1840s that an administrative career would not be open to him in Schleswig-Holstein—at any rate in a Schleswig-Holstein ruled by a government in Copenhagen, no matter how constitutionalist or liberal. In 1840, Danish became the official administrative language in northern parts of Schleswig; finally, on December 4th 1846, the Estates of Schleswig and Holstein dissolved themselves rather than vote to legitimate the integrationist policies of the Copenhagen government.

The Schleswig-Holstein problem does not explain everything, but it should surely be seen as a factor in Mommsen's interest as a student in local folk culture (like the Grimms); in his becoming a revolutionary in 1848, in spite of the fact that he despised violence and extremism; and perhaps in his becoming a professional ancient historian, where he might have become a civil servant—like the 'apparitores' about whom he wrote his doctoral dissertation.

Above all, I would now like to see Mommsen's positive feelings about England as the result not just of the English merchants to whom he gave German lessons during his year in Altona (1843/44: his prize student was a

⁷ See J. Malitz, 'Theodor Mommsen und Wilamowitz' in: *Wilamowitz nach 50 Jahren* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1985).

⁸ P. 139: 'Res graecae philologorum sunt, latinae iurisconsultorum'.

Mr Pow), but going back to the influence of Dahlmann's ideas about the superiority of the British constitution. It was that intellectual or political anglophilia that made Mommsen so keen on Macaulay's *History of England*, the first two volumes of which appeared in 1848, and which the Leipzig publishers Hirzel and Reimer wanted him to take as his exemplar when they commissioned the *Römische Geschichte*. And it will have been Macaulay who directed Mommsen's interest to the importance of slavery (vol. I pp. 21ff. in the 1899 edition)—an interest which Macaulay himself, of course, inherited from his father Zachary (1768-1838), one of the founders of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1823.

It did just occur to me that if we do not want to see the influence of the English anti-slavery movement through Macaulay as the single, exclusive explanation for Mommsen's exceptional attitude to slavery, his Danish background once again yields an unexpected angle: as a boy, Mommsen might just have met someone like Philipp Bassold, born in Spandau 1747, one of the many German-speaking sailors who served in the Danish slave-trade and retired to Nebek on the island of Amrun in Holstein not far from Mommsen's birthplace, where he died in 1835 when Mommsen was aged 17.⁹ But an account of the study of slavery in the German-speaking world is another story.

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[Note: this oral text has been lightly edited by the *Histos* team in such a way as to preserve the spirit of the original.]

⁹ Catharina Luden, *Sklavensahrt: mit Seeleuten aus Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg und Lübeck im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heide 1980).