Local Pride, Ethnicity and Ancient History in Turin in the Risorgimento: The Representation of the Taurisci/Taurini in Carlo Promis’ *Storia dell’Antica Torino* (1869)

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The Taurini, the pre-Roman population that occupied the area north of the Po and from which the Roman colony of *Augusta Taurinorum*, today Torino, took its name, were already a problematic issue for the ancient authors. The Latin sources are particularly confused when defining their relationship with the nearby populations of the Liguri (problematic as well) and of the Celts, such as the Insubri. An additional “difficulty”, for the Roman authors, was provided by the name itself, similar to the name of the Taurisci, which were located at the opposite end of the Alpine arch.\(^1\)

Historians of the Antiquity have only realized recently that ethnicity should not be considered, from an essentialist perspective, as a natural “given”, but rather as a cultural construct and as a part of a complex set of segmented identities, meaning that etic and emic perspectives on ethnicity can be very different. For example, it is now clear that the Roman descriptions and definitions of ethncal belonging of the groups inhabiting Italy “before” them are a litmus of Roman perspectives, discourses and ideologies, and should not be taken as factual information, that could be applied automatically to the forms of self-representation of the groups described.

Until recently, scholars had another approach to this set of contradictory and problematic sources as they were looking for “the” objective and natural Taurin ethnicity and identity. They would systematically adopt and adapt those to their own specific convictions, ideologies, and needs, while postulating a continuity through the centuries between the pre-Roman population which resided in Piedmont and all the subsequent inhabitants of the area. In this chapter, I aim to show how Carlo Promis, the leading ancient historian in

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Turin around the mid-19th century CE, dealt with the Taurini and their ethnicity, linking his treatment of the subject to his political ideas. It is not merely a case study—Promis a staunch opposer of a very specific cultural, scientific and political background, the Italian Risorgimento. His major work, *Storia dell’antica Torino* (1869), saluted by Theodor Mommsen as a work of very high quality, is a history of the city which led the movement of national unification and which had become, a few years before, in 1861, the first capital of the Kingdom of Italy, before it became Florence in 1864.

A great number of scholars, when considering the historiography on this matter, have assumed that the political movement towards national unification imposed a teleological reading of the Roman conquest of Italy, which, starting from the contemporary rhetoric of the Nation States, recognized also in Classical Antiquity the existence of an Italian nation. If works of this sort did exist, it also has been recently shown that they mostly originated from Germany (the other nation to undergo a process of national unification during the 1860’s). They became widespread in Italy later, most notably during the nation-building process of the early 20th century. Additionally, it is impossible to assume that each and every intellectual in that period was in favor of Italian unification as it was carried out, the process being very different from the ideals of the 1840s for instance. A deeper analysis of Promis’ work will help clarify the varied “uses of the past” which characterized the Italian mid-19th century, as well as its participation in a broader European discourse, and its “reception” in the 20th century, when some particular political opinions had become “unconceivable”.

In order to achieve that, I will first of all concentrate on the Taurini and on the very few ancient sources available, and which have been used by all scholars dealing with the subject. I will then present the Piedmontese historiography of the 19th century, the frame in which afterwards will be introduced Carlo Promis and his work. Eventually, I will analyze and explain his ideas about the ethnicity of the Taurini and their relationship to Rome.

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