

‘Un’ aiuola fioritissima, i cui mirabili e svariati fiori si alternano e si succedono senza interruzione’ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli’s fin de siècle (intellectual) networking and (its) politics

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In December 1925 the salonnière and archaeologist Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli died at the age of 85. National and international newspapers reported on her death extensively. The French newspaper *La Croix*, for example, reported that the savants and writers of all nations had entered Caetani-Lovatelli’s salons.¹ Similar reports were published in academic journals. The archaeologist Giulio Emanuele Rizzo in the *Rivista di filologia e d’istruzione classica* commemorated that

Ersilia Caetani mirava ad esser l’erede dello spirito del mondo antico, e perciò i suoi studi eran vari ed eran condotti con rigoroso metodo di ricerca scientifica. Ma era anche una scrittrice, e perciò *Thánatos* si legge ancora con diletto. [...] La ricerca è sempre profonda e completa, il coordinamento del grandissimo materiale raccolto – e da osservazioni personali e da libri antichi e nuovi – è opera di mente lucida e equilibrata. [...] come e quanto diversa nella sua conversazione originale, arguta e spesso anche – per chi non avesse spirito preparato e pronto o più pronta cultura – un poco imbarazzante. Chè non di archeologia soltanto essa amava intrattenersi, ma d’arte e di letteratura, mai di politica. Ascoltava con pazienza, quasi con rassegnazione, qualche ospite, [...], ma poi – come stanca di ascoltare certi non infrequenti sermoni, [...] – interrompeva con una domanda volutamente frivola o anche assurda, e smontava, così, il seccatore.²

Other intellectuals who had been welcomed by Rome’s most influential salonnière remembered her strong distaste of conversations on politics. Even though their writings did not completely deny her political influence nor the politics of her networking, they were used by later historians who simply concluded that these receptions had been insignificant in terms of power.³ In general the focus on official politics that dominated Italian historiography for a long time did not serve Caetani-Lovatelli and other salonnières well.⁴

¹ J. Guiraud, ‘La comtesse Caetani-Lovatelli’, in: *La Croix*, 28 February 1926.

² G.E. Rizzo, ‘Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli commemorata da G.E. Rizzo’, in: *Rivista di filologia e d’istruzione classica*, 55 (1927), pp. 276-278.

³ A. Audollent, ‘Hommage à Ersilie Lovatelli’, in: *Revue Archéologique*, 83 (1927), pp. 220-223. Cfr. L. Lemme, *Il salotto di cultura a Roma tra 800 e 900*, Roma, M.T. Cicerone, 1995, pp. 24-29; F. Bartocchini, *Roma nell’Ottocento. Il tramonto della ‘città santa’, nascita di una capitale*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1985, pp. 453, 561-562.

⁴ K. Mitchell & H. Sanson, ‘Introduction’, in: idem (eds.), *Women and Gender in Post-Unification Italy. Between Private and Public Spheres*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 1-10; M.T. Mori, A. Pescarolo & A.

The last decennia historians have begun to analyse the role of semi- and unofficial organisations that were part of the national cultural and intellectual infrastructure of post-Risorgimento Italy, including newspapers, journals, as well as salons.⁵ Influenced by the burgeoning of women and gender studies, they have revealed the influence of women authors, journalists, artists, scholars, feminists, and, indeed, salonnières.⁶ Maria Iolanda Palazzolo and Maria Teresa Mori have, for instance, demonstrated that salons were vital for the communication between the elites in Milan, Turin and Naples.⁷ Their hypothesis that Rome had lacked a salon culture because of the Papal regime's control, however, dominated until quite recently.

Even if historians now recognize that Rome did have its own salons, we still know little about their politics as well as their political significance. In this article I aim to fill this gap by analysing Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli's receptions. Her salon has been studied before by Paula Ghione,⁸ but continuing a dominant historiographical omission, she neither mapped nor studied the salon's complete network, making it hard to judge its political meaning or functioning. I shall concentrate on how Caetani-Lovatelli succeeded in building a network that was truly intellectual, had its own politics, and eventually deeply affected Rome's and Italy's political life.

Building, housing and maintaining a network

Ersilia was born into two noble families that shared a profound interest in politics, culture and arts. In the early nineteenth century many intellectuals, artists, scientists and politicians visited her grandparental palaces in Vienna and Rome. Ersilia's mother, Calista Rzewuska (1810-1842), was a Polish countess and a gifted composer. In the late 1830s, she met her future husband in Rome, where she lived the rest of her short life. In 1842 she died after giving birth to Ersilia's brother Onorato (1842-1917). Ersilia's father, Michelangelo (1804-1882), took care of and strongly influenced the development of his two children.⁹

Caetani's wide interests in arts, sciences and politics brought him into contact with almost the entire Roman, Italian and European elites. In fact, from the late 1830s onwards, the duke hosted a unique salon celebrated for its free exchanges of thought. Between the late 1830s and 1870, Caetani invited various politicians, including the Italians Massimo D'Azeglio, Marco Minghetti and Giuseppe Garibaldi, but also the Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Karl Alexander, and the British King Edward VII. He also welcomed writers, including Sir Walter Scott, Nikolaj Gogol, François-René de Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, Alexandre Dumas and Henri Longfellow; painters such as Frederic Leighton and William Stanley Haseltine; and the composer Franz Liszt. They discussed politics, science, literature, music and, above all, Rome, its history and cultural heritage.¹⁰

Scattigno, 'Le italiane sulla scena pubblica: una chiave di lettura', in: idem (eds.), *Di generazioni in generazioni. Le italiane dall'Unità a oggi*, Roma, Viella, 2014, pp. 9-26.

⁵ For instance: G. Ragone, *Un secolo di libri. Storia dell'editoria in Italia dall'Unità al postmoderno*, Torino, Einaudi, 1999; F. Colombo, *La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni Novanta*, Milano, Bompiani, 1999; A. Hallamore Caesar, G. Romani & J. Burns (eds.), *The Printed Media in Fin-de-siècle Italy. Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, London, Legenda, 2011; S. Soper, *Building a Civil Society: Associations, Public Life and the Origins of Modern Italy*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2013.

⁶ Mitchell & Sanson, 'Introduction', cit., pp. 1-10.

⁷ M. Palazzolo, *I salotti di cultura nell'Italia dell'Ottocento: scene e modelli*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 1985; M.T. Mori, *Salotti. La sociabilità delle élite nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, Roma, Carocci, 2000.

⁸ P. Ghione, 'Il salotto di Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli a Roma', in: M.L. Betri & E. Brambilla (eds.), *Salotti e ruolo femminile. Tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2004, pp. 487-508.

⁹ F. Meens, *Archeologe en muze. Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli en het culturele leven in Rome tijdens het Fin de siècle*, proefschrift Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2017, pp. 34-42.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 84-94.

From a very young age, his daughter Ersilia shared this interest in the history of her city of birth. In that time, however, her wish of studying Rome's past was something quite hard to achieve for Italian women. Most of them were brought up to be good mothers and wives, and only received a basic education.¹¹ Michelangelo was generous, however, allowing both of his children comprehensive learning. Ersilia studied several modern European languages, as well as Latin and Greek. She also benefited from the cultural receptions of her father that she attended from a young age.¹² Under the guidance of some members of Michelangelo's intellectual network, including Luigi Maria Rezzi (1785-1857) and Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822-1894) Ersilia learned the basic principles of ancient history and archaeology. Because of her special interest in epigraphy, she also studied Sanskrit under Ignazio Guidi (1844-1935), an exceptional achievement for a woman in the nineteenth century.¹³

Michelangelo's network also helped Ersilia to get introduced within several learned societies. In 1864 she was offered a membership of the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica. This was a turning point in her career. She had yet to publish her first article, even if she had studied many topics and had formulated some interesting and original ideas in her letters. Even though the world of science was still dominated by men, she had the help of fellow members of the Istituto who encouraged her to write down her insights on epigraphy. In 1878 this led to her first publication. She was then asked to participate in several excavations and published many more articles as well as monographs.¹⁴ She became a member of several of the famous learned bodies of Rome and Italy. Her membership of the Accademia dei Lincei – probably Italy's most prestigious national academy – had special significance, as she was the first woman to join. Her reputation in the rest of Europe grew, gaining her access to institutions, two of which awarded her an honorary doctorate.

Ersilia continued her scholarly activities after she had got married to the count Giacomo Lovatelli (1832-1879). And when only a couple of years later Giacomo unexpectedly died, Ersilia not only took care of their six children, but dedicated even more time to her studies in her library in Palazzo Lovatelli that contained well over 6000 works, including French, German and British encyclopedias, as well as philological, archaeological, iconographical and epigraphical monographs and the most important academic journals.¹⁵

This library soon also became the heart of Caetani-Lovatelli's receptions. In the late 1860s Ersilia had begun inviting a small group of friends, including her father's habitués and colleague scientists. The number of people grew quickly, leaving the countess no choice than making her receptions regular, on every Thursday and Sunday.¹⁶ Gaining access to Palazzo Lovatelli was not easy. There were no official invitations, though one could get one of Ersilia's typical small cards, written in her small, regular handwriting, often decorated with Latin and Greek quotations.¹⁷ The

¹¹ M. Casalena, *Scritti storici di donne Italiane. Bibliografia 1800-1945*, Firenze, L.S. Olschki, 2003, pp. XXVII-XXXII; E. Malantruccio, 'Formazione e cultura in alcune famiglie della nobiltà romana (1870-1915)', in: S. Casmirri (ed.), *Le élites italiane prima e dopo l'Unità: formazione e vita civile*, Marina di Minturno, Caramanica, 2000, pp. 202-207.

¹² Meens, 'Archeologe en muze', cit., pp. 99-104.

¹³ G. Marchetti Ferrante, 'Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli e il suo tempo', in: *Nuova antologia di lettere, arti e scienze*, 7 (1926), pp. 220-221; Audollent, 'Hommage' à Ersilie Lovatelli', cit., p. 223.

¹⁴ For an analysis of these: F. Meens, 'The Elegant Science of Antiquity', in: *Literature, Interpretation, Theory*, 27, 2 (2016), pp. 111-129.

¹⁵ G. Gabrieli, 'La libreria d'una gran dama', in: *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 17 March 1926; O. Pinto, *Storia della Biblioteca Corsiniana e della Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei*, Firenze, L.S. Olschki, 1956, p. 53.

¹⁶ E. Amadei, 'Un inedito carteggio di Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli', in: *Capitolium*, 37 (1962), pp. 474-478.

¹⁷ For an example, see the correspondence between Giovanni Battista De Rossi and Louis Duchesne, P. Saint-Roch, *Correspondance de Giovanni Battista De Rossi et de Louis Duchesne (1873-1894)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1995, p. 165.

alternative was an introduction by one of Ersilia's habitués.¹⁸ But only those with enough intellectual, cultural, political, or religious capital (or with the potential to gain it) had a chance.¹⁹

The lucky few who entered Palazzo Lovatelli did so in the heart of Rome, at the crossing of Piazza Lovatelli and Piazza di Campitelli. The building nowadays hardly resembles its heydays. In his diaries the French novelist Émile Zola described the interior of the palace in detail:

Un petit hôtel, avec deux entrées. La voiture entre, passée par la cour, et ressort. Un vestibule à droite, fermé d'un vitrage, évidemment ajouté. Elle [Ersilia] demeure au second. L'escalier large, avec plafond en voûte, avec marches basses et larges. Au second, une vieille porte, surmontée d'une sculpture, ouvrant sur une immense antichambre vide, peinte, représentant des draperies rouges et or. On entre dans un salon rouge, je crois. A gauche, la bibliothèque, vaste pièce pleine de livres, spéciale à la comtesse, une savante. A droite, deux salons, puis la salle à manger. Tout cela grand seulement. Un des salons est tendu de brocatelle jaune, Louis XIV. Les rideaux et les portières de même étoffe. Les plafonds à caissons dorés, ou peints. Pas de tableaux, deux seulement. Comme mobilier, très disparate. Des consoles surtout, immenses, dorées, avec de beaux marbres; les consoles qu'on nous vende à Paris. Les mobiliers Louis XIV surtout. Et beaucoup de choses hétéroclites qui traînent, des photographies, des bibelots de bazar. Pas d'objets d'art vraiment intéressants.²⁰

Ersilia welcomed her guests in three rooms; the *sala gialla*, where novices were introduced.²¹ The regular guests walked straight into the *salotto rosso*. The real intimates also knew the library, where they held their – often improvised – lectures.²² Caetani-Lovatelli provided her guests with a *pranzo*, a word that during the nineteenth century indicated late afternoon refreshments.²³ Sometimes the guests were served 'ordinaire cuisine d'Italie'.²⁴ Alcohol was strictly forbidden since it could harm the intellectual spirit, although Ersilia made an exception for the poet and Nobel laureate Giosuè Carducci.²⁵ Although she tried to prevent any gossiping in her rooms, in her correspondences she herself sometimes was not very flattering about her guests. She once wrote to her nephew Leone Caetani about the politician and mathematician Francesco Brioschi (1824-1897), also the chairman of the Accademia dei Lincei, who had told her that he preferred speaking French instead of Italian: 'L'Italiano non lo conosce affatto, e il Francese lo parla come una vacca Spagnola!'.²⁶

Ersilia allowed her guests to behave according to their own needs. The lack of a clear dress code left Zola in shock.²⁷ The Bavarian ambassador Tucher, his Swiss colleague Carlin and the Swede Bildt, who were not familiar with the absence of fixed

¹⁸ Amadei, 'Un inedito carteggio', cit., p. 475. Cfr. the undated letter of Ferdinand Gregorovius to Ersilia, in which he introduced to her the historian and poet Adolf Friedrich von Schack: 'Mein Freund ist nicht Professor; er war zuerst in der Diplomatie thätig und lebt jetzt als sehr reicher Signore in München, wo er ein schönes Haus mit einer Gemäldegalerie besitzt', in: S. Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius und seine Briefe an Donna Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli*, Berlin, Paetel, 1896, p. 82.

¹⁹ Audollent, 'Homage à Ersilie Lovatelli', cit., p. 223.

²⁰ E. Zola, *Mes voyages. Lourdes, Rome. Journaux inédits présentés et annotés par René Ternois*, Paris, Frasnelle, 1958, pp. 219-220.

²¹ E. Von Kupffer, *Aus einem wahrhaften Leben*, Minusio-Locarno, Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion, 1943, p. 241.

²² E. Mancini, 'La biblioteca ed il salotto della contessa Lovatelli', in: *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 54 (1927), p. 12.

²³ P. Lemme, *Salotti Romani dell'Ottocento*, Torino, Allemandi, 1990, p. 27.

²⁴ Zola, *Mes voyages*, cit., p. 220.

²⁵ Marchetti Ferrante, 'Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli', cit., p. 230; Amadei, 'Un inedito carteggio', cit., p. 475.

²⁶ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Leone Caetani, 23 September 1896, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome, Archivio Leone Caetani (hereafter ALC), cart. 482 (1).

²⁷ Lemme, *Il salotto di cultura*, cit., p. 25. Cfr. Sfinge, 'Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli (Ritratto)', in: *La Romagna*, 24 (1928), pp. 241-259.

seating, kept walking around the table.²⁸ Later on, the neat French cardinal François-Désiré Mathieu ended up next to Carducci, who kept drinking wine. Ersilia had a good sense of humour.²⁹ She used it to conduct the conversation, teasing good friends with caustic remarks and interrupting serious exchanges with comical interventions. She as well knew the importance of small entertainment. According to the art historian Antonio Muñoz (1884-1960)

nel salotto di donna Ersilia non si parlava solo di archeologia, ma uno sciame di belle signore lo allietava con cicaluccio gentile, discutendo di mode, di avventure, di amori... A Capodanno e a Carnevale qualche volta un'allegra mascherata ideata dalla padrona di casa, metteva una nota rumorosa nel salotto.³⁰

To make sure that all her guests felt at ease, Ersilia adjusted the subject and level of the conversation. The Baltic-German poet and philosopher Elisàr von Kupffer remarked that she 'verstand es, jedem ein höfliches Wort zu sagen, damit er sich behaglich fühlte. Ihre Gelehrsamkeit hielt sie dabei mehr verborgen'.³¹

Since they were accessible to all persons who had proven their intellectual, cultural or political value regardless of their background and views, Ersilia's receptions did not serve a clear-cut program. Often there were strong polemics. To prevent the Italian, French and German archaeologists from going at each other's throats, for instance, she invited a lady to sit in between.³² She also used the beauty of her female guests to persuade others to come over.³³ A more in-depth analysis of the salon's network and its conversations reveals, however, that most of Caetani-Lovatelli's visitors were male, and their exchanges serious.

A network of scholars and politicians

The Austro-Czech archaeologist and art dealer Ludwig Pollak in his memoirs characterized Ersilia's network: 'Die Gesellschaft, in der sehr wenige Damen waren, war immer interessant, man traf dort außer Gelehrten große Künstler, Diplomaten, (...), einige Parlamentarier, Minister und Journalisten'.³⁴ My quantitative analysis based on a study of all available sources, confirms this classification.³⁵ 91% of Ersilia's guests were male, the consequence of her strict selecting policy. Her own politics of access thus mirrored and confirmed the small number of women in Italian intellectual, cultural and political life. It could well be that many of Ersilia's male visitors brought their female partners when they visited Caetani-Lovatelli, but they are hardly referred to in the sources. Also, their role in the discussions seems to have been small.³⁶

Ersilia's network was clearly international, although most guests were European. 63% of them were Italian, but the Germans (15%) and French (14%) were quite dominant as well. 49% of the individuals worked in academia; hardly surprising given Ersilia's own occupation, most of them were philologists, philosophers, historians and archaeologists.³⁷ Indeed during the 1870s, the salonnière predominantly invited colleagues whom she had met in one of the academies. She welcomed the likes of

²⁸ Marchetti Ferrante, 'Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli', cit., p. 229.

²⁹ E. Perodi, *Cento dame romane. Profili*, Roma, Bontempelli, 1895, p. 91.

³⁰ A. Muñoz, *Figure romane*, Roma, Staderini, 1944, pp. 183-184.

³¹ Von Kupffer, *Aus einem wahrhaften Leben*, cit., p. 241.

³² Muñoz, *Figure*, cit., p. 181.

³³ Amadei, 'Un inedito carteggio', cit., p. 479.

³⁴ L. Pollak, *Römische Memoiren*, Rom, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1994, p. 92.

³⁵ F. Meens, 'How to Approach Salons? A Fin-de-siècle Italian Case Study', in: *Cultural and Social History*, 2018, pp. 1-84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2018.1427356>.

³⁶ R. Rolland, 'Retour au palais Farnèse. Choix de lettres de Romain Rolland à sa mère 1890-1891', in: *Cahiers Romain Rolland*, 8 (1956), Paris, Albin Michel, pp. 143-154.

³⁷ Meens, 'The Elegant Science of Antiquity', cit., pp. 111-129.

Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), Ferdinand Gregorovius (1821-1891), Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), Ernest Renan (1823-1892), Wolfgang Helbig (1839-1915), Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822-1894), Rodolfo Lanciani (1845-1929), Christian Hülsen (1858-1935), Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931) and Georg Karo (1872-1963). Some of them called themselves ‘Ersiliasti’, as if their group formed a real academy too. For them, Ersilia organised excursions that she called ‘pranzi archeologici’.³⁸ Twice a year, Ersilia planned a *soirée archéologique* to welcome new members to this select group.³⁹ The countess referred to her palace as *domus Lovatellia* in which she welcomed ‘un’aiuola fioritissima, i cui mirabili e svariati fiori [her guests] si alternano e si succedono senza interruzione’.⁴⁰ Showing her great sense of humor as well as her mastery of Latin she compared her guests to imaginary flowers and plants, Latinising their names:

Più belli di tutti s’innalzano gloriosi e vegetano alla luce delle lampade elettriche, la *Rosa Mystica Pietromarchienses* [presumably the topographer Pietro Rosa] e il *Cactus Nuger Culbaciarius* [presumably the philologist and politician Costantino Nigra], e il *Clementillus Cucurbitaceus* [perhaps the archaeologist Gherardo Ghirardini]. Del resto la buona damigella Molter [Giuseppina, the German teacher of her children], è divenuta una *cucuzza-zucca-patata* talmente grande, da coprire con la sua vegetazione, non che la *domus Lovatellia*, ma altresì tutta Roma.⁴¹

By and large, Ersilia also opened her doors to national and international writers, artists and composers. At first, these included those who had been close to her father, like Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and Angelo de Gubernatis (1840-1913); but swiftly she extended this part of her network, inviting the likes of Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907), Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938), Grazia Deledda (1871-1936), Émile Zola (1840-1902), Paul Bourget (1852-1935) and Ernest Hébert (1817-1908).

Nobody doubted that this *domus* housed a European network of intellectuals. In 1896 the German author Sigmund Münz concluded that ‘[d]ie Empfangsräume des Palazzo Lovatelli [...] bietet nicht selten ein Bild, als ob sich daselbst die Akademie oder die Stoa versammelt hätte’.⁴² His colleague Johannes Rumbauer concluded that Ersilia

bildet den verehrten und hochvornehmen Mittelpunkt der intellektuellen Gesellschaft, die Verkörperung einer Tradition edelster Geselligkeit und feinsten Bildung des Geistes und Herzens. [...] So verkehrt bei ihr noch heute die Crème all dessen, was Geist und Wissen nach Rom zusammenführt, ohne Unterschied der Anschauung, Richtung und Nationalität – eine Republik, in welcher allein die Liebenswürdigkeit und Geistesanmut der Herrin des Hauses herrscht, einer ebenbürtigen Gleichen unter Gleichen.⁴³

By 1899, however, the salon’s character had changed quite radically. According to a report in *Il Fanfulla*:

L’ospitalità della contessa Lovatelli è ben a ragione celebrata e desiderata per la sua cordialità. Ricevendo gli amici, la padrona di casa non è più l’accademica dei Lincei: ella sa scendere

³⁸ L. Pollak, *Tagebücher*, Band XII, 19 & 25 November 1901, Museo Barracco Roma, Archivio Ludwig Pollak.

³⁹ Amadei, ‘Un inedito carteggio’, cit., p. 475; L. Nicotra, *Archeologia al femminile. Il cammino delle donne nella disciplina archeologica attraverso le figure di otto archeologhe classiche vissute dalla metà dell’Ottocento ad oggi*, Roma, L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2004, pp. 29-46.

⁴⁰ Ghione, ‘Il salotto di Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli’, cit., p. 490.

⁴¹ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Leone Caetani, 15 April 1894, ALC, cart. 482 (1); also cited in: Ghione, ‘Il salotto di Ersilia Caetani Lovatelli’, cit., p. 490.

⁴² Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius*, cit., pp. 56-57.

⁴³ J. Rumbauer, ‘Ersilia Lovatelli’, in: *Hochland*, 7 (1910), pp. 203-204.

dall'Olimpo della sapienza con una grazia ed uno spirito che è in lei una delle più belle qualità ereditate da casa Caetani. Il salone di donna Ersilia Caetani era ed è sempre il cenacolo dell'intelligenza, ma la corrente mondana ha invaso in questi ultimi anni i saloni tranquilli del palazzo di Piazza Campitelli sotto forma di un gruppo brillante di giovani signori e di giovani brillanti reclutati della diplomazia e nei circoli dell'eleganza romana.⁴⁴

Indeed, slowly but surely Caetani-Lovatelli had begun welcoming individuals from outside academia and the arts, and especially politicians and higher officials. They accounted for 29% of all guests. Among them, however, were those who had been appointed *senatore a vita* because of their academic or artistic qualities. The number of politicians without an academic or artistic career was much lower (14%).⁴⁵ But all were able to participate in the process of political decision making. Therefore, the politician and journalist Ferdinando Martini rightly classified Ersilia's drawing rooms as an appendix to the Italian parliament.⁴⁶

Many of Caetani-Lovatelli's guests enjoyed significant political influence. This was true for her relatives. Her father Michelangelo, a regular guest in his final years, was a former minister. Her brother Onorato became a member of parliament, as well as mayor of Rome. Both his sons Leone (1869-1935) – a member of parliament – and Livio (1873-1915) who served as a diplomat, were habitués. Then there were Francesco Crispi (1818-1901), the old revolutionary who served as prime minister twice; Maggiorino Ferraris (1856-1929), Guido Baccelli (1830-1916), Domenico Berti (1820-1897), Quintino Sella (1827-1884), Ruggiero Bonghi (1826-1895), Emilio Visconti-Venosta (1829-1914), Ferdinando Martini and Gaspare Finali, who all became minister various times; Emanuele Ruspoli (1837-1899) and Ernesto Nathan (1848-1921), both mayor of Rome; and Giuseppe Pasolini (1815-1876), member of parliament and minister, but from 1874 onwards also chairman of the Senate. They all attracted foreign colleagues, including Emilio Castelar y Ripoll (1832-1899), one of the first presidents of the Spanish Republic, and Émile Ollivier (1825-1913), who during his reign as prime minister of France declared war to Prussia. The presence of these (inter)national authority figures drew diplomats to Palazzo Lovatelli: the Belgian top diplomat Albéric Charles Grenier (1865-1920), the British consul Montgomery Carmichael (1857-1936); ambassadors including Gaston Carlin (1859-1922) of Switzerland, Carl von Bildt of Sweden (1850-1931), George von Lengerke Meyer (1858-1918) from the United States, Heinrich Tucher von Simmelsdorf (1853-1925) of Bavaria, and Marius Pasetti-Angeli von Friedenburg (1841-1913) of Austria-Hungaria.

A clear political ideology affected Caetani-Lovatelli's selection policy little. She also kept clear of explicating her own views, but we can deduce from her private writings that she was a liberal royalist who had little sympathy for anarchists and Marxists whom she called *spauracchi*.⁴⁷ She also deplored the growing support of republicanism among her fellow scholars. At the same time, however, she invited the likes of Antonio Labriola (1843-1904), a professor of Philosophy known for his Marxist's views, as well as Felice Cavallotti (1842-1898), the influential leader of the radical left wing in parliament. Inevitably, Ersilia's choice of welcoming this diverse political company led to interesting and often fierce discussions.

⁴⁴ 'Note mondane. Al Palazzo Lovatelli', in: *Il Fanfulla*, 18 September 1899.

⁴⁵ Meens, 'How to Approach Salons?', cit., p. 73.

⁴⁶ F. Martini, 'Donne, salotti e costumi', in C. Lumbroso, A. Mosso, A.G. Barrili & V. Fiorini (eds.), *La vita italiana, durante la Rivoluzione francese e l'Impero: conferenze tenute a Firenze del 1896*, Milano, Fratelli Treves, 1896, pp. 337-363.

⁴⁷ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Onorato Caetani, 17 April 1898, ALC, cart. 482 (1).

A network talking and doing politics

The time was ripe for strong debates anyway. Soon after 1870 the optimism of the Risorgimento had disappeared into searching for solutions to some of the major problems that Italy now faced, including its regional differences, the *campanilismo*, and the lack of development, especially in the South.⁴⁸ There was no linguistic unity and literacy rates were extremely low. The Italian government had stripped off the Church its traditional role in education, but there had hardly been any decision making with regard to a new educational structure and its content.⁴⁹ Economic prospects were bad, not only due to a series of poor harvests, but also because the left-wing governments of Agostino Depretis had spent large amounts of money. The result was a financial crisis that left many traces. The ideals of the leftist leaders, including democratisation, decentralisation, the opening up of education and a progressive tax system, came under increasing pressure.⁵⁰ Moreover Depretis' flirtations with the conservatives of Minghetti – who he even gave a majority in his cabinet in 1883 – harmed his and Italian politics' reputation. Even so, Depretis' successor, Francesco Crispi, representative of the *Sinistra Storica*, continued this tactic that was now called *trasformismo*, and governed with support of the right.⁵¹ To make everything worse, both government and parliament were known for corruption and nepotism. It was thus hardly surprising that uprisings arose and that already in 1878 the anarchists committed an attack on the King.

In Ersilia's salon there was a fierce battle between Crispi and Cavallotti, who were each other's biggest rivals. Cavallotti, who was known for his rhetorical talents, argued that nothing of this third Rome was in line with the ideals of his hero Mazzini. He argued that he and his fellow politicians were part of a weak and corrupt Byzantine system. According to him the only solution was the expansion of voting rights.⁵² Crispi, on the other hand, argued that Italy, being divided to the bone, could not be governed in any other way, and that changing the electoral system would only cause more problems.⁵³ Cavallotti's attitude ultimately proved costly. In 1898, on his way to Ersilia's palace, he was killed in a duel by a furious Ferruccio Macola (1861-1910), editor of the conservative *Gazzetta di Venezia*.⁵⁴

Apart from personal political battles, members of Ersilia's network tried to analyse the deeper causes of Italy's deplorable state of affairs. Even Giosuè Carducci, who was known to be a fervent nationalist and opponent of the Catholic Church, was worried. Like many he blamed Italian politics.⁵⁵ Especially after his appointment as senator for life he regularly visited Caetani-Lovatelli to talk about the many scandals.

⁴⁸ S. Cavazza, 'Regionalism in Italy: a critique', in: J. Augusteijn & E. Storm (eds.), *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 69-92; C. Duggan, *The force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1876*, London, Penguin, 2007; A. Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, London-New York, Routledge, 2009; D. Beales & E. Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy*, Harlow, Longman, 2002, pp. 150-162; C. Duggan, 'Politics in the era of Depretis and Crispi, 1870-1896', in: J. Davis (ed.), *Italy in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 155-180.

⁴⁹ Beales & Biagini, *The Risorgimento*, cit., pp. 79-80.

⁵⁰ D. Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp. 95-140; M. Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871-1995*, London-New York, Longman, 1996, pp. 12-36.

⁵¹ A. Cento Bull, 'Social and political cultures in Italy from 1860 to the present day', in: Z. Barański & R. West (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 35-63.

⁵² R. Colapietra, *Felice Cavallotti e la democrazia radicale in Italia*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1966, p. 83.

⁵³ T. Palamenghi, *L'Italia coloniale e Francesco Crispi*, Milano, Treves, 1928, pp. 184-186; Cfr. Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Christian Hülsen, undated, Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei, Archivio Lovatelli, coll. 156.

⁵⁴ P. Spezi, 'Nel salotto della contessa Lovatelli. Emilio Zola', in: *L'Urbe*, 6 (1952), pp. 20-22.

⁵⁵ L. Brani, 'Ditemi, o Pietre! Parlatemi, eccelsi palagi!'. *La rappresentazione di Roma nella lirica Italiana tra Otto e Novecento: Carducci, D'Annunzio, Pascoli*, Pisa, ETS, 2012, pp. 81-83.

In his letters to the Countess, but probably also in her palace, he expressed his views on the functioning of Rome's city council and national parliament: 'Il potere legislativo invade, intralcia e guasta la macchina dell'esecutivo. Le "piovre" dei cinquecento deputati coi cinquecentomila figliuoli, nipoti, mogli, amanti della moglie, mantenute, amici delle mantenute, ruffiani ed elettori, succhiano tutto, empiono tutto, imbrattano tutto'.⁵⁶

To provide explanations some guests turned to Social Darwinism, which at that time was popular throughout Europe. In his major work *Les origines de la France contemporaine* (1875-1894) the French philosopher Hippolyte Taine, one of Ersilia's friends, had analysed the French system by using Darwin's insights. He argued that if countries, like animals, were the product of slow evolution, why should then a political system that did not fit well with the character of its people be forced upon them? Taine's contention was that the French revolution had spurned a liberal doctrine in a country whose history did not favor it. Taine thus saw a dangerous imbalance between the French nation on the one hand and its political institutions on the other. His influence reached far, and certainly included Italy.⁵⁷ In 1884 Ruggiero Bonghi, who had been minister of education but thereafter mainly functioned as a critic of the political system, in his article 'Una questione grossa. La decadenza del regime parlamentare' denounced Italian democracy, including its shamefully incompetent parliament. Bonghi was clearly inspired by Taine's explanations, but, even though they were both regular guests, it remains unclear whether the two men actually met in Ersilia's salons.

In Palazzo Lovatelli Bonghi did encounter Émile Zola, whom he informed about the political and social life of contemporary Rome. The Frenchman would use these conversations to write his novel *Rome*.⁵⁸ Zola himself held quite explicit views about Italy:

Pour lui [Bonghi] le malheur de l'Italie, c'est de n'avoir aucune force intellectuelle et morale, neuve, décisive. Je lui ai fait remarquer que cela vient de ce que, en Italie, il n'y avait pas comme chez nous un peuple (paysans et ouvriers), qui est la réserve de la nation, d'où tous nos hommes nouveaux sortent. Notre vitalité vient depuis cent cinquante ans de l'ascension du peuple, du mouvement des individualités à travers le corps social. En Italie l'aristocratie a croulé, la bourgeoisie reste neutre et sans force, et le peuple reste enfant: de là la déchéance irrémédiable. Il faudrait prendre le problème par le bas, donner au peuple l'instruction, la force du travail, créer une démocratie vivante et ascendante.⁵⁹

But most of Caetani-Lovatelli's guests identified the lack of national unity as the biggest cause of all Italy's troubles. Already in 1872, the German historian Ferdinand Gregorovius, one of the habitués, noted that:

[v]on namhaften Italienern sah ich mehrere bei Donna Ersilia [...], wie Sella, Minghetti, Bonghi, Guerrieri Gonzaga, Terenzio Mamiani [...]. Wenn Selbstkritik ein Symptom der Erneuerung des Volksgeistes ist, so sind die Italiener heute am gutem Wege. Sie üben diese bis zum Zynismus an sich aus; sie decken schonungslos die *Pudenda* ihrer Nation auf. Übereinstimmend erkennen sie, dass der moralische Zustand des Volks im Widerspruch zu den politischen Erfolgen steht. Sie haben eine nationale Form wie über Nacht erhalten, und diese Form ist ohne Inhalt. Bis zur Selbstverzweiflung sprechen sie das aus: so urteile selbst Mamiani, so Lignana. Der Satz ist

⁵⁶ Giosuè Carducci to Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli, 2 August 1893, cited in: M. Biagini, *Giosuè Carducci. Poeta della terza Italia*, Milano, Mursia, 1976, p. 679.

⁵⁷ Duggan, 'Politics in the era of Depretis and Crispi', cit., p. 167.

⁵⁸ Zola, *Mes voyages*, cit., p. 220.

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, pp. 250-251.

richtig, dass eine politische Revolution fruchtlos bleibt ohne die sie begleitende moralische. Für diese fehlt es den Italienern an Gewissen und sittlicher Energie.⁶⁰

How could this young nation-state forge its people into a real community? Some argued that the Italians should follow the example of Germany, a state as young as Italy, but much more successful in terms of (cultural) politics. In an 1877 letter to Ersilia the German historian Theodor Mommsen who himself advised his Italian colleagues on the development of a new academic and educational model, expressed his hopes that the Italians would not copy Germany's rather aggressive politics.⁶¹ Likewise Gregorovius argued that the Germans had a better developed national culture, but scored much lower than the Italians in terms of happiness. He had to admit, however, that the spiritual life in his beloved Italy was disappearing rather quickly and he advised his young protégé Sigmund Münz not to stay there for more than two years, '[d]enn das junge Italien werden Sie noch sehr schwach finden, noch in beständigem Experimentiren, mit viel Geist und weniger Charakter und dem wenigsten Wissen ausgestattet'.⁶² He added that in Italy 'die politischen Thatsachen den inneren moralischen Prozess überholt haben'.⁶³

Apart from lamenting the current state of affairs and discussing its causes, Ersilia's guests also critically evaluated the solutions, including Italy's colonial politics, especially of Crispi's cabinets.⁶⁴ In his view, Italy could only ever become a Great Power if it possessed colonies. He also saw a connection between war, masculinity, and citizenship.⁶⁵ In 1895 Crispi ordered Italian soldiers to occupy Ethiopia, thinking that propaganda would convert the anticolonial sentiments into fierce nationalism.⁶⁶ In 1896, however, resistance in Palazzo Lovatelli as well as in the rest of Italy grew as the Italian army suffered a defeat against Ethiopian troops for the third time. The 5000 Italian soldiers had been poorly prepared and equipped for the battle of Adua (1896), so that for the first time in history an African people successfully defeated a colonizer. The Ethiopians also took a large number of Italian prisoners, including Ersilia's son Giovanni. Immediately the countess in her salon formed a group consisting of clergymen as well as spouses of influential political opponents of Crispi, with whom she tried to provide the Italian soldiers with material and spiritual relief. Moreover, she wanted to speed up their release through negotiations and financial support. In 1896 a delegation departed with 50,000 lire, presumably donated by the Pope.⁶⁷

Crispi detested what he saw as a female and ecclesiastical interference in times of war.⁶⁸ He tried to persuade Caetani-Lovatelli by writing her:

⁶⁰ H.-W. Krufft & M. Völkel (eds.), *Ferdinand Gregorovius. Römische Tagebücher 1852-1889*, München, C.H. Beck, 1991, p. 317.

⁶¹ Theodor Mommsen to Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli, 13 March 1877, cited in: L. Wickert, *Theodor Mommsen. Eine Biographie. Band II: Wanderjahre. Frankreich und Italien*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1964, p. 69.

⁶² Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius*, cit., p. 12.

⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ For Crispi and his politics: C. Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶⁵ L. Riall, 'Men at War: Masculinity and Military Ideals in the Risorgimento', in: S. Patriarca & L. Riall (eds.), *The Risorgimento Revisited. Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 152-171.

⁶⁶ G. Finaldi, *Italian National Identity in the Scramble for Africa*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2009; Palamenghi, *L'Italia coloniale*, cit., pp. 184-186.

⁶⁷ D. Farini, *Diario di fine secolo*, vol. II, Rome, Bardi Editore, 1962, p. 937; R. Colapietra, *L'incidenza di Pietro Chimienti nella politica italiana*, Brindisi, Ed. Amici della "A. de Leo", 1993, p. 21. See also the Dutch newspaper *Het nieuws van de dag: kleine courant*, 21 May 1896, and more specifically 'Buitenlandsch nieuws'.

⁶⁸ M. Choate, *Emigrant Nation. The Making of Italy Abroad*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 21-56, more precisely pp. 37-39.

Cara signora contessa. Trovo il di lei nome in un comitato di signore, il quale fa appello alla carità pubblica per nostri poveri prigionieri in Africa. Il pensiero è gentile, ma può essere pratico? Quando l'Italia era spezzata in sette stati, e *I barbareschi* esercitavano la tratta anche sulle nostre spiagge, i nostri padri, costretti dalla loro impotenza, costituirono la società per la redenzione degli schiavi. Oggi siamo una nazione di 32 milioni di uomini e ben altro è il metodo da seguire per esplicare i nostri doveri e per farci rispettare. I nostri fratelli, fatti captivi ad Abba Garima [alternative designation of Adua], aspettano ansiosi un esercito liberatore, e le donne italiane, come al 1848 e al 1860, dovrebbero ispirare il coraggio per organizzare la vittoria. La pietà è santa, ma nell'animo dell'Abissino oggi sarebbe interpretata paura e debolezza; del resto neanche potrebbe essere esercitata, perché tra noi e il nemico è il muro della barbarie, che impedisce arrivino ai sofferenti i soccorsi che si vorrebbero loro inviare. Scrivo a Lei, che so avere animo virile, affinché consigli alle gentili sue compagne a mutare scopo al comitato.⁶⁹

It is remarkable that to break the women's initiative, Crispi appealed to Ersilia's alleged male soul. Ultimately, however, the prisoners of war were indeed released through a diplomatic solution, which was partly initiated from Palazzo Lovatelli.⁷⁰

Crispi resigned and Ersilia's brother became minister of foreign affairs. Onorato tried to neutralise the colonial politics of his predecessors. In his sister's salon, while he defended Italy's 1882 Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungaria, he also spoke about the importance of restoring good relations with France and the United Kingdom.⁷¹ In 1911, however, Giovanni Giolitti became Italy's prime minister for the fourth time, and, in a new attempt to turn Italy into a Great Power, unleashed war against the Ottoman Empire.⁷² Ersilia's nephew Leone, who disliked colonial politics even more than his father, was one of Giolitti's vicious opponents. Having previously helped him to secure a victory in the parliamentary elections of 1909, Ersilia now offered Leone an arena to proclaim his opinions.⁷³

Others, however, defended Italy's colonial policy against Leone Caetani's fierce attacks, including his own friend Ferdinando Martini, the founder of the *Fanfulla della domenica*, one of the journals in which Caetani-Lovatelli published many articles. He had been a member of parliament since 1876 and had twice served as the minister of the colonies. In Palazzo Lovatelli Martini was introduced to Giacomo Agnesa, Ersilia's son in law who worked as a diplomat. After their meeting Agnesa became secretary of the Ufficio coloniale, founded in 1895 to coordinate the Italian property in Africa. Spurred by Ersilia Martini also supported Agnesa's appointment as director general of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. The countess herself intervened even more directly to make Agnesa a member of the board of the Società geografica italiana, just after Onorato Caetani had ended his presidium in 1887. As a result, the Società became an important instrument in Italian colonial policy.⁷⁴

A final political theme discussed in Palazzo Lovatelli was the transformation of the city of Rome from 1871 onwards. Even though, or precisely because Rome to many still was the *caput mundi*, the city had to become the centre of the new Italian nation-

⁶⁹ Francesco Crispi to Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli, 1896, cited in Palamenghi, *L'Italia coloniale*, cit., pp. 185-186

⁷⁰ Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, cit., pp. 37-39.

⁷¹ L. Curtius, *Deutsche und antike Welt: Lebenserinnerungen*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1950, p. 389.

⁷² C. Stephenson, *A Box of Sand. The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912*, Ticehurst, Tattered Flag Press, 2014, especially pp. 11-29 and 41-58.

⁷³ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Leone Caetani in a couple of undated letters, ALC, cart. 482 (3).

⁷⁴ M.A. Mulas, 'Un funzionario del Ministero degli esteri nello Stato liberale: G. Agnesa', in: C. Ghezzi (ed.), *Fonti e problemi della politica coloniale italiana*, Roma, Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Archivistici, 1996, vol. II, pp. 914-940.

state. Also Rome seemed to be the only city that evoked memories that potentially could unite the various Italian regions.⁷⁵ At the same time the Eternal City should also be able to compete with other modern European capitals including Paris, Vienna and Berlin.⁷⁶ After 1871 large construction projects were thus initiated by the national authorities, often contradicting the wishes of the city and Church authorities. They planned a new railway station, government buildings, grand boulevards and completely new neighbourhoods to house the new citizens.⁷⁷

Most of Ersilia's acquaintances criticised this new, Third Rome. Gregorovius wrote to the salonnière lamenting that

Die gewaltsame Transformation Roms macht mir wenig Freude – die Stadt gleicht einem alten Prachtteppich, welcher ausgeklopft wird und darüber unter einer Wolke von Staub in Fetzen auseinanderfällt. Die Wege meiner Vergangenheit hier sind verschüttet, umgewühlt und überbaut, und an die Stelle der majestätischen Ruhe ist der widerwärtige Lärm des modernen Lebens getreten.⁷⁸

The 'Ersiliasti' dreamed of the eternal glory of a tangible but idealised past. They refused to acknowledge that their dream was not shared by many, and certainly not by most Italian politicians in charge, who, according to them, turned the city into a 'banales Versuchsfeld für Bauspekulanten'.⁷⁹ The countess herself expressed her fear that only in name would Rome survive.⁸⁰ And in his travel diaries Zola noted:

La rêve de Rome capitale dès 1860. Et tout sacrifié à cette idée patriotique, nécessaire, fatale. La lutte contre la nature elle-même, la ville qu'on veut ressusciter quand même, malgré les obstacles physiques. Le poids de plomb de l'antiquité. *L'Urbs dell'antica e dell'età futura*. Et le coup d'enthousiasme dans l'orgueil de la conception. La griserie, puis la débâcle fatale, lorsque les choses apparaissent: une ville énorme, bâtie pour une population qui n'existe pas, la capitale moderne rêvée échouante contre la ville réelle avec son manque de communications, la ceinture mortelle de terrain stérile, son fleuve mort. L'orgueil a rêvé ce que la réalité ne peut réaliser. Quel cas étonnant et intéressant, quelle page de l'histoire naturelle d'une ville.⁸¹

And while Zola incorporated these observations in his novel *Rome*, Ersilia denounced Rome's metamorphoses in several of her scholarly publications,⁸² as well as in her conversations with queen Margherita, whom she knew well.⁸³ Also she encouraged Gregorovius, who was honorary citizen of Rome, to write a letter of protest to

⁷⁵ P. Scoppola (ed.), *I discorsi di Cavour per Roma Capitale*, Roma, Istituto di Studi Romani, 1971.

⁷⁶ C. Brice, 'La Rome des Savoie après l'unité', in: C. Charle & D. Roche (eds.), *Capitales culturelles, capitales symboliques: Paris et les expériences européennes*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002, pp. 133-148.

⁷⁷ V. Vidotto, 'Political Public Space in Rome from 1870 to 2011', in: G. Smith & J. Gadeyne (eds.), *Perspectives on Public Space in Rome, from Antiquity to the Present Day*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, pp. 251-276; L. Cardilli & A. Cambetta Napolitano (eds.), *La capitale a Roma. Città e arredo urbano 1870-1945*, Roma, Edizioni Carte segrete, 1991; M. Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale: Roma 1870-1911*, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana, 1992.

⁷⁸ Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius*, cit., p. 15.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, p. 61.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ Zola, *Mes voyages*, cit., p. 186.

⁸² See, for instance, E. Caetani-Lovatelli, 'A.S. Maria de Spazolaria', in: *Nuova Antologia di Lettere, Scienza ed Arti*, 1 July 1909, pp. 3-10. Cfr. A. Englen (ed.), *Caelius I. Santa Maria in Domnica, San Tommaso in Formis e il Clivus Scauri*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2003, p. 22.

⁸³ Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius*, cit., pp. 152-153; 'Prinses Marguérite', in: *De Tijd*, 26 April 1872; 'Italy', in: *Morning Post*, 4 december 1871. Cfr. G. D'Annunzio, 'Giornate romane. I "regali" regali', in: *La Tribuna*, 28 December 1884; A. Hare, *The Story of My Life*, vol. III, London, G. Allen, 1901, p. 525.

Francesco Azzurri (1827-1901), who presided the Accademia di San Luca; and to publish this letter in German newspapers, in order to gain international support. On March 21 1886, Gregorovius in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* rhetorically asked how it was possible that citizens of the world did not revolt, for example against the sale of Villa Ludovisi to the Società Generale Immobiliare. How could one allow the sculptures to be removed, the park to be parcelled, and the buildings, with the exception of the Casino dell'Aurora, to be destroyed? And how was it possible that it was decided to design a street, the Via Veneto, through the heart of the old gardens and over the remains of the buildings? These could only be the decisions of barbarians.

In a reaction the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar persuaded King Umberto I to save the city from deconstruction; the Italian monarch, however, did not respond.⁸⁴ But Ruggiero Bonghi did. He had always been an advocate of a strong cultural policy, but discussions in Ersilia's salon had convinced him that the urban destruction of Rome had gone too far. In an open letter in *Opinione* he argued for the maintenance of the Eternal City's tangible past in order to show the Italians, as well as other peoples, their glorious history and identity.⁸⁵

Thus, a prominent part of Ersilia's intellectual network was united in their wish to change the national and local heritage policies. In 1890 to streamline their initiatives Caetani-Lovatelli became a founding member of the Associazione artistica fra i cultori di architettura, which, chaired by her good friend the architect Gustavo Giovannoni (1873-1947), had the objective of preserving classical heritage.⁸⁶

In her palace, Caetani-Lovatelli emphasised the aims of the *Associazione*, for instance by talking to her brother Onorato. Between 1890-1892 as the mayor of Rome he was confronted with the urban renewal, and, above all, with the enormous financial crisis which, due to the often irresponsible construction expenses in the 1880s, was strongly felt in the capital. Onorato agreed with the objectives of the *Associazione*, but he knew that the fragmented and unstable political landscape was a major obstacle to finding solutions.⁸⁷ Many local politicians understood the need for substantial cutbacks, but stopping urban renewal was simply not an option to them. Most of them feared that in that case the national politicians would shut down money supply to the capital completely. Onorato, however, was an experienced and agile politician.⁸⁸ Despite his moderate liberal conviction he maintained strong ties with socialists and the Church, for instance in his sister's palace, hoping that they would support his attempt to put the city's finances in order. Although he did not succeed in permanently ending the building projects – after the turn of the century they were largely reopened –, by lobbying he did manage to pass a parliamentary law which allowed him to limit construction spending, without any consequences to the city's income. In 1892 moreover, he reached agreement with the national government about the repayment of municipal debts and seized control of the construction projects.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Gregorovius to Ersilia, 17 June 1888, in: Münz, *Ferdinand Gregorovius*, cit., pp. 169-171, more specifically p. 170.

⁸⁵ *Ivi*, pp. 152-153.

⁸⁶ P. Spagnesi, 'Cronologia dell'attività dell'AACAR', in: L. Barelli, M. Centofanti, G. Cifani, L. Finocchi Ghersi, M. Moretti, B.M. Ortu, G. Rivetti, P. Spagnesi (eds.), *Catalogo dei disegni di architettura*, Roma, Centro di studi per la storia dell'architettura, Casa dei Crescenzi, 1987, pp. 13-25; G. Zucconi, *La Città contesa. Dagli ingegneri sanitari agli urbanisti 1885-1942*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1989, pp. 114-128.

⁸⁷ Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli to Onorato Caetani, undated, ALC, cart. 482 (1).

⁸⁸ For the relationship between urban and national governments in late-nineteenth century Rome see: S. Rebecchini, 'Il Comune di Roma da Michelangelo Caetani a Filippo Doria Pamphilj', in: *Studi romani*, 10 (1962), pp. 278-298.

⁸⁹ U. Gentiloni Silveri, 'Onorato Caetani e la società di fine Ottocento', in: *Bonifacio VIII, I Caetani e la storia del Lazio. Atti del Convegno di studi storici*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004, pp. 259-272.

Conclusions

Using her intellectual network Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli was able to create one of Rome's fin de siècle political hotspots. Her salon provided those belonging to the academic, cultural and political elite a place to debate the current state of affairs, to influence policy, to get into new alliances and to take substantial steps in their careers. While it benefitted many – Caetani-Lovatelli's salon network counted well over 275 individuals – Ersilia always took care to gain profit for herself and her family. Her networking had its own politics. It is telling that the nobility accounted for only 15% of all visitors, while the upper middle classes were far better represented, especially after 1880. Ersilia understood that her own social class could only maintain its position in the new political reality of liberal Italy if it would fuse with other cultural-intellectual, political and social-economical elites that now gained momentum. Caetani-Lovatelli was able to consolidate her own position and that of her family members precisely by building and maintaining a network of individuals of various social backgrounds, and in particular members of the new bourgeoisie. Inspired by Verena von der Heyden-Rynsch one might call this outcome of Ersilia's networking politics the 'bourgeoisification of the nobility', while it simultaneously caused a 'nobilitysification of the bourgeoisie'.⁹⁰

The fact that her intellectual network became intertwined with official politics shows us that Ersilia's private sociability only existed by virtue of visitors who were interested in various topics, were active in various cultural fields, and were representatives of a society in which the specialisation of knowledge was not yet too far developed.⁹¹ Obviously this versatility of the members of her network offered Caetani-Lovatelli new prospects. Her salon and its network gained her access to worlds normally restricted to men, including academia. And even though the number of female visitors was quite low, Ersilia supported their entrance in these worlds as well, bringing the likes of Rina Faccio (1876-1960), Dora Melegari (1849-1924) and Grazia Deledda into contact with publishers, editors and literary critics that she already knew. She also used her wide network to support feminism,⁹² and encouraged other women, including Melegari and Nadine Helbig (1847-1922), Henriette Hertz (1846-1913) and Eugénie Sellers-Strong (1860-1943) to host salons of their own.⁹³ An important question remaining is how these colleagues used their own salons and networks to gain political influence, and if and how they collaborated in that process.⁹⁴ For all support she had offered to all, however, in 1915 Ersilia herself withdrew from public life, being ill for ten more years to come. Her networking politics and the political influence she had thereby earned had left their mark on liberal Italy.

Keywords

Salons, Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli (1840-1925), intellectual exchange, political networks, Liberal Italy

⁹⁰ V. von der Heyden-Rynsch, *Europäische Salons. Höhepunkte einer versunken weiblichen Kultur*, München, Artemis & Winkler, 1992, p. 19.

⁹¹ R. Simanowski, 'Einleitung: Der Salon als dreifache Vermittlungsinstanz', in: R. Simanowski, H. Turk & T. Schmidt (eds.), *Europa – ein Salon? Beiträge zur Internationalität des literarischen Salons*, Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 1999, pp. 8-39.

⁹² Meens, 'How to approach salons?', cit., p. 68.

⁹³ S. Dyson, *Eugénie Sellers Strong: Portrait of an Archaeologist*, London, Duckworth, 2004, pp. 56-61.

⁹⁴ The connections between salonnières in general during the first decades of the 20th century have been pointed at by H. Brown & G. Dow, 'Introduction', in: idem (eds.), *Readers, Writers, Salonnières. Female Networks in Europe, 1700-1900*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 1-9.

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RIASSUNTO

‘Un’ aiuola fioritissima, i cui mirabili e svariati fiori si alternano e si succedono senza interruzione’

Politiche di networking (intellettuale) del salone fin de siècle di Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli

Questo articolo ripercorre la genesi e lo sviluppo del salotto romano della contessa e archeologa Ersilia Caetani-Lovatelli (1840-1925). Verso la fine degli anni ‘60 dell’Ottocento la contessa cominciò a invitare amici intellettuali e altri personaggi di spicco nella Roma coeva, continuando in questo modo una tradizione inaugurata dal padre Michelangelo Caetani. Negli anni Settanta gli incontri intellettuali organizzati dalla Caetani-Lovatelli si fecero più regolari e il suo salotto divenne un punto di riferimento per la vita politica romana e italiana. Tra i frequentatori del salotto furono in molti a ricoprire cariche politiche all’interno delle istituzioni del giovane Stato nazionale italiano. L’analisi presentata in questa sede è infatti incentrata sul ruolo politico del salotto e sviluppa due linee di ricerca principali. In primo luogo, un approccio quantitativo e un’analisi della prassi discorsiva devono far luce sulle politiche sociali e sull’accessibilità del network della contessa. In secondo luogo si indaga il significato politico del salotto nell’Italia liberale, mettendo a fuoco le conversazioni politiche sostenutevi, e in particolare i dibattiti sulle questioni politiche che animavano il giovane Stato nazionale italiano.