

Think and rethink Lombroso

Ilaria Gorini

Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences, University of Insubria

Abstract. From the centenary of the celebration of the death of Cesare Lombroso, it is necessary to have an up-to-date look at the his figure and to analyze also other academics who have followed his teaching over the course of time.

Key words: Lombroso, De Blasio, criminal anthropology

In the last few years, a significant amount has been written about Lombroso. Even we, medical historians, have contributed something. Through the jagged chorus of many voices we understand, however, that Lombroso represented a certain conformist vision, while different aspects of his life and work will always remain in the background of the dominant questions for which man is known.

Here we see some of the other topics of interest to us.

An up-to-date look at the figure of Cesare Lombroso in 2009, in the centenary celebrations of his death, made it necessary to consider also those who had immediately and confidently continued his teaching.

And if the most important students were already well known, we saw the emergence of the hidden wounds of the history of Abel De Blasio (1-2) or Pasquale Penta, which also had a notable importance in scientific literature between the late nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth century (3). But, in 2009 we had to consider the circumstances of two other important anniversaries: two hundred years of Darwin's birth and fifty years since the death of Agostino Gemelli, on which there were no opportunities for meetings and studies in recent months. We certainly can

not afford to say with superficial simplicity that the life and work of Lombroso the physician has been placed between those of Gemelli the doctor and Darwin who trained in medicine. But, we suggest that, in a certain speech, the figure of the man who brought his criminal anthropology to the attention of science could almost assume a centrality between the other two, both in what Darwin can be seen in the Lombrosian poligrafia, and in the decidedly dry and perhaps unpleasant judgment of Gemelli who, in the aftermath of the funeral, gave the pages of the severe libellus Cesare Lombroso to the press. The funeral of a man and a doctrine (Monza, Tipografia Artigianelli 1910). Funeral of man and also of his doctrine? When, in 1911, he published the expanded third edition in a volume of almost 200 pages, the good friar Agostino Gemelli was certainly not yet a celebrity, but compared to the first edition, keeping his negative judgment unchanged, he nourished the already thriving band of detractors of Lombroso (4-5). He did so in the light of a new spiritual flourish, but also in the face of advances in science, chemistry and genetics, or mechanistic medicine. The early twentieth century mechanism in medicine certainly resulted from the positivism that had dominated much of the medical biology of the second half of the nineteenth century, but it differed from it in some cardinal points.

So much so that a certain scientific orientation proposed to break away from the statements of Darwinism to return to the root of an evolutionary thought that originated from Lamarck. Thus, we were witnessing the integration of new and old ideas. In historiographical terms, we must reflect on the title of the initial libel and the subsequent large volume of Gemelli and ask how to evaluate them. Do we have to consider that the funeral of the man did not correspond to the funeral or the definitive burial of his doctrine? Then we must also look into the history of medicine. A certain lombrosianism continued to flourish and if this is quite evident in the superficial layers of a culture we would say “spreading” on large issues of problematic impact that are always present and persistent in society, even within a part of medicine the quotations of Lombroso continued, as authoritative and convincing (6).

References

1. Borgo M, Martini M, Bragazzi NL, Paluan F, Gorini I, Vecchio I, Licata, M. *Corpus loquens: The speaking body and Abele De Blasio (1858-1945)*. *Acta Med Med* 2017; 33 (1): 95-100.
2. Iorio S, Larentis O, Licata M. *Show Me the Shape of your Face and I Will Tell You What Crime You Have Committed*. *Am J Forensic Med Pathol* 2018; doi:10.1097/PAF.0000000000000398.
3. Licata M, Iorio, S, Badino P, Tornali C, Vecchio I. *Leopoldo Maggi: Physican, anthropologist and archaeologist*. *Acta Med Medit* 2016; 32(5): 1569-70.
4. Ciliberti R, Monza F, De Stefano F, Licata M. *The trial of the skull studied by the founder of Criminal Anthropology: The war of the Lombroso Museum*. *J Forensic Leg Med* 2018; 25(59): 13-5.
5. Armocida G. *Lombroso, Cesare*. *Dizionario Biografico Italiani*. 2005; 65: 548-53.
6. Armocida G. *Lombroso C. non solo “antropologo criminale”, in “Identità della mente, identità dei corpi. Contributi di storia ed etica della psichiatria a cento anni dalla legge manicomiale del 1904”*. Varese: Insubria University Press; 2008; 93-140.

Correspondence:

Ilaria Gorini

Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences,

University of Insubria

E-mail: ilaria.gorini@uninsubria.it