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The Italian atheist academics : a myth of the French pre-enlightenment ?

Jean-Pierre Cavailé

“Hieronimus Borro, professor of philosophy in Pisa, was much beloved of the Grand Duke; he was a perfect Atheist, he was not burned, but he really deserved to have been; he once said that *supra octavam sphaeram nihil est*. The Inquisitor wanted to force him to retract: he ascended the chair the next day, and told his audience: “Gentlemen, I’ve maintained and proved that *supra octavam sphaeram nihil est*, they want me to recant; I assure you, if there is something else there, it can be only a dish of macaroni for Signore Inquisitor”. *Quo dicto sese proripiens et fuga saluti suae consuluit*. He had been burned several times without [the help of] the Grand Duke who loved him, yet he is died a fugitive”¹. This delightful anecdote from the *Naudeana* (1703) concerns a famous professor at the University of Pisa, who died in 1592, Girolamo Borri. In the course of his career, he encountered very serious difficulties with the Inquisition². The historical reliability of this anecdote is highly questionable, but it perfectly expresses the perception that a very well informed French scholar could have in the years 1620-1640 of a large part of the Aristotelian tradition of study in Italy.

This presentation aims mainly to challenge a thesis frequently admitted in scientific literature. This thesis asserts that the reputation of irreligion and atheism with Italian scholars and academics is a late production, an *a posteriori* representation of the professors of Padua and other Italian universities forged by French minds of the pre-Enlightenment. The main proponent of this thesis is undoubtedly Oskar Kristeller in a famous article entitled « The myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought »³, in which, among other things, Kristeller calls into question the authenticity of the *Naudeana* and *Patiniana* published in 1701 and 1703, long after the death of Gabriel Naudé (1653) and Guy Patin

¹ “Hieronimus Borro, professeur de Philosophie à Pise, étoit fort chéri du Grand Duc ; c’ étoit un Athée parfait, il n’a pas été brûlé, mais il le méritoit bien ; il avoit dit un jour, que *supra octavam sphaeram nihil est*. L’Inquisiteur le voulut obliger de se dédire : il monta en chaire le lendemain, et dit a ses Auditeurs, Messieurs, je vous ai maintenu et prouvé, que *supra octavam sphaeram nihil est*, on veut que je me dédise ; je vous assure, que s’il y a autre chose, ce ne peut être qu’un plat de macarons pour M. l’Inquisiteur. *Quo dicto sese proripiens et fuga saluti suae consuluit*. Il eut été brûlé plusieurs fois sans le Grand Duc qui l’aimoit ; il est pourtant mort en fuite”, *Naudaeana et patiniana*, Amsterdam, François van der Plaats, 1703, p. 9. One can find quite the same text in the ms of Vienna, *Staatsbibliothek*, ms 7071, p. 4.

² See in particular what Montaigne, who met him repeatedly during his stay in Italy, wrote about him. *Voyage*, éd. F. Rigolot, PUF, 1992, p. 192-194 ; *Essais*, I, 26. Cf. the entree “Girolamo Borri” in G. Stabile in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, XIII (1971), pp. 13-17 et G. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, Roma, 1950, pp. 29-32. Also, Robert A. Hatch, *The scientific Revolution*, url : <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/ufhatch/pages/03-Sci-Rev/SCI-REV-Home/resource-ref-read/major-minor-ind/westfall-dsb/SAM-B.htm>.

³ *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 1968, p. 233-243.

(1672)⁴. Kristeller, however, knew very well that the texts contained in this printed collection (one of the first of the "ana", which will meet with great success in the eighteenth century⁵), can be found in a series of manuscripts in Paris, Wiesbaden, Munich and Vienna (the Vienna one being closest to the printed collection, but it is not its direct source). These manuscripts are usually known as the "Patin papers", others are known as the *Borboniana*, from the name of the humanist and Latin poet Nicolas Bourbon, close friend and mentor of Patin⁶. The combined material served as the basis for a handwritten collection of cross-referenced notes⁷. The whole has been scrupulously analyzed by René Pintard in his second thesis, which was known to Kristeller⁸. These documents are extremely abundant notebooks written initially by the physician-scholar Guy Patin⁹. Their historiographical relevance is very important, even though they remained largely unpublished, because they are one of the major sources exploited by René Pintard in his principal thesis: *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle*¹⁰. Now, Kristeller, who concentrated mainly on the *Naudeana*, asserts in his article that Pintard "failed to prove that the collection as a whole is authentic in origin". He added that the Naudé of the *Naudeana* is fundamentally alien to the Naudé we know elsewhere¹¹ and he even suggests that the link proposed by Pintard between the *Naudeana* and Guy Patin is weak and insufficient, while conceding that Pintard "has undoubtedly proved

⁴ *Naudeana et patiniana ou singularités remarquables, prises des conversations de Mess. Naudé et Patin*, Paris, Florentin and Pierre Delaune, 1701 ; *Idem* (completed by the *Additions au Naudeana* of Antoine Lancelot) Amsterdam, Van der Plaats, 1703.

⁵ Francine Wild, *Naissance du genre des ana (1574-1712)*, Paris, Champion, 2001.

⁶ The *Borboniana* were published by the Président Bouhier (who ignored that these texts were written by Patin) in 1751 and 1754, Patin, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷ Manuscripts of Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cod. gall. 93 and Wiesbaden, Staatsbibliothek, ms 77.

⁸ *La Mothe le Vayer, Gassendi, Guy Patin. Etudes de biographie et de critique suivies de textes inédits de Guy Patin*, Paris, Boivin, 1943, p. 47 sq.

⁹ See the letter to André Falconet from 1659, in which Patin talks about his "cahiers historiques et politiques dans lesquelles il y a bien des particularités" and which he names himself "Borboniana", "Grotiana" and "Naudeana", adding that : "ces manuscrits prennent les gens par le nez, et les empêchent de devenir de grands sots : cela me réjouit", *Lettres*, éd. Réveillé-Parise, t. III, pp. 108-109 and 162. See in particular the very interesting preface, whose author can be only Patin himself, probably at the intention of his son Robert, contained in the copies preserved in Wiesbaden and Munich : "Tous ces Cahiers, que vous voyez icy, sont un Farrago, un Pot-pourri, et un Ramas, sans aucun ordre, de quantités de choses fort différentes, que j'ay apprises, et ay ouï dire, des uns et des autres", Munich, Staatsbibliothek, cod. gall. 93, p. 1.

¹⁰ Paris, 1943. Nouv. éd. augmentée d'un avant-propos, de notes et de réflexions sur les problèmes de l'histoire du libertinage, Genève, Slatkine, 1983.

¹¹ "Naudé himself has been suspected as a libertine, especially by Pintard, but his authentic writings do not reveal him as an atheist at all", p. 239 (one can observe here a confusion between "libertine" and "atheist"). "The entire tone of the *Naudeana* is that of a writer who under a thin veil of caution seems to sympathize with libertinism and to cite the Italians as a precedent or alibi for his own attitude. I see no reason for attributing this same attitude to Naudé himself, let alone to the Italians of whom the stories are told. The work reflects in its extant form the spirit of the eighteenth century", p. 241.

that some of the fragments are authentic and probably derive from Patin”¹². Kristeller based his criticism on the fact that the manuscripts we have were handwritten during the early eighteenth century, but this seems not to be the case, at least, with the two which are more complete, conserved in Paris and Vienna, which he claimed to have seen¹³. The Vienna manuscript is for my purposes the more important, because it’s the only one which presents, in the same ensemble, the accounts of Naudé on Italy and its irreligious professors¹⁴. Now, if Kristeller had actually examined the manuscript, he should have admitted the whole reliability of the analysis presented by Pintard, who shows among other things that the first part of the manuscript containing the text then replicated in the *Naudeana* but also in the *Patiniana*¹⁵, is carefully dated and introduced by an author who can only be Guy Patin himself. The texts indeed are preceded by the following note: “Mr. Naudé who has been in Italy for twelve years finally returned to Paris in the year 1642, having come to see me on March 12th, and 19th, he told me what follows”¹⁶. Then, on p. 75, “Mr Naudé came back from his trip to Italy on Saturday 20th March 1646 where he had gone a year ago to fetch the books of his patron the Cardinal de Mazarin and even his own books left behind on his last trip in 1642. Since his last return he has told me what follows”¹⁷. Most of the information and anecdotes of all kinds about Italian intellectual life and many other subjects in the manuscript are given in the first person singular, an “I”, which can almost always be attributed with certainty to Naudé and not to Patin (because the texts refer to Roman events or Italian meetings of the narrator), and an “I” which then can be found in the printed *Naudeana and Patiniana*. We thus have, beyond any doubt, a first-hand source of Naudé’s own impressions of his three Italian periods of stay,

¹² *Ibid.* p. 240.

¹³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. fr. 9730 and Vienna, Staatsbibliothek, cod. Palat. 7071, two manuscripts with a widely different and complementary content (they could represent two successive periods of notes taken by Patin, December 1637-March 1638 for the first and the subsequent years, until the period of the Fronde, for the second). Pintard first showed it had been copied by Hugues de Salins, the younger, a doctor of medicine in Beaume, and probably dates from the second half of the seventeenth century, like the second (which Pintard considers to be “du milieu du XVII^e siècle”). The manuscripts in Munich and Wiesbaden, almost identical in content, are composed of numerous items, partially drawn from the notebooks written previously which were copied in the two manuscripts mentioned above, they provide both the place and the date of their constitution : “*Pariis, sub initium Anni 1664*”. The ms Wiesbaden copy is dated 1706 and that of Munich, according to Pintard, who noted his rather archaic spelling, might be “soit le résultat immédiat de cette transcription ou une copie exécutée à un faible intervalle de temps”, *La Mothe the Vayer, Gassendi, Guy Patin, op. cit.*, p. 50-53.

¹⁴ Vienna, *Staatsbibliothek*, ms 7071.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the manuscript(s) from which were drawn the printed *Naudeana* contain texts which are absent from the Vienna ms, which yet, very likely, come from Naude himself.

¹⁶ “Monsieur Naudé ayant été douze ans en Italie est enfin revenu à Paris l’an 1642, le 12 mars, et le 19 m’étant venu voir il m’a appris ce qui s’ensuit”, Vienna ms, p. 1.

¹⁷ “Mr Naudé est revenu de son voyage d’Italie le samedi 20 de mars 1646 ou il était allé un an auparavant y querir les livres de son Patron le cardinal de Mazarin et ceux mêmes des siens qu’il y avait laissés en son dernier voyage de 1642. Depuis ce sien dernier retour il m’a dit ce qui s’ensuit”, Vienna ms, p. 75.

gathered by Patin, who took notes of what his friend had told him, probably shortly after (if not during) these interviews¹⁸. The text, I repeat, does not contain any inconsistency that might suggest a fake, even partial¹⁹. It should further be noted that the entire manuscript, which is very abundant (374 p. + index), contains other references, numerous enough, to the learned friends of Patin who have provided information, and to the occasions for these discussions (often dated). However, Patin seems to have added to his sources, information and judgments of his own, to a proportion sometimes difficult if not impossible to measure²⁰.

These notes often refer to scholars – they are sometimes real biographical records somewhat in the mood of what will be the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* of Bayle²¹ – and, among these scholars, many academics, living or dead. We know that Naudé, in Italy, assiduously attended the academic circles: first in Padua, where he was registered as a student of law in 1626 and where he met many professors especially in medicine and philosophy²², then in Roma, where he lived from 1631, but also in other cities through written correspondence (Bologna, Pavia, Pisa, etc.). For all these reasons the statements attributed to Naudé in the Patin papers and in the *Naudeana* about the irreligion more or less strictly concealed of a part of the Italian professors should, I believe, be regarded as accurately reflecting the views of a French scholar of the first half of the seventeenth century in close contact with academic circles in Italy, and a man who spent many years in Italy. It is therefore an account, but which is not isolated – then one could argue that it could be primarily nothing

¹⁸ According to Godefroy Hermant, Patin “ne perdoit nulle occasion d’apprendre quelque chose de ses amis qui estoient des hommes de lettres, et il ne les abordoit guère qu’un billet à la main pour s’éclaircir avec eux de 5 ou 6 questions”, quoted by Pintard, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁹ For some passages however problems of date and source (the identification of the speaker is sometimes difficult) arise, as noted by the copyist in a margin about the evocation of an event dated 1643 (disgrace of Des Noyers): “Par la datte de cet Article il paroist que cecy n’est pas une suite de ce que M.^r Naudé luy dit a son retour d’Italie en 1642 comme il a dit au commencement de ce Manuscript. Ce qui se peut encore remarquer dans la suite en beaucoup d’endroits tant par les dattes que par le stile. Cecy soit dit une fois pour toutes a l’esgard de tout ce manuscript qui est une rapsodie comme ie crois tant de ses propres pensées que de ce qu’il a ouy dire a plusieurs personnes qu’il enchevestre et brouille ensemble selon que cela luy vient en l’esprit, sans ordre et sans suite”. As Pintard noted, this statement is grossly exaggerated, because very often Patin gives the names of his contacts and the dates of the meetings (*La Mothe Le Vayer, Gassendi, Guy Patin... op. cit.*, p.52). At least Patin's identity as the author of the texts can't be in any case doubtful, and the copyist asserts rightly that the first 63 pages contain mainly if not exclusively “what Mr. Naude told him on his return to Italy in 1642”.

²⁰ It seems to me that Pintard is a little bit too confident when he writes: “c’est à un ami sincère, et dans l’intimité la plus sûre, que l’érudit a avoué ses curiosités et ses goûts; nulle malveillance n’a faussé la traduction de ses jugements; il ne semble pas que Guy Patin y ait, en général, mêlé les siens propres”, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

²¹ It should obviously be noted that Bayle was involved in the edition of the text in 1703, which he wrote the “avertissement”, however, in those times, the dictionary was already published. See his reaction to the edition of 1701: “On m’a écrit de Paris qu’il y a dans le *Naudeana* des endroits si libertins qu’il y a de quoi s’étonner que les Reviseurs de Livres ayent consenti à publier cet ouvrage-là...”, *Lettres de P. Bayle*, éd. Des Maizeaux, Amsterdam, 1729, t. III, p. 840.

²² Pintard, p. 168 sq. See also Anna L. Schino, “Incontri italiani di Gabriel Naudé”, *Rivista di Storia della filosofia*, 1989, p. 3-35.

more than a commonplace –, but this account cannot be ignored because it comes from one of the best informed French intellectuals on the Italian academic culture. We can even argue that Naudé was perhaps the greatest French expert of the Italian erudite and learned productions, in which he played a very important role as intermediary and translator²³.

It can also be immediately answered to a legitimate objection by noting that it is not possible to say that the French scholar would abusively project his own libertine convictions on his Italian peers, because his judgments in this regard, such as they appear in the manuscripts, are often negative or at least very ambiguous. But this observation takes us, it has to be admitted, onto very slippery ground because, as we have seen, it is not Naudé, but Patin, who holds the pen and we can indeed observe that Naudé's judgments and his positions on religious issues are strongly similar to what Patin himself wrote in his letters in his own name, where he shows a great hostility towards “bigots”, “monks” in general and Jesuits in particular, even towards the Church itself as a corrupt institution, and he shows interest in, even fascination for the most irreligious ideas, people and books, while condemning them and claiming, with a sincerity difficult to gauge, its support for the Catholic creed. But this relative confusion between the respective positions of the two characters, due to the fact that the author of the notes is Patin and not his interlocutor, does not affect the factual matter that interests me here: there is indeed no reason to doubt that Naudé, in the considerations attributed to him, is the main source of information on the irreligion of Italians in general and of numerous Italian academics in particular.

Now, let us consider an excerpt from the *Naudeana*, to which Kristeller denies any historical validity and authenticity: “All professors of this country, but mainly those of Padua, are “gens déniaisées” [people who know the ways of the world], especially as having reached the height of the science, they have to be disabused of vulgar errors of the age and well acquainted with the views of Aristotle”²⁴. This passage is not in the Vienna manuscript, but several extracts of the document develop the same ideas: “These great Italian philosophers are almost all atheists. They are always studying and trying to penetrate the depths of human philosophy in all its subtleties without inquiring into Christian religion or anything resembling

²³ See, in particular, the two books from Lorenzo Bianchi, *Tradizione libertina e critica storica, Da Naudé a Bayle*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1988 ; *Rinascimento e libertinismo, studi su Gabriel Naudé*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1996.

²⁴ “Tous les professeurs de ce pays-là, mais principalement ceux de Padoue sont gens déniaisées, d'autant qu'étant parvenus au faite de la science, ils doivent être détrompés des erreurs vulgaires des siècles et bien connaître l'opinion d'Aristote”, *Naudeana*, Amsterdam, 1701, p. 57.

it. Whosoever professes philosophy in *1° loco* in Padua is usually or almost always Atheist, as were Cremonini Zabarella, Pomponazzi, Castellanus, *et alii*".²⁵ This is a brutal and peremptory assertion: Italian philosophers, especially those of Padua, like Zabarella, Pomponazzi, Castellani and Cremonini are associated by Naudé with atheism. Moreover, Naudé not only possessed the works of these professors, as is demonstrated by the published catalogs of his personal libraries in Roma and Paris²⁶, but he had an intimate knowledge of them. He knew very well that, formally, all these authors protested their orthodoxy in their published writings, but he was also convinced that these books should be read contrary to their stated intentions : "Italy is full of libertines and atheists and people who believe in nothing, and yet the number of those who wrote about the immortality of the soul is almost infinite: but I think these writers believe no more than the others because it is a maxim which I hold very true, that the doubt they have is one of the prime reasons which force and lead them to write about it. Added to which all their writings are so weak that nobody can become better or more reassured because of them, but rather they are all likely to make people doubt everything"²⁷. In another excerpt from the manuscript, Naudé even goes so far as to compare these books supposedly dedicated to the demonstration of the immortality of the soul with the "dangerous MS. of Jean Bodin entitled *Heptaplomeres*": "There are in Italy a few books whose authors are not much better than this Bodin. I mean all those who wrote *de immortalitate animae* in and according to the intention of Pomponazzi, such as Simon Portius²⁸, Julius Castellanus, a certain Franciosus *in librum Aristotelis de divinatione per insomnia, cujus esse creditur Author Cremoninus*"²⁹ ["whose author is believed to be

²⁵ "Tous ces grands Philosophes Italiens sont presque tous Athées. Ce sont gens qui étudient toujours et qui ~~pénètrent~~ tâchent de pénétrer jusque dans le fond de la Philosophie humaine et toutes ses subtilités sans s'enquérir de la Religion chrétienne ni de chose qui en approche. Celui qui professe la Philosophie in 1° loco a Padoue est ordinairement voire presque toujours Athée, tels qu'on[t] été Cremonin, Zabarella, Pomponace, Castellanus [Giulio Castellani] et alij.", Vienna ms, p. 22-23.

²⁶ See Lorenzo Bianchi, "Per una biblioteca libertina : Gabriel Naudé e Charles Sorel", *Bibliothecae Selectae, da Cusano a leopardi*, éd. Eugenio Canone, Lessico Intellettuale Europeo, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993, p. 171-215; *idem*, *Rinascimento e libertinismo, studi su Gabriel Naudé*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1996, p. 253 sq ; Estèle Bœuf, *La bibliothèque parisienne de Gabriel Naudé en 1630 – les lectures d'un libertin érudit*, Genève, Droz, 2007.

²⁷ "L'Italie est pleine de libertins et d'Athées et gens qui ne croient rien, et néanmoins le nombre de ceux qui y ont écrit de l'immortalité de l'âme en est presque infini : mais je pense que ces Écrivains n'en croient pas plus que les autres car c'est une maxime que je tiens pour très vraie, que le doute qu'ils en ont est une des premières causes qui les oblige et qui les porte a en écrire. Joint que tous leurs écrits sont si faibles que personne n'en peut devenir meilleur ni plus assuré, mais plutôt ils sont tous propres a faire douter de tout", Vienna ms, p. 25.

²⁸ Simone Porzio. Cf. surtout son commentaire du *De Anima* d'Aristote.

²⁹ "Il y a bien en Italie quelques livres dont les Auteurs ne valent guères mieux que ce Bodin. J'entends tous ceux qui ont écrit *de immortalitate animae* dans et selon l'intention qu'en a eu Pomponace, tels qu'ont été Simon Portius, Julius Castellanus, un certain Franciosus *in librum Aristotelis de divinatione per insomnia, cujus autor creditur esse Cremoninus*", Vienna ms, p. 47.

Cremonini”, it's actually a work of Girolamo Franzosi]³⁰. The intention of Pomponazzi, for Naudé, who happily uses his writings (especially in his *De Fato*³¹), is of course to make clear the mortality of the soul. Here is how he presents the man who is undoubtedly one of his favourite authors: “Petrus Pomponatius was a Professor of Philosophy in Padua in the time of Leo X. They wanted to try him and he was in great danger of being burned, but the Cardinal Pietro Bembo saved him. [...] Pomponatius wrote two *Apologies* for his book, which were even worse than the book itself. I've never seen a philosopher who hasn't praised Pomponazzi, though he wrote against him. It's a sign that he was a good man. [...] Nobody has accused his book of falsehood and could disprove its reasons. However monks, who have more interest than anybody in the matter, should do, because their lives are based on this article”³². The claim that nobody has been able to refute Pomponazzi sounds like a kind of philosophical allegiance, even though, in other passages, Naudé seems to assert that if the metaphysical speculations of the Italians lead inevitably to atheism, he is for his part in favour of abandoning himself to a radical fideism: « Italy is full of this sort of people who believe only in fortune. They extend their mind into the essence of things, and penetrate as far as possible, and having gone so far, failing to find God along the way, they do not believe in anything more. To find God in the mess that is the world today, one must have modesty and humility, we must submit to the spirit of the sacred mysteries of Christian religion, as once did the early Christians, *Captivantes intellectum in obsequium fidei*”³³.

Naudé's own position, as I said before, is not easy to establish from these Patinian sources. But this is not, anyway, my point here; I'm interested primarily in the perception by these French scholars of the Italian academic circles. And I would now emphasize the fact

³⁰ Girolamo Franzosi, Hieronymus Franzosius,... *de Divinatione per somnum et de prophetia...*, Francofurt, apud J. Beyerum, 1632.

³¹ *Quaestio iatrophilologica de fato et fatali vitae termino, in Joh. Beverovicii Epistolica quaestio de vitae termino, fatali an mobili ? Cum doctorum responsis*, Lugduni Batavorum, ex Officina Ioannis Maire, 1639, pp. 3-82 ; ristampa anagrafica, edizione Annalisa Schino, Lecce, Conte Editore, 1995. About the *De Fato* from Pomponazzi, see Martin L. Pine, “Pietro Pomponazzi's attack on Religion and the Problem of the *De fato*”, in F. Niewöhner et O. Pluta (éd.), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999, pp. 145-172.

³² “Petrus Pomponatius était un Professeur en Philosophie a Padoue du temps de Léon X. On lui voulait faire son procès et il fut en grand danger d'être brûlé, mais le Card.^{al} Petrus Bembus le sauva. [...] Pomponatius fit deux Apologies pour son livre, qui étaient pires encore que le livre même. Je n'ai jamais vu Philosophe qui n'ait loué Pomponace, combien qu'il écrivit contre lui. C'est signe que c'était un bon homme. [...] Personne n'a encore argué son livre de fausseté et n'a pu renverser ses raisons. Les moines néanmoins le devraient faire, qui y ont plus d'intérêt que pas un, vu que sur cet article leur vie est fondée”, Vienna ms, p. 18.

³³ “l'Italie abonde en cette sorte de gens qui ne croient que la fortune. Ils étendent leur esprit dans l'être des choses, et pénètrent le plus avant qu'il leur est possible, et ayant été bien loin, faute d'avoir trouvé Dieu en chemin, ils n'en croient rien plus. Pour trouver Dieu dans le désordre qui est aujourd'hui dans le monde, il faut avoir de la modestie et de l'humilité ; il faut se soumettre l'esprit a ces sacrés mystères de la Religion chrétienne, comme faisaient autrefois les premiers chrétiens, *Captivantes intellectum in obsequium fidei*”, Vienna ms, p. 4.

that this perception is not only, nor primarily based on books. As is repeatedly indicated in the manuscript, Naudé draws his impressions and judgments from actual encounters with Italian scholars, who receive him at home, with whom he shared meals, and who eventually entrust him manuscripts to publish and of course, during informal discussions, who recount him anecdotes and give him information of all kinds³⁴.

In this respect, what he says about Cremonini seems to me fundamental. He presents him as “the most renowned professor who has never been to Italy” and for this reason excellently remunerated in Padua³⁵. Then he says to Patin, “I was engaged in conversation with Cremonini for three months”³⁶, undoubtedly in 1626, during his first trip to Italy. The *Naudeana* adds: “This Cremonini was a great character, a quick mind and capable of anything, a man “déniaisé”, cured of all silliness (“guéri du sot”), who knew well the truth, but which nobody dares tell in Italy”³⁷. This passage, absent from the manuscript of Vienna, is one of those in which Naudé seems to deviate considerably from the more moderate opinions of Patin and brings to the fore a more secret part of his thinking³⁸. But it is in the manuscript that we find two interesting anecdotes, which Pintard made famous, about the brilliant professor of Padua: « Cremonini professor of philosophy in Padua confessed to a few of his intimate friends that he believed neither in God nor the Devil nor in the immortality of the soul: but he was concerned that his valet should a very good Catholic, fearing, he said, that if he didn’t believe in anything more I do, one of these mornings he could cut my throat in my bed. He also said he wanted people to put this epitaph on his tombstone after his death: *hic*

³⁴ For exemple : “Vincentius Alsacius Crucius me donna a disner puis me donna la vie manuscrite de Cardano. Je la veux faire imprimer”, Vienna ms, p. 9 ; “Paganinus Gaudentius estoit un professeur en humanitéz à Pise qui y est encore vivant. [...] Il est fort mon amy combien que ie ne l’aye iamais vû. Nous avons fait et formé, fomenté et continué nostre amitié, per ceram linum et litteras animi nostri interpretes”, *ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵ “Il estoit aussi bien logé et meublé a Padouë qu’un card.^{al} a Rome. Il avoit 400 escoliers. Il avoit deux milles escus quand il mourut, et il n’y a en toute l’Italie aucun bien ny revenu si assuré que celuy la. [...] Cremonin auoit un beau Palais a Padouë, auoit un M.^t d’hostel, valet de chambre et autres officiers, deux carrosses et six bons chevaux.”, Vienna ms, p. 30-31.

³⁶ Then he adds “J’ai toujours soutenu son parti contre Caimus”. Pompeo Caimo (1568-1631), professor of theoretical medicine at Padua, was the opponent of Cremonini on a question of physiology about the “innate heat”.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

³⁸ Another excerpt following the precedent in the printed *Naudeana* is often and rightly quoted : “Cremonin cachoit finement son jeu en Italie : *nihil habebat pietatis, & tamen pius haberi volebat*. Une de ses maximes étoit : *intus ut libet ; foris ut moris est*. Il y en a bien en Italie qui ne croyent pas plus que Cremonin. Machiavel & lui étoient à deux de jeu, & Epicure, Lucrece, Cardan, Castellanus, Pomponace, Bembe, & tous ceux qui ont écrit de l’Immortalité de l’Ame. Pline a été un des chefs. Vanini en son Amphiteatre dit : que c’est la grande Secte que celle des Athées, qui est grossie de la plûpart des Princes, *utriusque ordinis*, & d’un grand nombre de sçavans anciens, comme Polybe, Ciceron, Cesar, Juvenal, Horace, Socrate, Homere, Euripide, Virgile, &c”, *op. cit.*, p. 56-57.

iacet totus Cremoninus”³⁹. In another passage of the manuscript, Patin even gives the source of these particularly daring confidences: a man named Du Closel, a Huguenot nobleman from Montpellier, hanged in 1635 for having tried to convince the Duke of Rohan to plott against Louis XIII in favour of Gaston d’Orléans.

One could also quote the account, drawn from Naudé of Claude Beauregard, author of the *Circulus Pisanus*, an important expression, yet poorly studied, of the philosophical heterodoxy produced in Italy during the seventeenth century⁴⁰: “He has been professor in Pisa and has is now replaced Fortunio Liceti in Padua. He believes only in Aristotle and mocks the entire religion of Italians, like most of them who believe in scarcely more, but they pretend to do so to conduct their business. *Ejusmodi hominibus utilitas facit esse Deos*”⁴¹. In other words, the attitude to religion of this French fellow who pursues his academic career in Padua, seems in fact quite close to that of his Italian colleagues; what preserves him from their hypocrisy, seems to be mainly, for Naudé, his national affiliation!

I plead therefore that we have to reconsider, despite Kristeller, the *Naudeana et Patiniana* and especially the Patin papers as genuine historical documents, which are extremely valuable for understanding the relationship of those French scholars who Pintard called the “erudite libertines” with Italy in general and Italian academic networks in particular, which this documentation abundantly shows not to be closed in on themselves but wide open to all scholarly productions. It appears also, as in the representation given by contemporaries, that the possibilities of free expression of the heterodox professors were strictly limited by the ecclesiastical power, which exercised over them a constant threat, and by the civil power which could ensure, but also remove its protection, imposing a relationship of complete dependence. These observations are certainly not new, but force us to consider seriously, accumulating and comparing all the available literature, behind or under the official

³⁹ “Le Cremonin Professeur en Philosophie a Padoue a avoué a quelques siens Amis particuliers qu’il ne croyait ni Dieu ni Diable ni immortalité de l’âme : mais qu’il avait soin que son valet fût tout bon catholique de peur disait-il, s’il ne croyait rien non plus que moi, qu’un de ces matins il ne m’égorgeât dans mon lit. Il disait aussi qu’il voulait que l’on mit sur son tombeau pour épitaphe après sa mort *hic iacet totus Cremoninus*.», See also this other passage from the manuscript : «*Vidi testamentum cremonini. Sic incipiebat : manebo in vocatione qua vocati estis ; ego totus in philosophia fui et in ipsa moriar. Obiit Patavij anno 1632*”, Vienna ms, p. 364.

⁴⁰ See yet the insightful analysis of the book by Toland, *Clidophorus* an by Boyer d’Argens, *Mémoires secrets de la république des lettres*, t. 3.

⁴¹ «Il a été professeur à Pise et est aujourd’hui à la place de Fortunio Liceti à Padoue. Il ne croit qu’en Aristote et se moque de toute la Religion des Italiens, comme la plupart d’entre eux n’y croient guères aussi, mais ils en font semblant pour en faire leurs affaires. *Ejusmodi hominibus utilitas facit esse Deos*», See *Naudeana et Patiniana*, p. 111 (same text but stoped after “religion des Italiens”). Cf. entrée “Palingen” of the *Dictionnaire des athées anciens et modernes* by Sylvain Maréchal, Bruxelles, 1833, p. 201 : “C’est-à-dire : ‘C’est le besoin qu’on crût avoir des Dieux qui fit imaginer les Dieux’. Le savant G. Naudé faisait grand cas de ce poème. Les théologiens reprochent au poète de trop faire valoir les difficultés des impies contre la religion.”

self-representation of the members of these networks – official self-representation, it must never be forgotten, to which belonged their books printed and signed –, what was said about these teachers, about entire sections of their teaching, deliberately left in the shadows, concerning their reputations on the highly sensitive topic of religion, concerning all the statements that were attributed to them, the anecdotes which were told about them, etc. In other words, rumour and gossip. But the same literature shows that the people targeted were not merely victims of these rumours; they reacted with increased caution but also by taking new risks, both recorded by hostile witnesses and by scholars positively fascinated by their masters. The philological rehabilitation of the Patin papers, in my view, is a prerequisite for a renewed and thorough study of the relationship between the “déniaisés” scholars from France and the academics on the other side of the Alps, in the wake then of René Pintard, but undoubtedly with a more suspicious approach and a very different methodological ambition, inspired, to a large extent, by the analysis and proposals of Martin Mulso about the identification and description of the intellectual networks through the heuristic notion of “philosophical constellations”⁴².

⁴² See especially, “Qu’est-ce qu’une constellation philosophique ? Propositions pour une analyse des réseaux intellectuels”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 2009/1 (t. LXIV), p. 81-110. However, at least in the case of the social circles described by Pintard and to which Naudé and Patin belonged, to call them “philosophical” would be somewhat reductive; “learned” would be more apposite, because embraces and goes far beyond strictly philosophical activity, which is of prime importance for only some of their members. Mulso insists in this article on the relevance of oral exchanges to the emergence of such configurations. It goes without saying that the Patin papers, in this respect, provide an invaluable body of documentation, even if at the same time they show the narrow limits of such a conjectural reconstitution of the conversational dimension, essential to the group.