

unillustrated opus on the geology of Tuscany. Corsi now helps us by providing rich context to aid our understanding of Orbigny as a historical object and contemporary figure (his rather controversial position in French scientific life remains contested). It is here that the real value of this introduction is revealed, for Corsi – uniquely, I believe, among present-day historians of geology – effortlessly moves his interpretations between the cultures of Italy, France and England and never once gives a sense that he is writing about a foreign country, whereas for most cultural historians of science (as in other disciplines) border-crossing has generally resulted in a weakening of argument. How interesting it is, then, to see the lack of respect for Orbigny, the ‘joker and miracle worker’ (p. 21), in his native Paris and compare this with Meneghini’s reception of him in Pisa as a bold and respected scientific worker known only through his publications. Meneghini felt sympathy for Orbigny, perhaps even empathy, but was also shaken by the assault on one of his main intellectual props as Meneghini attempted to grapple with the geology of Sardinia and Tuscany. I was particularly interested to read how late fossils came to the science in Italy; in England, recognition of the significance of the fossil was key to a revolution that took place in the science and it was this that permitted the definition of the peculiar fossil-based development that Sedgwick sold to the world as ‘English geology’. *Fossils and Reputations* is certainly worth picking up for this introduction as it provides wonderful insights on the impact of culture on the doing of science. The book as a whole is also something of a personal triumph for Corsi for it is the result of an arduous voyage of discovery, rescue, interpretation (of appalling handwriting) and transcription. But it is Corsi’s sophisticated and highly readable interpretation of what these letters tell us about three quite different cultures of production that makes this book especially valuable.

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PIETRO CORSI, *Fossils and Reputations: A Scientific Correspondence: Pisa, Paris, London, 1853–1857*. Pisa: Edizioni Plus–Pisa University Press, 2008. Pp. 411. ISBN 978-88-8492-564-0. €25.00 (paperback).
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Fossils and Reputations brings together correspondence between Igino Cocchi (1827–1913) and his teacher, Giuseppe Meneghini (1811–1889), which was written as Cocchi travelled between the scientific centres of Pisa, Paris and London, and in which he reported on the distinctive science cultures present in those cities. All but the first fifty-seven pages of this volume are transcriptions of these ‘long, detailed, rather open and at times brutally frank’ (p. 8) letters in their original Italian but with copious footnotes in English. Of particular interest, however – and considerably more accessible to English readers – is Corsi’s superb introduction, which gives new insights into the cultures of scientific production in these three European cities. While much historical work has been done on the social structures and interactions of early nineteenth-century British geologists (of all persuasions and levels), hardly anything similar has appeared on practices in France and Italy. In addition to the rich cultural setting Corsi provides, we are also treated to an account of two quite believable and different individuals, and their changing relationships as the well-travelled Cocchi became increasingly worldly. This narrative is greatly helped by extensive quotes from the letters in English.

I will leave readers to discover the rich cultural nuances of these different settings which so shaped the doing of science, what one might believe and who one might befriend, but I was surprised to see (as was the author) that Cocchi found far less scandal in London than in Paris. Indeed, from the moment of his arrival the young Italian discovered that Paris was filled with scientific intrigue. In this backbiting world, authorities began to dissolve into frail and selfish individuals. But Corsi does not use these letters to merely survey a culture and certainly not to exaggerate the extraordinary social relationships that lay beneath the cool head of science. Instead, he reveals under-resourced Meneghini, with his reputation on the line, desperately in need of authorities. Here Corsi’s prose moves swiftly and engagingly, capturing the political nuances and implicit alliances that were forged simply by the holding of particular opinions or the use of certain terms. Alcide d’Orbigny (1802–1857), for example, whom Cocchi increasingly dislikes, is soon revealed to have paid no attention to texts of other geologists and considered only their illustrations – or at least this is what Cocchi tells Meneghini when d’Orbigny dismisses the Italian’s