

The correspondence between Igino Cocchi and his teacher Giuseppe Meneghini in the 1850s gives historians an unrivalled opportunity to sample the lively scientific arguments and candid gossip of a network of geologists and palaeontologists - centred on Paris and London but spread throughout Europe - in the last decade before these sciences began to yield cultural prestige to prehistory and evolutionary biology. Pietro Corsi's superb edition of these letters, with its substantial introduction in English (including extended quotations in translation), will help historians to regain the pan-European perspective of the mid-century scientific world.

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Drawing upon a unique series of letters between an Italian professor and his travelling pupil, Pietro Corsi reveals a Europe in which the doing of science is determined by political geography rather than intellectual ability. Here, the resource-starved, immobile and paternalistic Giuseppe Meneghini uses the young Igino Cocchi to understand the politics of geological knowledge being formulated in two intellectual capitals, Paris and London. Corsi shows that as Cocchi stumbles upon unimagined and extraordinary worlds, it is he who becomes the teacher, his worldview utterly changed. Prefaced by a pioneering comparative study of science culture in Italy, France and Britain, this is a book that enables us to see what Cocchi saw as he saw it. At times that made me laugh out loud!

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Fossils and Reputations

Pietro Corsi

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A Scientific Correspondence: Pisa, Paris, London, 1853-1857

