

Annelies LANNOY, Corinne BONNET et Dany PRAET (Dir.), « *Mon cher Mithra...* ». *La correspondance entre Franz Cumont et Alfred Loisy. Édition, introduction et notes.* Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2019. 2 vol., LX-448 p. + VI-647 p., 7 illustrations (MÉMOIRES DE L'ACADÉMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES-LETTRES, 55). Prix : 120 €. ISBN 97-2-877-54374-3.

“Mon cher Mithra...” is the edited corpus of the entire extant correspondence between the classical archaeologist Franz Cumont and the French theologian, Alfred Loisy published here for the first time from the archives of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Split into two volumes, the first features an introduction and full transcripts of the 409 letters exchanged between the pair in the years 1908 to 1940. The second volume contains a full and forensic commentary on the key themes and references within each letter. While a specialist in theology, classics or ancient history will find great interest in the revolutionary science of the history of religions they discuss, a historian will garner much from this unique window into the context of crisis that afflicts the pair during the first half of the twentieth century. 2022 marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of Franz Cumont’s passing (1868-1947). In recent times, there has been a celebration of the Belgian classicist’s legacy set to coincide with this anniversary. “Mon Cher Mithra...” caps ten years which began with Corinne Bonnet’s contribution to G. Bongard-Levine, C. Bonnet, Y. Litvinenko, and A. Marcone’s *Mongolus Syrio salutem optimam dat : La Correspondance entre Mikhaïl Rostovtzeff et Franz Cumont*, Paris, 2009 and ends with a return to the fountain of Cumont’s correspondence. Next year will see the arrival of *Scripta Maiora XI*, the republication of Cumont’s monograph *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (1926) in the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana* series, following on from D. Praet, T. Kaizer and A. Lannoy’s *Doura-Europos/Franz Cumont, (Scripta Minora VII)*, Rome, 2020 (see review in AC 90 [2021], p. 377-378). This collaborative project has unlocked the otherwise intimidating scale of these materials and made them available with an extensive commentary taking them to an audience beyond the archives of the BNF. Cumont is known to have penned over a thousand articles and publications during his sixty-year career. Unsurprisingly, he was an inveterate letter writer, too. These hefty volumes (they weigh over a kilo) feature 409 letters exchanged between the historian of ancient religions with Alfred Loisy (1857-1940), the French modernist theologian whose *Les Évangiles Synoptiques* (1908) precipitated his excommunication. Considering the range of monographs on Cumont of late and the expertise of the editorial team, the spotlight of the introduction falls predominantly on the more senior figure of Loisy. Their correspondence spans four extraordinary and often trying decades for the pair from 1908 to 1940. Astonishingly, they represent just a little over 3% of Cumont’s correspondence which amounts to 12,000 letters in total. It has taken the skills of the archivist and the researcher for the authors to unravel the secrets of the letters buried under the sheer weight of this enormous archive. The mysteries of Cumont’s archive are slowly but surely being opened up to a wider audience by their concerted efforts. Accessibility is one of the keynotes to the publication project. The first volume contains a thorough and exemplary introduction exploring the pair’s biographies, personal relationship and history of their scholarship, alongside the historical and academic context to their writings across many different themes. They also direct readers towards and quote at

length from relevant letters to help illustrate these key themes from their discussions on the science of religions to the historical context in which they write. The rest of the volume is taken up by the transcripts of the full corpus of letters each displayed with an attempt to reflect their epistolary origin (dates, addresses, grammatical or typographical errors, emphases etc.) They provide a clean and highly efficient interface to what would only be overwhelmed by scans of the extant letters. The only criticism could be that the presentation is a little unimaginative – although highly practical when consulting select letters – it becomes a little relentless if reading cover to cover. There are scant images and the appearance of the text lacks the colour and personality that define the writings themselves. Perhaps portraits of the pair in the introduction would not have gone amiss, while the front-page alludes to the visual possibilities presented by supplementary imagery from the archives. It would also be beneficial to include select photographs or scans of the letters (featured on the covers) in their original condition to showcase the type of resource studied and provide a glimpse of the authors' own hands to offer more of a personal touch to compliment the main content. The second, larger volume offers a truly monumental commentary on the letters which reflects the assets of each of the editorial team at the pinnacle of their analytical and interpretative abilities. As the end of the introduction modestly states: « L'analyse que nous en proposons dans les commentaires accompagnant les éditions n'a pas la prétention d'épuiser l'immense potentiel intellectuel que recèlent des échanges touchant à tout un éventail de questions. Du moins nous a-t-il semblé important de mettre ce remarquable corpus épistolaire à disposition de toute la communauté scientifique qui pourra ainsi s'en emparer et le faire fructifier ». The comprehensive commentary achieves a great deal more and will, like its subjects, stand the test of time. The work will prove the definitive resource for centuries to come for any scholar consulting the texts for personal research. The two volumes provide an excellent entry point for a reader looking to dive deeper into the pair's "République des lettres" and delve beneath the surface of their published works. While a theologian or ancient historian will gain great insight into their privately conveyed perspectives on religious cults and the interconnection between Christianity and paganism in late antiquity, a historian will greatly appreciate the access into two totemic twentieth-century figures' responses to so tumultuous a period. The letters grant us prime access to witness events through their eyes as Europe pivots between two catastrophic wars and the seismic societal, economic and academic transformations of the early twentieth century. The First World War offers the best overview of the pair's correspondence and its direct relation to contemporary events. Their correspondence bookends the war. Cumont writes to Loisy in late July 1914 as relations between Serbia and Austria disintegrate following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand: « Ces jours-ci, nous avons vécu dans une attente anxieuse : il est effroyable de penser que la sauvagerie austro-serbe pourrait entraîner toute l'Europe dans une tourmente où risquerait de sombrer sa civilisation » (letter 108). The ominous atmosphere of doom inherent to Cumont's writing is only lifted some three years later when Loisy speculates that « peut-être nous entrions dans le dernier acte (de la guerre) » (letter 155), before writing somewhat more jovially of President Woodrow Wilson's visit to Paris: « Voilà Wilson parti. Cet homme est admirable. Il parle comme un pape. Je lui demande pardon de la comparaison. Je veux dire qu'il parle comme le pape devrait parler, s'il savait son métier » (letter 157). If Wilson

is likened to the Pope in Loisy's alternative pantheon of religious figures, then Cumont had long since become the pagan deity, Mithras. As can be expected, their correspondence hinges on the science and history of religions that so preoccupied the pair. The volumes' title originates from three of Loisy's letters in which Cumont is addressed in the persona of his subject and muse, Mithras. The affectionate pseudonym begins as early as the fourth letter exchanged between the two, « C'est vous qui êtes Mithra », before the familiar 'mon cher Mithra' is preferred: « J'aurais aussi, mon cher Mithra, bien des questions à vous poser sur l'histoire de votre divinité... » (letter 37). Loisy then launches into an investigation of the relationship between myths and rites within the cult of Mithras as the two debate their respective research into the religions of the eastern Roman world. For any reader less well versed in the technicalities of their discussion, the commentary offers four supplementary pages of analysis. The editors contextualise the discussion in the works and examples the pair discuss while also updating the analysis with modern references and bibliography to direct further independent research. As Loisy consults 'son cher Mithra', so too can a reader today when using Lanoy, Bonnet and Praet's splendid compendium which represents both a comprehensive resource and an excellent launchpad for future research.

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Laurent BRICAULT, Richard VEYMIERS et Nicolas AMOROSO (Dir.), *Le mystère Mithra, plongée au cœur d'un culte romain*. Morlanwelz, Musée Royal de Mariemont, 2021. 1 vol. relié, 573 p. Prix : 40 €. ISBN 978-2-930469-85-0.

Le Musée royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz, Belgique) nous a livré par le passé des catalogues d'exposition appelés à faire date, qu'il s'agisse par ex. d'A. Barbet & A. Verbanck-Piérard (Eds.), *La villa romaine de Boscoreale et ses fresques*, 2013 (AC 84 [2015], p. 561-563) ou d'A. Verbanck-Piérard, V. Boudon-Millot & D. Gourevitch (Eds.), *Au temps de Galien. Un médecin grec dans l'Empire romain*, 2018 (AC 88 [2019], p. 306-308). Dans le cadre d'une exposition consacrée au culte mithriaque, la nouvelle direction du Musée nous propose un catalogue relié réunissant une quarantaine de contributions co-écrites par 75 chercheurs internationaux. Le canevas en est simple : six parties distinctes alternent de brèves contributions – les auteurs paraissent avoir été contraints – et le catalogue des objets présentés. Ces parties permettent de broser un tableau général des questions posées : histoire de la découverte du culte (I), exploration du récit mythologique et de ses représentations (II), espaces de culte (III), communautés de dévots (IV), « Itinérances d'un culte » (V) et enfin, culte de Mithra et christianisme (VI). Un état de la question très complet qui témoigne de ce que le volume et la qualité des sources archéologiques disponibles supplantent désormais largement les sources écrites et iconographiques... Plusieurs volets sont ainsi abordés : l'historiographie et la réception du culte de la Renaissance au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle (e.g. R. Gordon), la caractérisation du culte et sa situation dans le polythéisme romain (e.g. C. Bonnet), l'évolution de sa perception comme « religion orientale » et culte à « mystères » (déconstruit ici par N. Belayche) ou le focus, imprimé par l'archéologie, sur le repas ritualisé des *cultores* (e.g. A. B. Griffith). Il s'agit aussi d'explorer l'origine du culte (sans trancher la question, les auteurs n'adoptant pas toujours la même