False testimonianze

A New Research Project on Epigraphic Forgeries

Lorenzo Calvelli, Principal Investigator of the Italian Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) «False testimonianze. Copie, contraffazioni, manipolazioni e abusi del documento epigrafico antico»



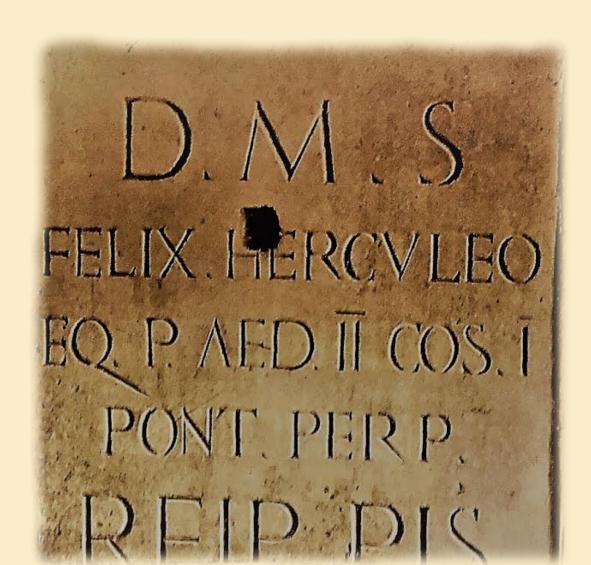
Forged inscription from Rome in the Villa Due Pini in Montecassiano (Macerata, CIL VI 25292)



Forged inscription from Ferrara in the Museo Lapidario Maffeiano (Verona, CIL V 180*)

ROUTLEA CURTAN MESTA, CUR PLOBAS ERAM. HVHC MORTVA HIST PULVIS ET WUZZ G. ERBOHIVS, ET MESIA PARENTES CVM GENTTY 205.

Forged inscription from Aquileia in J. Valvasone's manuscript, 1550 ca. Forged inscription from Pisae incised on an azzurrino marble block (London, British Library, Add MS 49369, f. 5r)



(Pisa, Camposanto monumentale, CIL IX 195* = Inscr.It. VII, 1, 4*)

The project

The Italian Ministry of Education, University, and Research (MIUR) recently approved a list of Research Projects of National Interest (PRIN) which includes a three-year investigation on fake ancient inscriptions entitled «False testimonianze. Copie, contraffazioni, manipolazioni e abusi del documento epigrafico antico». The project, which received 178,000 Euro funding, began officially on 5 February 2017 and will last until January 2020. Directed by Lorenzo Calvelli, tenured lecturer in Roman History and Latin Epigraphy at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the project involves scholars from eight research units, all based in Italian public universities.

The research units

- 1) Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (Lorenzo Calvelli: principal investigator and head of local research unit; Giovannella Cresci; Tommaso Gnoli: Università degli Studi di Bologna); research focus: forged inscriptions from western Venetia;
- 2) Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro" (Antonio Enrico Felle: head of local research unit; Marcella Chelotti; Paolo Fioretti) research focus: forged Christian inscriptions from Rome;
- 3) Università degli Studi di Genova (Giovanni Mennella: head of local research unit; Rossella Pera; Silvia Giorcelli: Università degli Studi di Torino); research focus: forged inscriptions from Liguria and Piedmont;

4) Università degli Studi di Macerata (Silvia Maria Marengo: head of local research unit; Simona Antolini); research focus: forged inscriptions from Umbria and Picenum;

5) Università degli Studi di Milano (Simonetta Segenni: head of local research unit; Pier Giuseppe Michelotto); research focus: forged inscriptions from Milan, Pisa, and Amiternum;

6) Università degli Studi di Pisa (Andrea Raggi: head of local research unit; Maria Domitilla Campanile; Margherita Facella; Eleonora Salomone: Università degli Studi di Genova); research focus: forged inscriptions from Etruria and Aemilia;

7) Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza" (Maria Letizia Caldelli: head of local research unit; Gian Luca Gregori; Silvia Orlandi); research focus: forged pagan inscriptions from Rome;

8) Università degli Studi di Trieste (Fulvia Mainardis: head of local research unit; Alfredo Buonopane: Università degli Studi di Verona); research focus: forged inscriptions from eastern Venetia and Histria

Investigating epigraphic forgeries

The project's first goal is to establish a common methodology that will lead to a shared definition of epigraphic forgery. Overcoming the discriminatory attitude of traditional literature on the topic of forgery, falsified inscriptions will be considered as the result of different cultures that express simultaneously a relationship with the classical world and with the age when each forgery was produced. In particular, the members of the eight research units, who all have significant expertise in local history, will concentrate on collecting evidence on fakes and counterfeits in the regions where their academic institutions are based.

Special attention will be given to understanding the specific features of each forgery, which may vary considerably according to different factors, such as

- the modes of transmission (there are forgeries which are only known through the manuscript tradition and others that were actually produced on stone or metal, the latter being inscribed on ancient or only partially ancient materials, as well as on non-antique objects);
- the purpose of the forgeries, which could be intentionally deceitful, such as the production of documents that would certify an otherwise untenable statement or the counterfeiting of ancient inscriptions that were sold to unsuspecting purchasers, but also nonfraudulent, i.e. carving passages from ancient literature onto durable materials, completing fragmentary texts as scholarly exercise, other academic and divertissements involving learned humanists;
- the methods of production: forgeries which were invented from scratch as opposed to complete, partial, or interpolated copies of ancient inscriptions.

Being aware of all these aspects will help us to build a number of micro-histories that, when combined together, will result in the first coherent overview of epigraphic forgery in Italy from the Middles Ages to the current day. We do not intend to focus specifically on the role played by Italian workshops in the production of forgeries that were sold to foreign collectors, because we hope that the relationship of made-in-Italy counterfeit inscriptions with the European and non-European antiquarian markets will be the subject of a future investigation within the framework of an international research project, whose potential partners we are currently scouting.

EDF - Epigraphic Database Falsae

The study of epigraphic forgeries is still in an embryonic stage. For instance, we currently lack an electronic database of all forged texts, nor do we have an image repository of the objects (either manuscripts or actual artefacts) that have preserved those texts. The main reason why such a tool has not yet been created is well as a virtual exhibit dedicated to the subject.

the absence of any scholarly consensus as to what should be considered a counterfeit inscription. In fact, existing sections devoted to forgeries in the principle printed collections of ancient inscriptions group together extensive and ambiguous sets of documents which include intentional forgeries, copies of ancient inscriptions, and medieval and early modern inscriptions that imitate classical models.

The main output of our research project will be an electronic archive of fake inscriptions called the EDF (Epigraphic Database Falsae: http://edf.unive.it), which will compile data from multiple sources and concern all known typologies of fakes, including transcriptions, reproductions, and facsimiles of thousands of forgeries. The EDF will be reachable through the EAGLE shared portal (European network of Ancient Greek and Latin Epigraphy: www.eagle-network.eu). Its developers will also ensure interoperability with the main existing online resources related to epigraphy, in particular the EDR (Epigraphic Database Roma: www.edr-edr.it) and the EDB (Epigraphic Database Bari: www.edb.uniba.it). Eventually, it is intended that the electronic archive will encompass all forged epigraphic texts that originate from the whole territory of Italy and, it is hoped, will extend its geographic range to include the rest of Europe and the Mediterranean, provided that partnerships with foreign and international institutions are created.

Other goals of the project

Aside from the EDF, the project has three main goals: (1) to establish a regular schedule of work-in-progress meetings and to produce scholarly publications on open-access resources;

(2) to organize an international conference on epigraphic forgeries whose proceedings will also be published;

(3) to disseminate its scientific results through a number of multimedia products, such as a digital library on epigraphic forgeries and an online gallery of forgers, as

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Forged inscription from Rome with dedication from Catullus to Lesbia (Roma, Sapienza - Università di Roma, Sala del Senato Accademico)





