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LE VIE DEL FALSO

Storia, letteratura, arte

A CURA DI

ANDREA COMBONI
SANDRO LA BARBERA



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INDICE

Ringraziamenti	p.	7
Premessa, <i>di Andrea Comboni</i>		11
Le vie del falso: partenza e viatico, <i>di Sandro La Barbera</i>		15
I. Il falso e l'impossibile. Storie di corvi imbiancati di gesso, <i>di Elena Franchi</i>		29
II. <i>Aemulatio vs Imitatio: On the Misattribution of the Hercules Oetaeus to Seneca, di Lucia Degiovanni</i>		39
III. Epigraphic Forgeries: A Critical Approach, <i>di Lorenzo Calvelli</i>		55
IV. False voci di donne, antiche e nuove, <i>di Federico Condello</i>		77
V. Dal «vero» al «falso» Catilina: retorica e politica negli <i>pseudepigrapha ciceroniani, di Giuseppe La Bua</i>		103
VI. I pontefici e l'emiro. Giuseppe Vella e le false lettere papali del IX secolo, <i>di Danilo Siragusa</i>		121
VII. Anonimato e pseudoepigrafia nei secoli XII-XIV, <i>di Francesco Santi</i>		143
VIII. Naming, Un-naming, and Renaming in the Forgeries of Annius of Viterbo, <i>di Walter Stephens</i>		163

IX.	Tipologie del falso in epoca umanistica, <i>di Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti</i>	p. 181
X.	Un falso laurenziiano: forme e motivi di una contraffazione, <i>di Giovanni Ciappelli</i>	199
XI.	Nel laboratorio del falsario: analisi e commento di un sonetto pseudocinque- centesco, <i>di Camilla Russo</i>	219
XII.	Forgery, Criticism and Anachronism: The Magdeburg Centuriators and their Critics, <i>di Anthony Grafton</i>	239
XIII.	Falsificazioni testuali nell'Ottocento italiano (e nel contesto europeo), tra «questione della lingua» e costruzione della nazione, <i>di Sandra Covino</i>	265
XIV.	«Con tutti gli artifici della menzogna e dell'inganno»: <i>L'ebreo talmudista</i> di Au- gust Rohling, <i>di Massimiliano De Villa</i>	289
XV.	Le <i>Conversazioni con Kafka</i> di Gustav Janouch. Vero e falso nella testimonianza dialogica, <i>di Luca Crescenzi</i>	317
XVI.	Riflessione su falsi e falsari. Il caso senese: Icilio Federico Joni (1866-1946), <i>di Gianni Mazzoni</i>	331
XVII.	Fra memoria e invenzione. Alcuni casi di retrodatazione, <i>di Federica Rovati</i>	341
XVIII.	Hoaxes, Imposture and the Fabrication of Literary Selves, <i>di Maggie Nolan</i>	361
	Indice dei nomi	377
	Autrici e autori	397

LORENZO CALVELLI

EPIGRAPHIC FORGERIES: A CRITICAL APPROACH

The goal of this essay is not to discuss the misuses of classical epigraphy in post-classical times nor to examine a specific forged inscription or the work of a single forger, but, rather, to establish a more theoretical framework for the study of epigraphic forgeries. More specifically, I adopt an epistemological perspective. First, I explore how fakes in epigraphy have been detected and assessed through time. Next, drawing on this survey of relevant scholarship, I challenge the current understanding of epigraphic forgery and suggest a different, more productive approach to forged historical sources, be they inscriptions or other kinds of documents. Finally, I propose some areas for future research and potentially fruitful collaboration.

The key points of the following arguments stem from a 5-year collaborative research project on epigraphic forgeries entitled *Forged Evidence (False testimonianze)* and funded by the Italian Ministry of Education¹. The project ran from 2017 to 2021 and involved about 50 scholars from 12 public universities across Italy. Our efforts led to the first systematic survey of epigraphic forgeries produced in Italy from the Middles Ages to the present and culminated in the establishment of a permanent open-access digital tool, called EDF (Epigraphic Database Falsae)². This resource currently provides textual and visual data on about 2,000 forged inscriptions, known both from the manuscript tradition (paper

I am deeply indebted to my dear friend and colleague Marc Schachter (Durham University) for providing most insightful and valuable comments on this manuscript.

¹ For a brief presentation of the project see Calvelli [2018a; 2018b].

² <http://edf.unive.it>; on the structure of this digital resource see Calvelli [2017].

forges, *falsi cartacei*) and from actual forged monuments and objects (material forgeries, *falsi materiali*). EDF is also a partner of the Europeana EAGLE network, the largest existing initiative in the field of digital epigraphy, which brings together numerous online resources from different European countries and aggregates their data through interoperability protocols and a shared portal³. Other outputs of the «Forged evidence» project include two open-access edited volumes devoted to the manuscript tradition of ancient inscriptions and to the cultural phenomenon of epigraphic forgeries⁴, as well as the proceedings of two conferences, the first of which have already seen the light⁵, while the second are in press⁶.

While working on our research project, it became clear that even today the shifting understanding of fakes and forgeries represents a crucial concern for the study of the past. As far as classical epigraphy is concerned, the relationship between inscriptions and forgeries is extremely complex and stratified. For example, in ancient Roman epigraphic cultures, the practice of forging inscriptions apparently already existed as early as the mid-5th century BCE. In a well-known passage of Livy's book 4, we are told that a forged inscription (*falsus titulus*) was once located under Lucius Minucius' portrait to demonstrate that he had been co-opted as a supernumerary eleventh tribune of the plebs, early in his career in 438 BCE⁷. But were this inscription to be discovered by archaeologists today, it would obviously be considered as an authentic ancient Roman artefact, if one bearing false testimony.

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³ <https://www.eagle-network.eu>; on the history of EAGLE to the advent of EDF see Caldelli and Orlandi [2020].

⁴ Calvelli, Cresci and Buonopane [2019]; Calvelli [2019a].

⁵ Segnani [2019].

⁶ The conference, entitled *Falsi e falsari nell'epoca di internet*, took place in Rome from 22 to 23 April 2022.

⁷ Liv. 4, 16, 4: *Sed ante omnia refellit falsum imaginis titulum paucis ante annis lege caustum ne tribunis collegam cooptare liceret*. On this passage see Lanfranchi [2015, 167-170]. On ancient epigraphic forgeries illustrating Roman portraits see Bellomo [2019]. On the notion of forgery in the ancient Roman world see Anguissola [2022].

So, what exactly is a forged or non-genuine inscription, since even a forgery may present some characteristics that identify it as authentic?⁸ As already pointed out by the Italo-Canadian archaeologist Gilbert Bagnani in a seminal article published over sixty years ago, it is difficult to offer a straight answer⁹. An example may clarify this point. In 14th-century Padua, some locals discovered a Roman funerary inscription commemorating a freedman named *Titus Livius Halys*¹⁰. The identity of this individual was immediately interpreted, or rather misinterpreted, as that of Livy, who was notably a native of ancient *Patavium*¹¹. The inscription was praised by humanists, including Petrarch¹², and became the object of intellectual pilgrimage. It was eventually displayed in the main room of the *Palazzo della Ragione*, where it still stands today (fig. 1). Only in the 16th century did scholars begin to realize that its text commemorated a former slave and not the ancient historian Livy. But this inscription is not a forgery: it is an ancient Roman monument bearing a genuine text, inscribed during the first half of the 1st century CE, whose interpretation was forged, or perhaps just forced, for a specific ideological purpose.

⁸ See Duranti [1998, 46]: «A document is “authentic” when it presents all the elements which are designed to provide it with authenticity. A document is “genuine” when it is truly what it purports to be».

⁹ See Bagnani [1960, 244]: «An object may be declared a fake because *a*) it is much too good to be true, *b*) it is much too bad to be true; because *a*) it is like countless other objects, *b*) it is not like any known object; because *a*) it confirms an established theory, *b*) it explodes an established theory; and so on and so forth». For a recent approach to the phenomenon of forgeries in modern times see Salvadori and Zamparo [2022].

¹⁰ CIL V 2865 = EDR168411 (S. Ganzaroli): «V(ivus) f(ecit) / T(itus) Livius / Liviae T(iti) f(iliae) / Quartae l(ibertus) / Halys / concordialis / Patavi / sibi et suis / omnibus».

¹¹ On the fortune of Livy's alleged funerary inscription see Bassignano [2015].

¹² On February 22, 1351, Petrarch addressed a celebrated letter to Livy, dating it «Apud superos, in ea parte Italie et in ea urbe in qua natus et sepultus es, in vestibulo Iustine virginis et ante ipsum sepulcri tui lapidem» (Petr. *fam.* 24, 8): see Pastore Stocchi [2015, 244]. For a full reproduction of the letter see Petrarca [2017].

In the 15th and 16th centuries, evidence for the existence of epigraphic forgeries became more and more frequent. Well-known forgers like Annius of Viterbo actively produced numerous fake inscriptions, both on paper and on durable materials like stone or metal¹³. Humanists began to realize that the diffusion of forgeries was facilitated by two factors: the impossibility of sight-checking all the surviving ancient inscriptions (what modern epigraphic science defines as autopsy) and the frequent displacements of inscribed objects from one location to another. The first of these concerns is reflected in the dedicatory letter of the handwritten collection of inscriptions which Fra Giocondo of Verona offered in 1489 to Lorenzo de' Medici, in which he claimed to have personally checked all the inscriptions transcribed in his manuscripts and emphasized the importance of his own, self-built certainty (*certitudo mea*)¹⁴. The second is apparent in the Flemish scholar Martin de Smet's complaint some decades later about the recurrent mobility of inscriptions¹⁵.

Around the same time, intellectuals began to realize that inscriptions could serve as antiquarian sources, meaning that they could be used to improve the understanding of ancient history and better integrate the narrative of ancient historians, such as Livy or other Greek and Roman authors¹⁶. In the early 17th century, another Flemish scholar, Jan Gruter, was the first to attempt the publication of a universal corpus of all the Greek and Latin inscriptions that were known in his day. His volume included approximately 12,000 texts: it is a pioneering enterprise, but also very unreliable, since its

¹³ On Annius see Fubini [2012] and Walter Stephens's article in this volume.

¹⁴ Koortbojian [2002, 313]: «Quamobrem etsi nefas est mihi his a quibus epigrammata ipsa suscepit non credere, certitudini meae tamen non placet aequare, ne quis errores si quos post exempla collata exemplaribus invenerit mihi adscribat».

¹⁵ Smet [1588, p. n.n.] : «Verum quum saepe ex uno loco in alium transportentur ac distrahantur, alium mihi certiorem et commodiore ordinem instituendum esse duxi».

¹⁶ On the development of epigraphic studies in the late Renaissance Europe see Stenhouse [2005].

author never inspected in person the inscribed monuments that he published. As a general rule, Gruter accepted earlier editions of epigraphic texts or new transcriptions, which he received by letter through his impressive network of correspondents all over Europe. He was also the first to devote a specific section of an epigraphic corpus to forgeries; his *inscriptiones spuriae ac supposititiae* include about 200 spurious inscriptions¹⁷. Despite this important innovation, the volume incorporates many false texts scattered throughout, as Gruter's *modus operandi* might lead us to expect.

It would be over a century before the first comprehensive rules for identifying forged inscriptions would be set out by the Veronese intellectual and nobleman Scipione Maffei. His *Ars critica lapidaria*, written between 1720 and 1722 but published posthumously in 1765, concerned both Greek and Latin inscriptions¹⁸. As an indispensable starting point, Maffei stated that a good epigrapher must carry out autopsy of all inscribed monuments (*marmororum inspectio*). He then called for a close examination of the contents of

¹⁷ Gruter [1601]. The section on *spuriae ac supposititiae* consists of 27 independently numbered sheets (I-XXVII); for its location in the various editions of Gruter's *Corpus* see Benedetti [2015, 951-952]. On the treatment of epigraphic forgeries in Gruter's *Corpus* see Calvano [2021].

¹⁸ Maffei [1765, 51-187]: «Caput I. Canones traduntur ad fictitias inscriptiones Graece loquentes dignoscendas: 1. Inscriptionum Graece loquentium commentitiae paucae deprehenduntur. 2. Marmorum inspectio admodum conductus ad eorumdem veritatem explorandam. 3. Inscriptionum verba ac continentia examinanda. 4. Inscriptiones recte describendae, cum ex literarum omissione vel permutatione errores non pauci oriuntur. 5. Inscriptiones summa diligentia resolvendae. 6. Inscriptiones summa circumspectione emendandae vel supplendae. 7. Graecorum epigrammatum versio ardua ideoque saepissime in eorumdem translatione peccatum. Caput II. Canones traduntur ad fictitias inscriptiones Latine loquentes internoscendas: 1. Antiquitatibus indubitatum ferme argumentum est, cum inscriptiones in aeneis tabulis incisae repraesentantur. 2. Ad lapidearum inscriptionum explorandam fidem, marmoris genus, faciem coloremque inspicere oportet. 3. Ad scripturae observationem atque iudicium literarum transeundum est. 4. Iam vero ab examine, quod oculorum opera peragitur, ad illud, quod mentis ac doctrinae subsidio instruitur, transeundum est». For a full commentary, see Calvelli [2019b, 88-90]. On Maffei's *Ars critica lapidaria* see Di Stefano Manzella [1979; 1985].

inscriptions (*inscriptionum verba ac continentia examinanda*); for an impeccable transcription of each sign (*inscriptiones recte describendae*); and for extreme carefulness in expanding abbreviations (*inscriptiones summa diligentia resolvendae*) as well as in proposing emendations and integrations (*summa circumspectione emendandae vel supplendae*). He also recalled the difficulties of translating epigraphic texts, especially those written in Greek (*versio ardua*), and finally maintained the importance of petrographic and palaeographic analysis (*marmoris genus, faciem coloremque inspicere oportet. [...] Ad scripturae observationem atque iudicium literarum transeundum est*).

Maffei's set of rules is strikingly modern. Most of his advice is still valid for a modern epigrapher. Given its intent to detect reliable information and distinguish it from forgeries, his decalogue may well be paralleled to contemporary attempts to react to the phenomenon of misinformation, such as Mark Zuckerberg's set of tips to spot fake news on Facebook (fig. 2)¹⁹.

In order to use forged inscriptions as a sort of teaching aid, Scipione Maffei even displayed some of them in the public museum, known today as the Museo Lapidario Maffeiano, which he personally set up in the courtyard of the Accademia Filarmonica in Verona²⁰. Yet, in spite of his educational attempts and the subsequent development of classical studies into professional and academic disciplines (*Altertumswissenschaften*), the number of epigraphic forgeries kept increasing well into the 19th century, a time which may conveniently be regarded as *l'âge du faux*²¹.

In a letter written to the young Danish scholar Olaus Kellermann in July 1835, the Italian master of epigraphic studies Bartolomeo Borghesi complimented the former's intent to set up a universal corpus of Latin inscriptions, above all because such a work would eventually allow scholars to get rid of all the impostures and forged texts that were still

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/formedia/blog/third-party-fact-checking-tips-to-spot-false-news>.

²⁰ See Buonopane [1985].

²¹ Kaeser [2013].

in circulation²². In particular, Borghesi had inherited from his master Gaetano Marini an almost obsessive mistrust towards the 16th-century polymath Pirro Ligorio, who had created thousands of forged epigraphic texts (scornfully labelled by Borghesi as *imposture*), mainly on paper, but also on durable materials²³.

After drafting the proposal for his epigraphic edition, Kellermann died of cholera in Rome in 1837, aged just 32²⁴. Ten years later, his project was taken over by Theodor Mommsen, who officially elaborated the modern notion of epigraphy as a science. Mommsen fully described his working methodology (namely «epigraphic criticism» or *Kritik der Inschriften*) in his application for funding for a *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, which he addressed to the Berlin Academy of Sciences in January 1847²⁵. A full paragraph of this text deals with the critique of the authenticity of inscriptions (*Kritik der Ächttheit*)²⁶. In Mommsen's

²² Borghesi [1872, 107] (Borghesi to Kellermann: San Marino, 31 July 1835): «Ma non è tanto per l'accrescimento di nuove cognizioni che io La felicito della sua idea, quanto per la rettificazione delle antiche. Sarebbe certamente un gran merito quello di far sparire un'infinità di false lezioni e di decidere così una quantità di controversie che hanno diviso gli antiquarii. Ma il vantaggio principale per me, vantaggio che non può ottenersi se non coll'impresa da Lei immaginata, sarebbe quello di togliere una volta allo studio dei dotti le imposture del Ligorio».

²³ On Ligorio see Loffredo and Vagenheim [2019]. On Marini's and Borghesi's assessments of Ligorian forgeries see respectively Vagenheim [2015; 2014]. On forgeries as a modern obsession see Lenain [2011].

²⁴ The text of Kellermann's *Denkschrift* is published in Irmscher [1964, 167-173]; see also Id. [1961].

²⁵ The text of Mommsen's proposal is published in Harnack [1900, 522-540]. For a digitized version of the document see https://cil.bbaw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Mommsens_Plan.pdf.

²⁶ Harnack [1900, 532-533]: «Die Fälschungen sind dreierlei Art. Erstens geschehen sie von den Kunsthändlern, welche zum Besten der unwissenden Dilettanten falsche Steine fabriciren oder auf wirklich alte Tabletten und Urnen moderne Inschriften setzen ließen. [...]. Die zweite Klasse der Falsare sind die Municipal- und Provinzialschriftsteller, die zu mehrerer Ehre der Heimath Inschriften schmieden, gewöhnlich auf dem Papiere. [...] Die dritte Klasse endlich bilden die Falsare vom Handwerk, die es sich zum Specialgeschäft machten, Inschriften mit Angabe der Fundörter, natürlich nur auf dem Papier, in Masse zu erfinden. Ein

view, one could identify three different kinds of epigraphic forgeries: those that circulated on the antiquarian market and had been deceitfully produced by antiques dealers (*Kunsthändlern*); those created by local scholars (*Municipal- und Provinzialschriftsteller*), usually just on paper, in order to celebrate their homeland; and, finally, those fabricated by professional forgers (*die Falsare vom Handwerk, die es sich zum Specialgeschäft machen*), which were also the most difficult to detect. The best (or, in Mommsen's view, the worst) example of these were Pirro Ligorio's fabrications (*vor Allem aber Pirro Ligorio der Neapolitaner*), towards which Mommsen inherited Marini's and Borghesi's mistrust.

Mommsen set out his principles for dealing with epigraphic forgeries in his edition of the ancient Latin inscriptions of the Kingdom of Naples, which he published in 1852²⁷. In his introduction to this work, which he appropriately dedicated to Borghesi, he developed his own set of rules for dealing with untrustworthy epigraphic documents:

1) «I included in my corpus all the inscriptions, the ones that I saw, and the ones that I did not see, the unpublished ones, and the ones that were previously published no matter in what way, the genuine ones, the suspect ones, and the fake ones»²⁸.

2) «The first goal of my work was to separate genuine inscriptions from forgeries»²⁹.

3) «I did not put on trial single inscriptions, but single authors»³⁰, meaning that rather than focusing on individual texts, he challenged the trustworthiness of the whole body of inscriptions transmitted by the author of a suspect

solcher war der Canonicus Pratilli von Capua, vor Allem aber Pirro Ligorio der Neapolitaner».

²⁷ Mommsen [1852].

²⁸ *Ibidem* [p. VIII = CIL IX-X, p. VIII] = Buonocore [2017, 371]: *Recepi inscriptiones omnes, visas mihi et non visas, ineditas et ante qualicumque ratione editas, sinceras et suspectas et falsas.*

²⁹ *Ibidem* [p. VIII = CIL IX-X, p. VIII] = Buonocore [2017, 371]: *In disponendis titulis primum falsos a veris secrevi.*

³⁰ *Ibidem* [p. XI = CIL IX-X, p. XI] = Buonocore [2017, 376]: *Non tam inscriptiones singulas in iudicium vocavi, quam singulos auctores.*

epigraphic tradition. This is a crucial point, which may be labelled as the principle of the reliability of the first witness: in Mommsen's view, if the earliest transcription of an inscription came from an author whom he judged to be a forger, then, no matter its contents, such an inscription should be considered to be false³¹.

The rules set by Mommsen for dealing with epigraphic forgeries have been incredibly influential over the past 150 years. It may also be added that the harshness of his judgement with respect to inscriptions did not contradict his liberal political ideology³². In fact, he recognized the presumption of innocence, but he also stated that «once the deceitful intent of an author had been proven, his entire credibility as a source is invalidated and his whole production must be labelled as forged»³³: in other words, once a forger, always a forger!

Underlying Mommsen's approach was the assumption that inscriptions are above all fundamental documents for the study of the past. In his positivist view, history had to be an exact science, but, in order to be so, it had to be written using objective and reliable primary sources³⁴. These included the texts of Greek and Latin authors, but also, and perhaps above all, the texts of inscriptions, which have been transmitted directly, without the mediation of medieval copyists. Mommsen decided to devote a specific section of his corpus at the end of the volume to epigraphic forgeries. Here, Mommsen differentiated forged inscriptions (*inscriptiones falsae*) from those that he only suspected to be fake (*suspectae*). This specific distinction was not applied very clearly in his subsequent work, even if it still appears in a letter written to Giovanni Battista de Rossi in 1881,

³¹ See Calvelli [2019b, 95-96].

³² On the relationship between science and politics in Mommsen's work see Demandt, Goltz and Sch lange-Sch öning en [2005].

³³ Mommsen [1852, p. XI = CIL IX-X, p. XI] = Buonocore [2017, 376]: «Legem secutus quae in foro obtinet, dolum non praesumi, sed probato dolo totum testem infirmari».

³⁴ On the groundbreaking epistemic value of Mommsen's work see Rebenich [2004] and Daston [2017].

where the *falsae* and *suspectae* are pointed out respectively as the hell and purgatory of inscriptions³⁵.

Another innovation in Mommsen's edition of the Latin inscriptions of the Kingdom of Naples that would prove crucial in his scientific method was his decision to follow a geographical order in presenting both genuine and false inscriptions³⁶. As Borghesi underscored approvingly in his review of Mommsen's volume, the absence of an inscription from its putative place of origin could be a key detail in determining that it was indeed potentially a forgery³⁷. In other words, central to Mommsen's goal of producing a critical edition of ancient epigraphic texts was the establishment of their geographic provenance as a key step in expunging the inscriptions that he judged to be fake.

Mommsen's *opus magnum*, the *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)*, which he curated with Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Wilhelm Henzen, stems directly from the methodology adopted for the edition of the inscriptions of the Kingdom of the Naples, but covers the entire territory of the ancient Roman world. However, in the *CIL*, there is no specific reference to the *inscriptiones suspectae* and the section devoted to forgeries is labelled as *falsae vel alienae*. The latter are inscriptions which do not originate from the place to which that specific section of the *Corpus* is devoted but are or were physically kept there. The fact that *falsae* and *alienae* are listed together in the same section and are both marked by an asterisk to indicate that they should not be treated as genuine inscriptions may cause confusion among non-specialists. Yet, it is clear why Mommsen decided to

Bologna

³⁵ Buonocore [2017, 891] (Mommsen to de Rossi: Berlin, 3 February 1881): «Le *falsae et suspectae* dovranno servire non solo per l'inferno, ma anche da purgatorio».

³⁶ On the order of Mommsen's epigraphic *corpora* see Calvelli [2019c]; Eck [2021].

³⁷ Borghesi [1852, 119]: «A meglio chiarire la fede di ciascheduna [iscrizione, Mommsen] ha prescelto nel disporle l'ordine geografico, siccome il più atto a smascherare le frodi dei falsarii, riconoscendo l'insussistenza delle citazioni sulla faccia del luogo, in cui si dicevano esistenti».

pair them. In his view, neither of these categories could be used as sources for reconstructing the history of the place where they were recorded.

This overview of the history of scholarship demonstrates the complex, heterogenous, and at times arbitrary approach to epigraphic forgeries adopted by humanists and their successors until the 19th century. Influential approaches such as Mommsen's have had important consequences for subsequent research and have represented a model for later *corpora*, including the *Inscriptiones Graecae*. In a seminal study on Mommsen's working method, Silvio Panciera showed how substantial the sections of the *CIL* devoted to the *falsae vel alienae* are and offered some significant figures for the different volumes of the *Corpus* (tab. 1)³⁸. For practical reasons, Panciera's study did not differentiate between these two sets of data, yet for our purposes they must be distinguished because the *falsae* and the *alienae* are two ontologically different categories of inscriptions³⁹. In fact, a major consequence of their conflation in Mommsen's work has been a tendency to minimize the potential historical significance of a vast number of dislocated or falsified inscriptions.

Of course, this does not mean entirely abandoning Mommsen's approach. The need to identify genuine inscriptions as crucial sources for understanding the past is still a basic requirement that must be met when approaching historical issues in a scientific way. Indeed, one of the most remarkable achievements of the «Forged evidence» project has been to restore the status of sources for ancient history to dozens of inscriptions that were previously thought to be false. These so-called vindicated inscriptions (*riabilitate*) include texts that were originally judged as forged in the *CIL* or by other scholars and that have subsequently been recognized as genuine and actually produced in Roman times. But putting these aside, can we now approach the material that Mommsen considered of little or no significance in more

³⁸ Panciera [2004].

³⁹ See also Buonocore [2001].

TAB. 1. *The figures of the CL volumes published between 1863 and 1902 [from Panciera 2004, 440, tab. 1]*

Date	Volume	Area	Collectores-Editores	Inscriptions
1863	II	<i>Antiquissimae, elegia, fasti</i>	Mommesen	1667
1869	II	<i>Hispania</i>	Hübner	5096
1871	IV	Pompeii, Stabiae, parietariae, vasa	Zangemeister, Schoene	3338
1872	V,1	Gallia Cisalpina	Mommesen	5091
1873	III, 1-2	<i>Aegyptus Ractia</i>	Hübner	6575
1873	VII	<i>Britannia</i>	Henze, De Rossi, Bormann	1355
1876	VI,1	Roma		3925
1877	V,2	Gallia Cisalpina	Mommesen	3905
1881	VIII, 1-2	<i>Africa</i>	Wilmanns	10988
1882	VI,2	Roma	Henze, De Rossi, Bormann, Hülser	6117
1883	IX	Calabri, Picenum	Mommesen	6419
1883	X	Brutti, Latium adiectum	Mommesen	8422
1885	VI,5	Roma, falsae	Henze, De Rossi, Bormann, Hülser	s.n.
1886	VI,3	Roma	Henze, De Rossi, Bormann, Hülser	9194
1887	XIV	Latium Vetus	Dessau	4278
1888	XI,1	Aemilia, Etruria	Bormann	4080
1888	XII	<i>Gallia Narbonensis</i>	Hirschfeld	6038
1889	III, Suppl. 1	<i>Aegyptus, Media Inferior</i>	Mommesen , Hirschfeld, Domaszewski	1047
1891	III, Suppl. 2	<i>Dacia, Dalmatia</i>	Domaszewski, Hirschfeld	2572
1891	VIII, Suppl. 1	<i>Africa Proconsularis</i>	Cagnat, Schmidt	6596
1891	XV,1	Roma	Dressel	2557
1892	II, Suppl.	<i>Hispania</i>	Hübner	1218
1893	I ² ,1	<i>Fasti, elegia</i>	Mommesen , Henzen, Hübner	34*
1893	III, Suppl. 3	<i>Pannonia Ractia</i>	s.n.	—
1894	VI, ⁴ ,1	Roma	Hirschfeld, Domaszewski	1838
1894	VIII, Suppl. 2	<i>Africa, Numidia</i>	Henze, De Rossi, Bormann, Hülser	6361
1898	IV, Suppl. 1	Pompeii, parietariae, vasa	Cagnat, Schmidt, Dessau	2622
1899	XII,1,1	<i>Tres Galliae, Germaniae</i>	Zangemeister	s.n.
1899	XV,2,1	Roma	Hirschfeld	3252
1901	XI,2,1	Umbria	Dressel	5459
1902	III, Suppl. 2,1	<i>Aegyptus Ractia</i>	Bormann	2651
1902	VI, Add. 1	Roma	Mommesen , Hirschfeld, Domaszewski	3185
			Hülser	6064

productive ways? New methodological approaches should be envisaged to encompass a more holistic study of ancient inscriptions, crucially including those kept in locations different from their place of initial installation. Epigraphic manuscripts, archival documents and works from the history of classical scholarship should be better investigated to reconstruct the succession of «epigraphic situations» in which inscribed monuments were displayed across time. Only by tracing back the «life-cycle» of inscriptions, from their present location to the time and place in which they were originally produced, can their comprehensive value as historical sources fully be appraised⁴⁰.

As for forged inscriptions, following an initial proposal by Alfredo Buonopane, it is now possible to suggest a more thorough distinction within the undiversified category of Mommsen's *falsae*⁴¹. A finer taxonomy should differentiate between:

1) actual forgeries, meaning consciously counterfeited inscriptions made for profit or fraud (material or intellectual), on the basis of the definition offered by ancient jurists that «a fake is whatever is not true, but purports to be true»⁴²;

2) copies or replicas: i.e., more or less faithful reproductions, made for the purposes of studying, collecting, exhibiting or preserving ancient epigraphic texts;

3) re-elaborations: i.e., modern inscriptions produced by altering the text of one or more ancient inscriptions or by taking inspiration from ancient epigraphic texts, without any claim of genuineness.

This distinction is also adopted in the Epigraphic Database Falsae (EDF), which includes a field named «forgery typology» that reflects these three categories («pure forgery», «copy of a genuine inscription», «modern inscription»).

⁴⁰ As an attempt to adopt this approach for studying the non-local inscriptions of the Museo Lapidario Maffeiiano at Verona see Calvelli [2019d].

⁴¹ See Buonopane [2014, 293]; Calvelli [2019e, 9-10].

⁴² Paul. *sent.* 5, 25: «*Falsum est quidquid in veritate non est, sed pro vero adseveratur.*»

However, it must be emphasized that it is not always easy to assess the actual intent of the individuals who produced or copied a forged epigraphic text. These categories thus offer points of departure for further inquiry into personal motives and broader historical contexts.

To conclude, it may be wise to draw a short wish list, which includes some *desiderata* for the near future. Since the «Forged evidence» research project was subject to the restrictions of national funding and only included Italian scholars, it would be advisable to apply for further grants and create an international network of scholars, who might be interested in studying the diffusion of forged inscriptions on a wider scale. Indeed, while most epigraphic forgeries were produced in Italy (at least as far as Latin inscriptions are concerned), they often travelled very far away and many of them are currently kept in public museums and private collections all over the world. In the future, the EDF may also work as a starting point for a proper digital edition of all forged inscriptions, using international standards for the representation of texts in a digital form, such as TEI and Epidoc⁴³. Cross-disciplinary exchanges regarding notions of authenticity with scholars interested in fields such as archaeology, art history, numismatics, diplomatics and manuscript studies are also vital and may lead to a better understanding of the cultural phenomenon of forgery⁴⁴. Finally, it would be ideal to develop some shared best practices to be used when dealing with forgeries, which could be exported outside the academia and serve as guidelines for museums and other institutions. Opportunities for cooperation with police forces that fight the illicit traffic of cultural heritage and the dispersal of both genuine and

⁴³ <https://sourceforge.net/p/epidoc>.

⁴⁴ In this respect, the launch in March 2022 of «Authenticity Studies. International Journal of Archaeology and Art», curated by a group of scholars of the University of Padua and published by Padova University Press as an open-access electronic periodical, is particularly welcome (<https://authenticity-studies.padovauniversitypress.it>). See also Baggio *et al.* [2019]; Salvadori *et al.* [2022].

counterfeit antiquities have already been tested and merit further exploration⁴⁵.

In short, the time has come to stop regarding epigraphic forgeries as spurious documents that scholars are just required to isolate and expunge. On the contrary, fake inscriptions must be considered the cultural products of the time when they were produced. They are moreover texts and objects which often continued to interact with the different contexts where they circulated. When properly acknowledged as such, forgeries merit the status of primary sources, of course not for the time to which they claim to belong, but rather for the epoch(s) when they were produced and circulated. In this way, their historic value will no longer be underestimated and a vast body of neglected materials will provide new sources for history, as well as for stories that we are only now learning how to tell.

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⁴⁵ See the Global Challenges Seminar *Dentro il falso: indagini interdisciplinari*, jointly organized on 22 November 2017 by the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the *Comando dei Carabinieri per la tutela del patrimonio culturale*.

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