

Annamaria De Santis and Irene Rossi (Eds.)

Crossing Experiences in Digital Epigraphy. From Practice to Discipline

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Managing Editor: Katarzyna Michalak

Associate Editors: Francesca Corazza
and Łukasz Połczyński

Language Editor: Rebecca Crozier

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14 EDV – Italian Medieval Epigraphy in the Vernacular Some Editorial Problems Discussed

Abstract: EDV (Epigraphic Database Vernacular) is a database collecting the vernacular inscriptions produced in Italy from the late Medieval to the Early Modern Age, and is a part of the EAGLE and IDEA projects. The present contribution illustrates the criteria used for the description and indexing of all inscriptions that record public script in language(s) other than Latin. The material is very varied as regards language, script, provenance, support and function. The author discusses briefly the editorial criteria that may prove most appropriate for its publication.

Keywords: medieval epigraphy, textual criticism, Romance linguistics, digital humanities, palaeography

14.1 The Corpus

EDV is a new database recording the corpus of all vernacular inscriptions that were produced in Italy from the middle of the 9th century to the year 1500 CE, provided they were meant to be displayed publicly and are still extant. The aim of the study – which has been progressing since 2011 – is to collect documentary evidence of the uses of language(s) other than Latin in public script in late Medieval and Early Modern Italy. As I write, EDV contains over 530 items, and new entries are constantly being added (albeit at a slowing pace now). We intend to publish the complete catalogue both through a website currently under construction¹ and in book form.²

¹ [www.edvcorpus.com/wp/]. The corpus is to be hosted on the EAGLE platform (Europeana network of Ancient Greek and Latin), a best-practice network co-funded by the European Commission, under its Information and Communication Technologies Policy Support Programme, and is now part of IDEA. International Digital Epigraphy Association [<http://www.idea-association.eu>] (see Chapter 17 in this volume, and Orlandi et al., 2017).

² The work was started as the subject of the MA and doctoral dissertations of Drs Luna Cacchioli and Alessandra Tiburzi, supervised by me at the University of Roma “La Sapienza”. The first results have been published in three different contributions: Cacchioli & Tiburzi (2014, 2015); Cacchioli, Cannata, & Tiburzi (2016), and a book is in preparation (Cacchioli, Cannata, & Tiburzi, 2019).

Nadia Cannata, Università di Roma, “La Sapienza”

The number of inscriptions so far identified and recorded widely exceeds our previous knowledge of the extent to which the language of the *illiterates* (i.e. those who did not know Latin) was used in public contexts. EDV collects them as a category for the first time. Therefore, even though quite a few of the inscriptions have received scholarly attention and are known (often very well known) to the scholarly community, it has not been possible – before all the data were collected and made available – to look at the historical phenomenon of public script in Early Modern Italy, produced in languages other than Latin in its entirety. In this respect, EDV constitutes material for a new discipline – medieval and early modern vernacular epigraphy – the study of which may be of interest not only to epigraphists and linguists (both philologists in general, and Romance philologists in particular), but also to scholars engaged in fields of enquiry as diverse as culture history and anthropology, palaeography, history of art and architecture.

14.2 The Background

In 1967, Augusto Campana's seminal article advocated, for the first time, the need to establish an epigraphic scholarship concerning itself with the study of early modern inscriptions (Campana, 1967). He argued that an inscription needs to be investigated and interpreted through the joint cooperation of palaeographers, art historians and linguists, since only such cooperation would allow for it to be fully understood in all its components: text, script and monument. This, of course, applies to inscriptions produced in any language. Nearly four decades later, the first systematic catalogue of medieval inscriptions was launched: IMAI – *Inscriptiones Medii Aevii Italiae* (*saec. VI–XII*), a series that aims to catalogue all inscriptions produced in Italy within that chronological span. It is organized according to Italian administrative regions (so far the volumes *Lazio – Viterbo*, *Umbria – Terni* and *Veneto* were published), and offers the text of the inscriptions (in both diplomatic and critical editions), a photographic reproduction of the pieces published, accompanied by a detailed palaeographic analysis of the script(s) used (Cimarra, Condello, Miglio et al., 2002; Guerrini, 2010; De Rubeis, 2011).

The interest in vernacular epigraphy has flourished somewhat later, but it yielded its first results at a quicker pace (Petrucci 1985, 1986, 1988). In 1995, Claudio Ciociola organized an exhibition and conference, *Visibile parlare* at the University of Cassino. The proceedings of the conference were published in a volume that effectively signalled the start of a dedicated scholarly interest for this body of texts. Perhaps bearing in mind Campana's remarks, the volume is arranged into three sections devoted, respectively, to Palaeography, Language History and Textual Criticism, and Iconography (Ciociola, 1997).

Some pioneering work has also been carried out on the use of script in Renaissance art. The first, and perhaps major such contribution is Dario Covi's 1958

PhD dissertation, now published as *The inscription in Fifteenth Century Florentine Painting* (Covi, 1986). Covi's work is complemented by A. Dietl's *Die Sprache der Signatur* (Dietl, 2008), and by the periodical *Opera Nomina Historiae*, launched by the late Maria Monica Donato at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa.³

During the past twenty years many new projects were undertaken, and have revealed a remarkable treasure of texts, mostly the result of interest in local history and linguistics. Particular attention has been devoted to Rome and the Lazio (Sabatini, Raffaelli, & D'Achille, 1987; Sabatini, 1996; Tedeschi, 2012, 2014), Venice and the Veneto (Tomasin, 2001, 2004, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Di Lenardo, 2014; Benucci, 2015; Ferguson, 2015), as well as to the earliest examples in Tuscany and elsewhere. A recent volume (Petrucci, 2010) catalogues all vernacular inscriptions produced up to the 13th century, and other similar cataloguing initiatives are also being undertaken outside of Italy.⁴ Therefore, we have a significant body of texts and templates to guide our criteria in setting up EDV, which aims at generating a comprehensive catalogue of Italian vernacular inscriptions, similar to IMAI, but with certain differences that may be worth discussing (Geymonat, 2014).

14.3 History, Geography, Forms and Functions

For historians, it is a known fact that the nature of the documents they are studying should shape the form through which such material is published, edited and circulated. The main feature of the corpus contained in EDV lies in its complex variety, in terms of time, geography, types, form, function, language and script.

The inscriptions were written in different vernaculars, in Catalan, and in Old French. Some are informal notices, other are epigraphs solemnly celebrating patronage. Many were inscribed in stone or engraved on metal, some are casually scratched on plaster. Many are painted on wood or canvas: sometimes solemnly displayed, sometimes disguised in the picture, or else discreetly placed to indicate the authorship of a painting or the biblical source of a scene. Those cut into stone were in most, if not all cases, not created by the authors of the text they bear. Others are written or scratched by whomever devised the message they convey. In both cases they show a degree of skill in using script, which may range from the barely literate to the highly professional.

³ [<http://onh.giornale.sns.it/>].

⁴ I am thinking of the project entitled *Écritures Exposées. Discours, matérialité et usages* jointly coordinated by the École des hautes études hispaniques et ibériques (Casa de Velázquez, Madrid), the Grupo de Investigación "Lectura, escritura, alfabetización" (LEA), Seminario Interdisciplinar de Estudios sobre Cultura Escrita (SIECE) (Universidad de Alcalá) and the Centre d'Etude des Littératures et Langues Anciennes et Modernes (CELLAM), Groupe de recherche sur culture écrite et société (GRECES) (Université Rennes 2).

All these features should be covered thoroughly for the database to be of any use to scholars, and organized according to categories that design a taxonomy that has historical significance.⁵ Let us consider, for example, the geographic distribution of the inscriptions. Reasons of practicality suggest the use, as general categories for localization, of the administrative regions of modern Italy (Lombardia, Veneto, Tuscany, Apulia, Sicily and so on). Some of those – Tuscany or Sicily to name only two – constitute a monument to Italian history, and have existed since the late middle ages with that very designation. Dante, in the *Comedia*, is addressed by his fellow Florentine citizen Farinata as “O Tosco” (Inf. X, 22). Others, however, would have been unknown at the time when the documents were produced. For example, Lazio did not exist before 1927. Dante used the term to refer to “Italy” as the land where Latins live (*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, I, *passim*).

In absolute terms Tuscany and the Veneto – accounting, respectively, for 154 and 107 inscriptions – house the highest number of inscriptions per area, and between them they cover nearly half (49%) of the corpus, as shown in the following chart indicating the number of inscriptions per region and the percentage the region occupies in the sample (Figure 14.1).

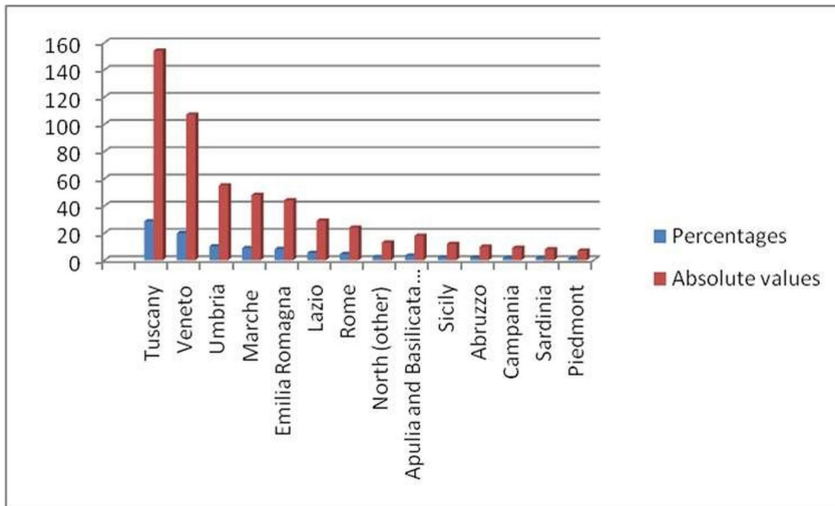


Figure 14.1: Number of inscriptions per region (in red) and the percentage the region occupies in the sample (in blue)

⁵ Similar issues are being addressed by many other projects that deal with the publication, in both paper and digital form, of epigraphic materials of a multilingual nature. See, for example the Hesperia project (discussed in Chapter 3 in this volume), the OCIANA project (Chapter 8) and the I.Sicily project (Chapter 19).

If, however, we were to classify our data according to the vernaculars used, it would be more useful to adopt a different grid, and distinguish between Northern Italy where Gallo-italic vernaculars were spoken, Friuli and the Veneto, Central Italy excluding Tuscany (the so-called *Italia mediana* which includes part of the Abruzzi), Tuscany, Southern Italy (Southern Abruzzi, Campania, Basilicata, Northern Apulia and Calabria), Extreme South (southern Apulia and Calabria, Sicily), and Sardinia.

To Northern Italy (from Valle d'Aosta down to, and including, Emilia Romagna) belong 171 inscriptions (32%), Central Italy accounts for 156 items (29%) (Figure 14.2).

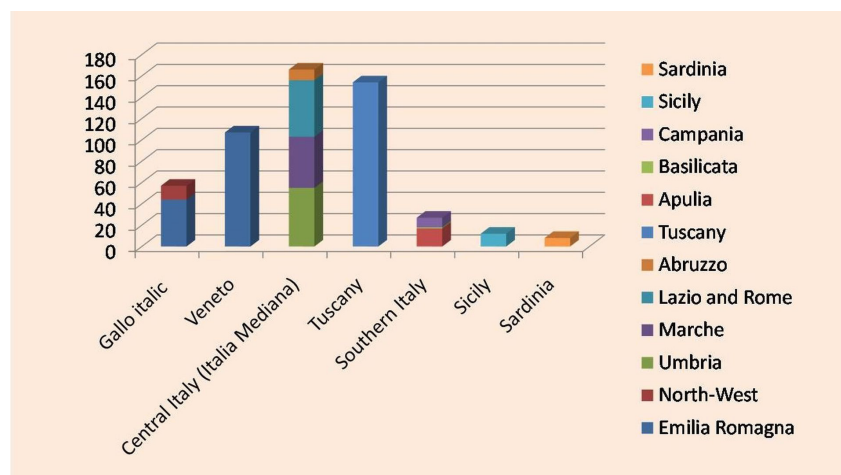


Figure 14.2: Number of inscriptions per region (according to the vernacular used)

If we were to include Tuscany where it geographically belongs, we would see a very different picture; one that shows Central Italy as the area where the vernacular was most widely employed in public life, and where it replaced Latin in many of its functions. Conversely, only a mere 11% of the inscriptions are attributed to Southern Italy, which – one might be inclined to think – remained more aligned with tradition (Figure 14.3).

But was it really? The imbalance demonstrated by the data is also due (maybe largely due) to the greater documentation available for Tuscany and Venice, thanks to the position they occupy in Italian history and culture. More scholarly attention naturally results in more documentation being available, which in turn could cause their standing out from the rest of the sample, perhaps more so than the facts would allow. The eye of the beholder alters the picture that is seen, and never more acutely is this the case than when we deal with the large volume of data that digital humanities make available. We need, therefore, to allow for the data to be considered under different headings and perspectives, and to be interrogated with the greatest possible flexibility.

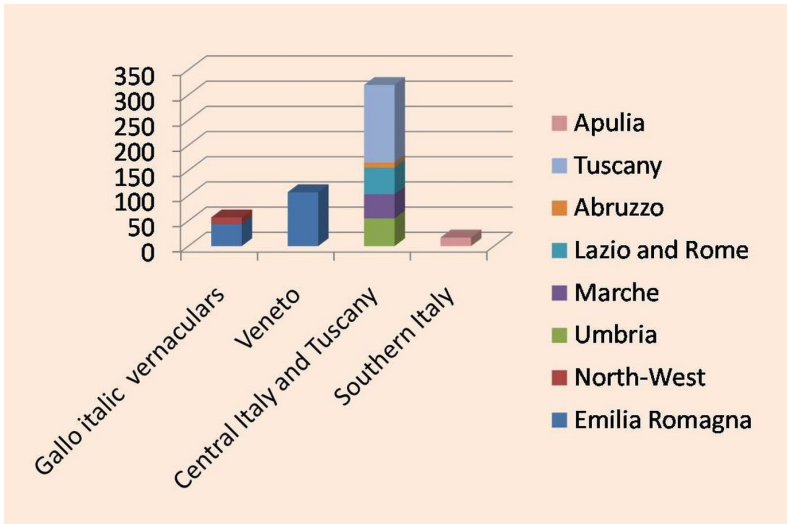


Figure 14.3: Use of vernacular in Central and Southern Italy

14.4 How are the Data Organized

Public script usually records the language dominant in a community at any given time. It constitutes one among the noblest forms of writing (Petrucci in Ciociola, 1997), because of its solemn and formal nature, which is usually appropriate to the dignity and importance of the message conveyed (be it the commemoration of the dead, of an event, or the issuing of a law). Public script also documents the relationship between orality and written records i.e. the language(s) in use in speech and in written documentation. They do not necessarily coincide, and literature often uses a language that may be very different, or a different language altogether, from the spoken language, especially in Medieval Italy. Inscriptions tend, however, to document a language that approaches more closely what was in use in the community. Inscriptions were produced to convey messages addressed to an entire group and – in order to be effective and to fulfil their function – they should have been written in a language understood by most, if not all. Often, since they were preserved to this day, they appear to have been valued by that community across the centuries as monuments to a shared past and shared identity.

The inscriptions included in the catalogue span nearly six-hundred years of history, and were produced across the whole peninsula in many different languages and scripts for a different array of functions. They were also engraved, painted or scratched onto a variety of different writing surfaces ranging from stone to plaster, wood, cloth, metal (gold, silver, bronze, iron), terracotta and ivory. All this information needs to be recorded and searchable within the online database, as well as in print.

For the purpose of this chapter we need to distinguish between the General Catalogue of the inscriptions, which will be openly accessible to all visitors of the EDV website, and the materials that will be published in print only. The website and book cover different functions and will therefore be used for different forms of publication.

We believe that the material we have identified and studied needs to be presented within a critical framework that online browsing does not allow, because it would make its consultation highly impractical.

In addition, we would like to address explicitly the issues of sustainability and durability. The high cost of maintaining digital records available over time is an issue for all researchers engaged in digital epigraphy projects.⁶ In our opinion it is advisable to provide a paper edition of the database in traditional book form, which is best suited to accommodate the complexity of the data (text in critical edition, linguistic analysis and paraphrase, all historical information on the building or painting hosting the inscription). The General Catalogue, available online, is organised under eight headings as follows:

1. ORIGIN (Region of production according to modern Italian administrative regions)
2. DATE (century, half century, quarter, year – as available)
3. CURRENT LOCATION (Site, Church, Museum etc.)
4. PLACE OF PRODUCTION (City, Town, Village)
 - (a) Linguistic area
5. IDENTIFICATION (e.g. General title, e.g. *Iscrizione di Commodilla, Lauda di Vanzone*)
6. WRITING SURFACE
 - (a) Bronze
 - (b) Canvas
 - (c) Copper
 - (d) Fabric
 - (e) Gold
 - (f) Iron
 - (g) Ivory
 - (h) Mosaic
 - (i) Plaster
 - (j) Silver
 - (k) Stone
 - (l) Terracotta
 - (m) Wood

⁶ An issue addressed by the creation of the IDEA network (see above, note 1).

7. TYPE (General Category according to the nature of the inscription, articulated in sub-categories, according to function, as appropriate):
- (a) Public Notices
 1. Memorials of major events (floods, pestilence, coronations etc.)
 2. Patronage
 3. Rulings (edicts, laws etc.)
 - (b) Captions
 1. Admonitions (proverbs, adages, moral statements etc.)
 2. Narrative captions in paintings
 3. Artists' signatures
 - (c) Funerary inscriptions⁷
 - (d) Inscriptions on objects of everyday use
 - (e) Graffiti and other extemporary notes
8. SCRIPT
- (a) Gothic
 - (b) Capital
 - (c) Mixed scripts (elementary level)⁸
9. ICONOGRAPHY
10. PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRODUCTION (Yes/No)
11. BIBLIOGRAPHY

The website also hosts a blog and an area for readers to give notice of any new items, or report mistakes or missing information, and anything else that may be of interest in relation to the corpus.

The printed edition of the corpus will include: a brief description of each item; the context in and for which it was produced; a summary of its content; the complete text of each inscription, both in diplomatic and critical edition;⁹ a critical apparatus; a detailed linguistic commentary of the text (phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon); and a palaeographical commentary and bibliography (Cacchioli, Cannata, & Tiburzi, 2016).

⁷ Funerary inscriptions should be a sub-category of public inscriptions, but given their numerosity and unique nature we have kept them separate.

⁸ Scripts which were executed at a very low level of skill and cannot therefore easily be classified are recorded as "elementary".

⁹ The metadata will be imported directly into the database. For each inscription an XML file containing the text elements encoded according to EpiDoc will be created (issues related to the encoding are extensively explained in Cacchioli, Cannata, & Tiburzi, 2016). The XML files published in the database (only a small selection) will be available for downloading. At the moment we will only tag inscriptions for the study purpose of the research group, at least for the time being.

The template of each entry is as follows:

ORIGIN (The data are arranged according to modern administrative regions)
 TITLE
 LOCATION
 DATE
 MATERIAL
 MEASUREMENTS
 TYPE
 FUNCTION
 NOTES
 DIPLOMATIC EDITION
 CRITICAL EDITION
 LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS (phonology, morphology and syntax, lexicon)
 SCRIPT
 BIBLIOGRAPHY
 PHOTO

Here is an example:

LAZIO
*Telamone erratico*¹⁰
 Ferentino (FR), Chiesa dei santi Giovanni e Paolo (Duomo)
 1220-1230
 Stone
 TYPE
 Caption
 FUNCTION
 Narrative
 NOTES

The short text is engraved at the basis of the stone basin supported by the telamone erratico. It is preserved in the Church of the Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Ferentino. It constitutes a lamentation about the weight of the stone.

V
 P
 E
 S
 A

¹⁰ The author of the record is Luna Cacchioli.

U[h],/p/e/s/a!

SCRIPT:
Capital.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS:

The inscription documents the first known use of both ‘uh’ and the verb ‘pesare’. Deli, dates *u[h]* generically as before 1492 and the verb ‘pesare’ before 1320.¹¹

Editions: D’ACHILLE 2012, p. 112.

Photos: D’ACHILLE A. M. 2012, fig. 32, p. 92.



14.5 Conclusion

In his *Sermones*, Augustine claimed that walls might sometimes function as open books. Indeed, throughout the early modern period, texts and images were often

¹¹ *DELI* (see Cortelazzo & Zolli, 1979–1988), s.v. *uh* and *pesare*.

used to enrich the walls of churches, private homes, public palaces and other seats of power. As literacy spread, and with it the public use of script, moral admonitions, proverbs, captions and signatures in paintings, mementoes of patronage or of some catastrophic event, laws and edicts, as well as funerary inscriptions, all appeared with increasing frequency. In Italy, the use of languages other than Latin in public life, and as verbal complements to artistic representation, also intensified over time at an increasing pace, and became rather dominant during the Quattrocento.

The sheer wealth of the material uncovered will certainly help understand how, to what extent and why, languages other than Latin were used as a complement to visual arts and architecture in Italy in the early modern period. It will also provide fresh material for the study of the relation established in time and place between language and the aesthetics of an artefact and the role that issues of verbal communication played within artistic representation. The material might also help document if, and how, writing was used as an adornment in contemporary art, as well as provide very useful information relating to the sociolinguistics of early Italian (when and why was the modern language and its varieties used in lieu of Latin and for what purposes), and the spread of a common language in Italy well before the Cinquecento, which is when we conventionally date the birth of the national language.

The template adopted aims to be able to organize data in a useful manner for the purposes listed above, by providing a flexible and historically accurate tool for the study of the materials made available to the wider community of scholars. It aims at catering for the needs of all historians, regardless of their field of specialization, and it is expected it will prove to be flexible and open to correction, resilient, and most of all, durable in time.

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