La Lettera e il Leone.
A New Epigraphic Database of Venetian Renaissance Inscriptions from Cyprus

Lorenzo Calvelli (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)
Tatiana Tommasi (University of Udine - Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

1. About the Project

La Lettera e il Leone, jointly developed by the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the Cyprus Institute, is a research project that examines Latin inscriptions produced during the Venetian rule in Cyprus (1474-1571) with the aim of better identifying their intellectual and cultural value. These monuments, combining Humanistic capital script with the crowned lion of Saint Mark, sanctioned Venetian authority on the island and clearly differed from those produced by the island's previous rulers, the French-born crusader dynasty of the Lusignans. Through these epigraphic media, Venice aimed to strengthen its link with the classical past, ideally reconnecting with ancient Rome.
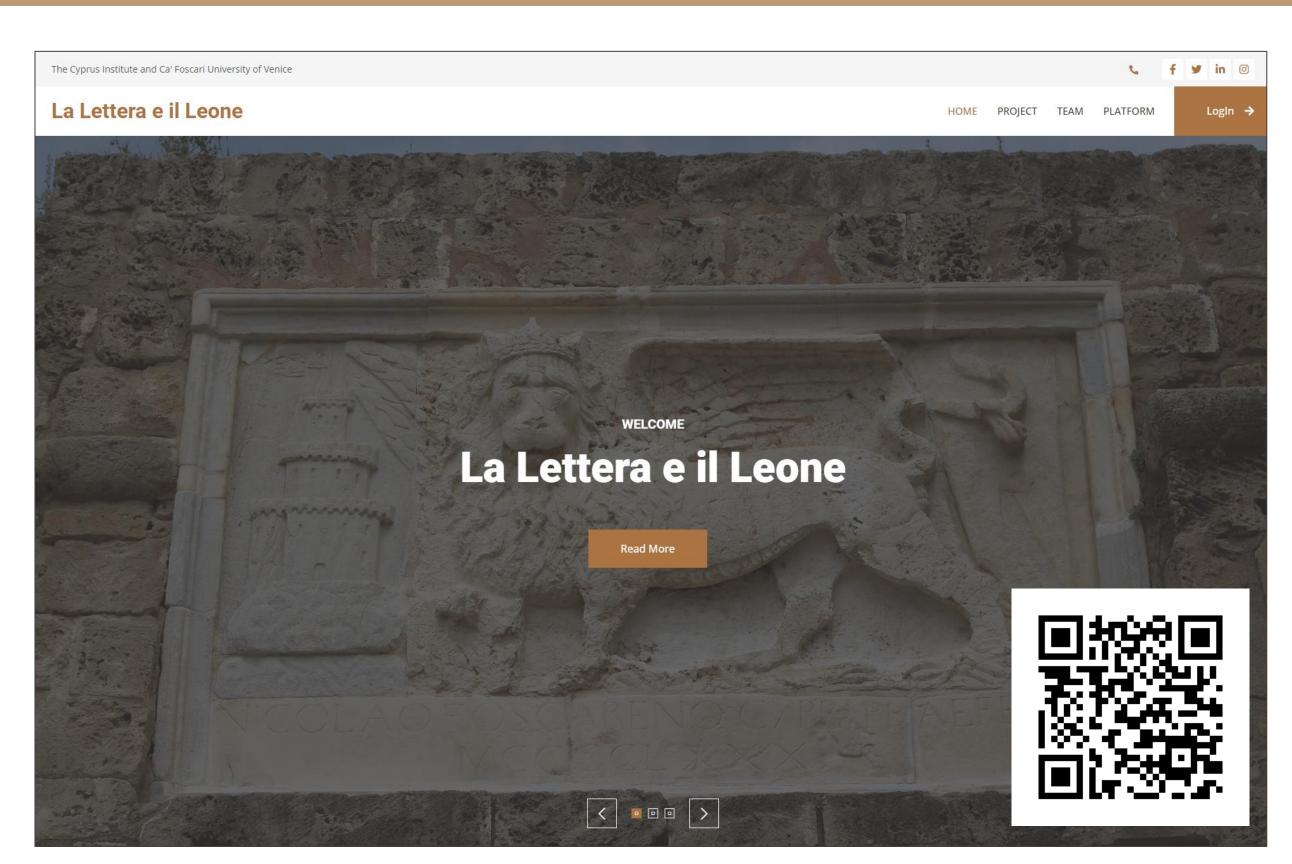

Fig. 1. Homepage of the project website: https://venetianinscriptions.cyi.ac.cy. The QR code provides direct access to the database.
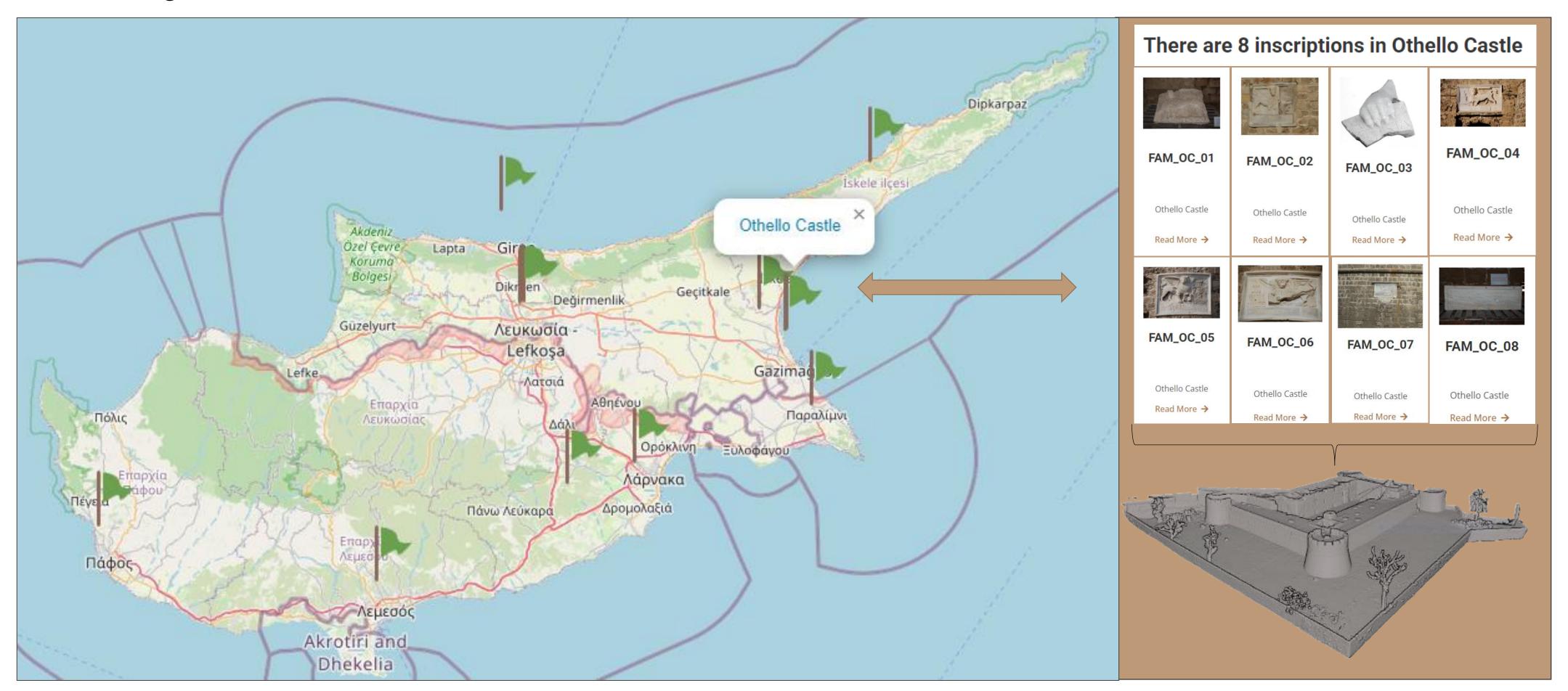

Fig. 2. Georeferenced cartography showing all the sites and the epigraphic records associated with one of them (Othello Castle).

2. Methodological Framework

The project focuses on surveying, documenting and digitally recording inscribed monuments through an integrated approach that considers the material, historical, political and socio-cultural implications of epigraphic landscapes.

3. Research Outputs

The main output of the project is an online resource that serves as the first Open Access platform specifically dedicated to Venetian Renaissance epigraphy (Figs. 1-2). This innovative tool complies with the international standards of Open Science and FAIR data.

4. Contents and Structure of the Database

A preliminary corpus of 27 inscriptions has been selected for inclusion in the database, either because they were written in Latin during the chronological period under consideration (1474–1571), or because they are closely linked to the political shift from the Lusignan dynasty to the government of Cyprus by the Venetian Republic.

The database allows for the visualisation of a georeferenced cartography showing the locations of the inscriptions, accompanied by digital cataloguing and, where possible, 3D reproductions of the monuments and their sites (Fig. 2). Inscriptions can be searched by browsing the map. This spatial approach aims to shed light on the communication strategies employed by the Serenissima to convey its authority on the island.

5. The Epigraphic Records

Each record is structured into the following main components:
1. a photo gallery or a 3D model;
2. a list of metadata (Fig. 3, white and grey table);
3. a description of the monument and its text (Fig. 3, white and orange table);
4. a digital edition in XML EpiDoc (Fig. 3, orange rectangle).

Furthermore, to ensure the interoperability and reusability of the data, the following strategies have been adopted:
1. the records have been linked to existing online resources (e.g. GeoNames);
2. metadata have been defined in accordance with the controlled vocabularies of the EAGLE Europeana project (Fig. 3, blue rectangles) and are fully compatible with EpiDoc;
3. a shared bibliographical library has been created for the project using the Zotero platform (Figs. 3–4, red rectangles).
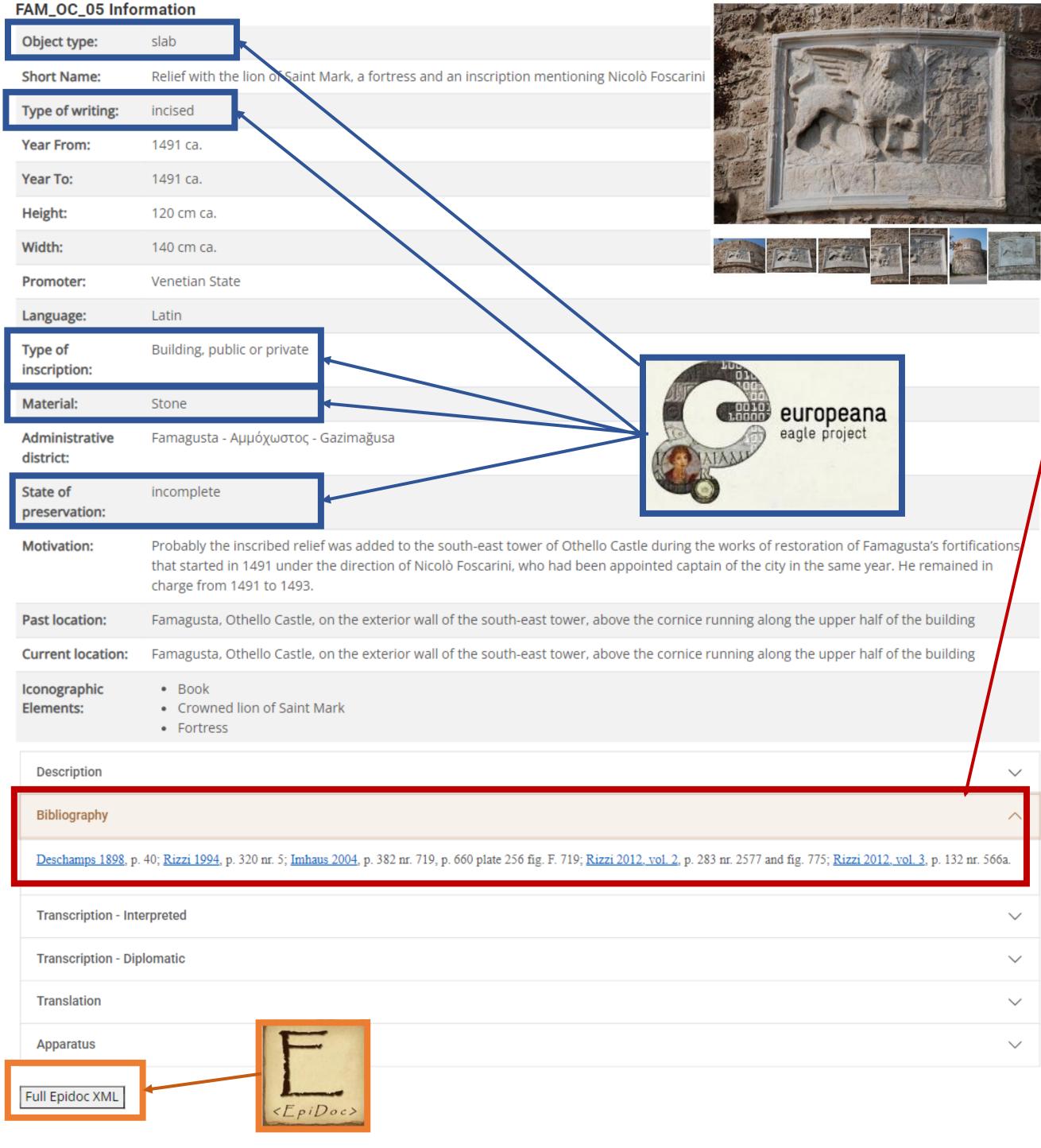

Fig. 3. Sample view of the main components of an epigraphic record (FAM_OC_05).

Fig. 4. Our shared bibliographical library on Zotero.

6. Prospective Developments

In the future, we plan to implement specific search tools that will enable users to filter the metadata with greater precision (e.g. by type of monument and iconographic elements).

Future funding could allow the corpus of inscriptions to be expanded to include epigraphic evidence from different periods of Cypriot history (for example, monuments produced during the Lusignan kingdom) or from other territories that were part of the Venetian Republic, including Venice itself.

Project Partners:

Project Team Members:
- Lorenzo Calvelli, Ca' Foscari University of Venice (PI)
- Avgoustinos Avgousti, The Cyprus Institute
- Nikolas Bakirtzis, The Cyprus Institute
- Tatiana Tommasi, University of Udine - Ca' Foscari University of Venice
- Mia Trentin, The Cyprus Institute
- Valentina Vassallo, The Cyprus Institute