Medieval and Early Modern graffiti: multicultural and multimodal communication in Cyprus

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Résumé. Cet article constitue une synthèse sur les enseignements que l'on peut retirer d'une étude des graffiti chypriotes du Moyen Âge et du début de l'époque moderne. La diversité de la documentation rassemblée reflète le caractère multiculturel de l'île et la capacité des auteurs de graffitis à utiliser différents systèmes de communication et d'écriture pour transmettre leurs messages. D'autre part, cette analyse préliminaire met en évidence la persistance quasiment immuable de pratiques d'ordre personnel et quotidien encore peu étudiées, comme celles qui, parallèlement à la religion elle-même, concernent la magie et la superstition. L'enquête sur les graffiti présentée dans cet article tend à apporter une contribution majeure à la redécouverte des anciennes pratiques liées à cet héritage immuable et à certains aspects de la vie quotidienne présents dans les archives cachées des édifices historiques de l'île.

Abstract. The paper aims to give an overview of what has emerged so far from the analysis of Cypriot Medieval and Early Modern graffiti. The formal variety of the collected material reflects the multicultural character of the island and the ability of the writers to use different communication and writing systems to express their messages. Moreover, the preliminary analysis of Cypriot graffiti is highlighting an intangible heritage of intimate and daily practices that are still little explored, such as magic and superstition alongside religion. The study of graffiti, as it emerges from the present contribution, can crucially contribute to recovering the intangible heritage of past practices and aspects of everyday life as they are preserved by the invisible archive of the island's historical buildings.

Introduction

"Dont desjeunay tres bien, loes soit Dieu; et puis men allay reposer à la grande église nommé saincte Sophie, cest une tres belle petite église...Pluseurs pellerins ont faict leurs marques, et mis leurs noms contre les murs. Je vis le nom de Jehan' Potiez de mon a lung des portas." 1

Jacques Le Saige, 1518

1 Voyage de Jacques Le Saige... (ed. Duthillœul, 1851), pp. 138-139; Cobham 1908, p. 58: “Then I breakfasted very well, thanks be to God, and then went to rest in the great church called S. Sophia, which is a very beautiful little church..... Many pilgrims have made their marks and set their names on the walls; I saw the name of Jehan Potiez of Mons near one of the entrances"
The words of Jacques Le Saige about his visit to Saint Sophia in Nicosia are one of the very few historical mentions of graffiti in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the material evidence shows a different picture. During the last 15 years, Medieval and Modern graffiti have been documented in 82 buildings located in both urban and rural areas, along the coasts and on the mountainous Troodos region (fig. 1). The graffiti presence and distribution in Cyprus testify the spread of this practice among locals of the various communities and foreigners who visited or lived on the island, offering a lively and original perspective on past societies.

The present paper aims to draw attention on this material, raising awareness about its presence and potential in the Cypriot context. The discussion will focus on graffiti evidence, describing its characteristics and showing how this complementary source can add an original contribution to the picture provided by traditional evidence, offering a new perspective to our knowledge on Medieval and Early Modern Cyprus. Moreover, the article will describe the features of graffiti practice, illustrating its integration in the socio-cultural and historical landscape of the island. The discussion relies on the material collected so far by the ongoing project GRAFMEDIA. The paper, though, aims to offer an overview rather than a final output, discussing

![Figure 1 — Graffiti sites distribution, author’s elaboration on Google map.](image)

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2 Other historical references to graffiti in Saint Sophia are by Pierre le Boucq, see Grivaud 2013, p. 499, n. 38 and Enlart 1987, pp. 124-125, and for the Royal Chapel (Pyrga) ibid., pp. 332-334.

3 GRAFMEDIA “GRAffiti MEDiterranean DIAlogue: Visual and verbal communication in the Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean” is a RIF – MSCA 2nd opportunity funded project. The aim of the project is twofold. The methodological goal is to develop specific digital tools for the documentation and visualisation of graffiti and their context, while establishing a methodology based on ontological description and standards, still not available for graffiti studies. The research output is to verify the consistency and typologies of graffiti on selected sites along the sea routes between Venice and Jerusalem, with Cyprus as a key point.
what has been discovered so far, providing possible interpretations and raising new questions to be addressed along with the project development.

The first part will introduce graffiti, identifying the nature of the act of tracing and scratching inscriptions and drawings on surfaces not intended for writing. Moreover, the often falsely assumed relation between graffiti and vandalism will be discussed and explained to prevent potential misconceptions. In the second part, graffiti features will be described based on the material collected in Cyprus so far. This section will explore the reasons why people used this way of expression, the different forms they chose and the places where they decided to write. This overview will shed light on the interaction of people with their environment through writing. The recovery of their messages, prayers and practices through graffiti will offer a new perspective in our knowledge not only on the Medieval and Early Modern Cypriot society but also on religious buildings, their value and function in the past. Locals and foreigners left their marks next to each other, adapting their written expression to the content and visual message they wanted to deliver. Hence, the study of their graffiti contributes to enriching and confirming the multicultural environment on the island.

Considerations about the nature of graffiti writing

Graffiti have a long-lasting history with roots in prehistoric times and rock art. Ever since, people have used this practice to communicate and to interact with the surrounding space through writing. Graffiti, though, are strictly connected with their context: the place and space where they are located. Their main feature is that they are found on surfaces not intended for writing, such as buildings and decorative elements (e.g. walls, columns, bricks, frescoes), wooden furniture, and natural elements (e.g. natural rocks, trees). This characteristic is an aspect which marks the difference between graffiti and epigraphs, their closest relatives in the array of written material. While epigraphs are the result of a planned process, graffiti are more spontaneous, traced with improvised or common tools (e.g. knives, pins, nails, charcoal, natural pigments) on non-specific surfaces. The fact that graffiti are displayed on surfaces not intended for writing has often related them to the act of vandalism. This is not the case, though, as demonstrated by various scholars. The analysis of material evidence and historical sources indicates that the practice of graffiti was tolerated and accepted until the 19th century, when the concept of Cultural Heritage (CH) started emerging.
Following the preservation approach to CH, particularly between the 18th and 19th centuries, graffiti were considered defacing elements, whether they were ancient or recent. The mistaken view that historical graffiti were the result of vandalism is attributed to enforced modern concepts to the study of the past. This misunderstanding arises from the fact that the practice of graffiti has been flattened and decontextualised. The understanding that writing or intervening on a historic monument is not tolerated in our times has falsely been applied to the past. A useful and relevant comparison would be between Medieval or Early Modern graffiti on coeval buildings and contemporary graffiti in modern urban spaces. This is the more appropriate perspective applied by graffiti scholars in their effort to contain the general distrust and misinformation about this practice. When graffiti is viewed within a correct historical, social and cultural context, they can provide useful information with positive contribution to socio-cultural studies of different periods. Of course, the possibility that some graffiti of the past can be attributed to vandalism cannot be totally eliminated. Nevertheless, even in this case, some clarifications are necessary. By definition, vandalism is an “action involving deliberate destruction of or damage to public or private property.” I will not dwell on the debate regarding contemporary graffiti, made even more complicated by the artistic dimension that some of these visual expressions have taken on in recent decades. For this period, drawing a line that separates vandalism from a form of communication and interaction with space is as complex as the society that produces them.

As for the Medieval and Early Modern graffiti, the current definition of vandalism is not applicable. The deliberate and targeted damage that can be attributed – in minimal cases – to graffiti is ascribable to the practice of damnatio memoriae. This is by definition the act of deliberately and often violently erasing the memory of a person or a fact not through the prohibition to name and perpetuate the memory but in perpetuating it in a mutilated way. To reach this result, intentional traces of destruction are visible to the public as a sign of condemnation. This practice was common in ancient times, and it actually entailed legal and social implications; it mainly affected public figures convicted of severe crimes such as treason. The intentional and manifested cancellation or obliteration of memory continues in the Middle Ages on written and visual media. In the epigraphic field, the damnatio memoriae is carried out through chiselling the name or damaging elements such as coats of arms and monograms. It does not affect the whole epigraph but only the specific parts referring to the person to be obliged, so as to emphasise the act of condemnation against him/her.

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10 Ashworth 2011, pp. 4-13.
12 https://www.lexico.com/definition/vandalism.
14 Ross 2016.
15 Vanderveen, van Eijk 2016; Bloch 2016. For contemporary graffiti in Cyprus see Karathanasis 2010; Leventis 2017.
16 Flower 2006.
17 Plesch 2002a, p. 140; Lori Sanfilippo, Rigon 2010.
18 Di Stefano Manzella 1987, p. 60; Giovè Marchioli 2010.
As described in more detail throughout the paper, Medieval and Early Modern graffiti do not testify the intention to destroy their support or obliterate the memory of figurations or texts; they merely record the interaction between the individual and the surrounding space as it is expressed in loco through writing. In Cyprus very few cases have been found to indicate damnatio memoriae practices so far. The evidence is connected to demons’ and sinners’ figurations on frescoes reproducing the final judgement, for example on the narthexes of Panagia in Moutoulla (15th c.) and Agios Sozomenos in Galata (1513). There deep, irregular X scratches are traced on different figures of Hell and its river of flames (fig. 2). An unusual example of damnatio memoriae can be seen in the church of Panagia Chrysopolitissa in Erimi. On the southwest side, there is a lunette with the depiction of two saints, Agia Paraskevi on the right flanked by a second unidentifiable saint. Both have a deep horizontal groove scratched at the base of the neck. The two figures also have a lacuna that cancelled the face, a widespread element in the Cypriot context. Many depictions of saints on the island’s frescoes have lacunae sometimes covering the entire face but more often limited to the eyes. The phenomenon is widespread and has not yet been sufficiently investigated. The only information available so far is based on oral traditions which provide two explanations. According to the first one, the saints’ eyes were intentionally removed by the ‘Turks’ who did not want to feel ‘seen’ by the hieratic painted figures when entering the Orthodox churches. This tradition does not refer to the more recent violent events of 1974 but goes back to earlier times of the Ottoman presence on the island. Therefore, the reference to ‘Turks’ is not necessarily related to Ottomans; it rather expresses the otherness, the diversity, especially from a religious point of view. Here the act does not aim to erase the memory but rather to cancel the presence

20 Stylianou, Stylianou 1997, pp. 84-89.
and possible influence of the saints. The same mechanism works on demons as attested by the erasing interventions on the characters that populate the last judgments mentioned above. In these cases, the damnatio memoriae does not want to abolish only the names or the figures but also their essence and influence. According to the second explanation, more attested in Troodos region, the action is linked to the strong cult of images in the Orthodox tradition. It seems that among the remedies for diseases, especially those related to eyes, there was a practice of collecting pieces of frescoes by scratching the surface to make drinking infusions, according to a practice mentioned in Byzantine literary sources and attested in Late Byzantine Crete. Even if these latter cases are not part of the graffiti practice, they too record the interaction of the individual with his/her space. Regardless of the given explanation, they testify a deliberate and targeted action performed through the act of writing/interacting in a broader way.

The surveys conducted in the last decade in Cyprus have revealed that graffiti can be considered neither accidental nor as the result of a superficial destructive will. Like other written sources, they record messages and ideas of people of the past, offering the advantage to recover the everyday human interaction with the landscape. Thanks to graffiti, historical buildings can be re-populated, revealing other aspects of their history, such as the intangible heritage of past practices and aspects of everyday life, which otherwise would be lost.

**Graffiti features**

**GRAFFITI DATING**

One of the most challenging aspects of graffiti study is dating. The number of graffiti that record date constitutes a small percentage of the material, so it is necessary to rely on other elements, the most important being the chronology of the support. Knowing the dating of the artefact and the surface on which the graffiti was traced, it is possible to establish a terminus post quem for the dating of the inscriptions. Other tools can further refine the chronology, where applicable. Palaeography, for example, can contribute to the analysis of textual graffiti. Stylistic comparisons with other media – e.g. manuscripts, fabrics, ceramics – can offer useful stylistic or formal elements that define a chronological timeframe for pictorial graffiti. The widespread motif of ship graffiti can be dated based on the shape and characteristics of the boat, if sufficiently accurate. The most complicated cases occur when the graffiti are realised in an elementary way, the writing indicating no dating elements, figurations are not detailed or well defined, and in presence of long-lasting symbols, such as the pentalpha and hexafoil. Despite the objective difficulties, however, it is always possible to define a chronological timeframe, or at least a terminus post quem for the creation of graffiti, and this is sufficient for their analysis. Though having precise historical references is useful, the analysis can still be carried out even

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22 Maguire 1995, p. 66.
with less detailed data. Graffiti should not be understood as a dating element but as a complex source that may offer information regarding “what” and “where”, “how” and “who” rather than “when”.

THE AUTHORS

In the past, as well as nowadays, anyone could potentially leave a graffito on any surface. Graffiti can be scratched with hard, pointed tools – e.g. knives, nails, etc.– or traced with charcoal or any type of pigment. Graffiti making does not require specific abilities nor does it need to abide to any formal rules; it is a free way of expression, accessible to every individual of every social stratum and gender. Hence, as in the case of Cyprus, graffiti provides valuable written evidence for areas where there is little, if any, written production.

The information graffiti provide about the authors rarely reveals their identity, yet it may indicate other factors, such as their literacy level, occupation and origin. Although names or initials are common, these do not always correspond to the identity of the writer. The inscription of a name, sometimes with a date, may indicate the visit of the writer following a very diffuse practice. In this case, however, in the absence of other sources that testify the actual passage of the person, and in the unfeasibility of a palaeographic comparison, the inscription cannot be considered as sufficient evidence to place a particular person in that place. Furthermore, even if we can prove the presence of the person in the place where his/her name is traced, we have to consider the possibility that the inscription is not autograph. In this case, the name inscribed does not identify the author. This occurs, for example, with commissioned writing, when the writer and the author of the text are two different people. This practice, though not widely attested, has been known since the early Middle Ages. In Cyprus, several examples can be seen at Bellapais Abbey on the slopes above Kyrenia. There, between the 18th and 19th centuries, visitors left their names and dates of their visits in various places, concentrating their graffiti on the ancient sarcophagus preserved in the cloister and on the lintel of refectory’s west door (fig. 3). At least four lists of names can be seen, traced with black colour in capital letters by four different hands. The oldest one dates to 15th October 1777 and is located at the centre of the lintel. The other lists are distributed on the sides, while the remaining space is filled with single names. The names mentioned belong to members of upper-class families of Larnaca who, as

25 Ibid., pp. 39-41.
26 Ibid., mainly p. 84.
27 Champion 2017, pp. 32-33.
30 They are members of the following families: Farkoa (Trentin 2019, p. 351), Wilkinson (Trentin 2019, p. 364), Michele Cirilli (Trentin 2019, p. 367), Porpy (Kyriazis 1946, p. 39), Caprara (Trentin 2019, p. 347), Catticich/Cativich (Trentin 2019, p. 348), Malagamba (Trentin 2019, p. 355), Dandolo (Trentin 2019, p. 350). Other commemora-
suggested by Hadjikyriakos, visited the abbey while sojourning at their vacation houses on the hills around Kyrenia. Although the presence of the people mentioned in Bellapais on a given date is almost certain, the memory of their passage was not left by their own hands but by a single – non-identifiable – one. The personal name, one of the strongest and most unique identifying marks, in these cases is allograph.

It is worth wondering why a writer chooses to write someone else’s name. There may be several reasons: one is given by the pilgrim from Piacenza, who describes his itinerary from the Italian city to the Holy Land in the 6th century. Upon arriving at the Cana wedding site, he claims to have written his parents’ names – not his own – on the side’s wooden benches. Handley discusses possible reasons for this choice, but what we are concerned about is the actual mismatch between the name of the writer and the name traced. On the other hand, a sure case of authenticity which represents a unicum in the field of graffiti study so far is represented in Barsky’s Cypriot graffiti.

Figure 3 — Bellapais Abbey, refectory’s door lintel, commemorative inscriptions. Author’s photo.

tive graffiti by Larnaca families are scratched on the sarcophagus in front of the refectory’s door (Van Belle, Brun 2020, pp. 90-92).

31 Hadjikyriakos 2018.
32 On 27th July 1817 Stefano Saletovich and Elena Rovetti celebrated their wedding at Marino Mattei’s (Consul of Ragusa) holiday home in Kyrenia. In the act the priest refers to the village of Kyrenia as luogo di villeggiatura (holiday resort): Trentin 2019, p. 176.
33 Handley 2017, p. 569.
34 Vasilis Grigorovich Barsky was a Russian monk who travelled extensively across Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean for 24 years (1723-1747) before returning to Kyiv. During his long-lasting trip, he kept an accurate account of the places he visited, enriched with drawings, which constitutes a precious source for the social and cultural history of the 18th century. He visited Cyprus four times, and during his last stay (1734-1736), in addition to the narration of his pilgrimage and the depiction of some of the monasteries and churches he visited, he
left five graffiti (fig. 4). In this case, we know with certainty that Barsky visited the places where graffiti are preserved, and from his Greek notations sometimes present in his drawings – the manuscript is in Russian – we also have a palaeographic comparison which further confirms the authenticity of the graffiti. Thanks to the accuracy of Barsky’s travelogue, it is possible to follow him step by step and see the places he visited through his eyes. Moreover, we can share his experience by reading his manuscript and integrating a missing part with the material evidence of graffiti. Grishin 1996, Della Dora 2016, Agayev 2019.
Another kind of information graffiti can provide is their author’s profession or social status. Textual graffiti sometimes record an ecclesiastical status, such as ιερομόναχος (priestmonk – Agios Georgios Teratziotis-Avgorou); ιεροδιάκονος (deacon – Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis-Kakopetria); carmelitano (Royal Chapel-Pyrga); Missionario Apostolico (Bellapais Abbey). Information about social status can be expressed in pictorial graffiti as well. Detlev Kraack collected heraldry and inscriptions from different sites of Europe and Eastern Mediterranean to trace the itineraries of nobles on their way to the Holy Land (14th - 16th century). The analysis of ship graffiti can offer, among other information, indication about the relationship of the carvers with the sea and maritime activities, as argued by Stella Demesticha and the KARABOI project team. Based on the collected material, the team suggested that ship graffiti carvers were connected with maritime activities at different levels. More detailed ship graffiti can be attributed to people with first-hand experience of ships – such as sailors or travellers with good drawing skills – while less elaborated or uncertain depiction could be the work of less skilled people, with no or little knowledge of ships.

The exact location of graffiti in a building can also suggest the writer’s social role. Although still under study, the presence of graffiti inside the churches’ temple in the Cypriot context inevitably suggests that at least some of the graffiti documented were made by the clergy, the only ones – in theory – allowed to access that area.

In addition, graffiti often indicate the author’s provenance. Such cases can be found in the church of Archangelos Michail in Choli (Pafoς): 1777 φεβρουάριος 28 / Τιμόθεως ιερομόναχος / Μορφου (1777, 28th February, Timotheos the hieromonk from Morphou) (fig. 5), or in Ayia Solomoni in Pafoς, where the capital inscription in the apse records de la Haye on the first line.

Palaeography can sometimes reveal the provenance or the learning environment of the writer. Latin texts traced in gothic or capital letters indicate a European influence, if not the writer’s origin; other examples of such evidence are the texts in Karamanlidika (Turkish texts

36 Stylianou, Stylianou 1997, pp. 53-75.
37 Schryver, Schabel 2003, p. 329.
38 Kraack 1997.
39 The project ‘KARABOI: The Ship Graffiti on the Medieval and post-Medieval Monuments of Cyprus: Mapping, Documentation and Digitisation’ (2014-2016) was coordinated by prof. Stella Demesticha (ARU) and funded by Leventis Foundation Committee and the University of Cyprus. The project performed an extensive survey on the island for the first time, collecting and studying the Cypriot ship graffiti. This study has contributed to developing and testing new digital approaches for the documentation and analysis of ship graffiti and their context from a micro to a macro scale. The result was an original insight on Cypriot past landscape and society, enhancing our knowledge about maritime activities from an original perspective, recovering information otherwise not recorded by traditional sources. https://www.ucy.ac.cy/marelab/en/research/karaboi
41 Stylianou, Stylianou 1997, pp. 419-421.
42 A complete site’s description enhancing the role of Agia Solomoni and Agios Lambrianos as shrines is offered in a forthcoming contribution by Philippe Trélat, with exhaustive bibliography (Trélat, forthcoming).
written with Greek alphabet) (fig. 6), Armenian and Arabic scripts.

The last aspect to consider in this section is the writer’s gender. This aspect is still underexplored in graffiti studies. One of the main reasons is that from the known material there are very few inscriptions which can be attributed to women, even when they record female names, due to the evidence discussed above with regard to graffiti authorship. In Cyprus only two female names have been attested so far, in Agia Paraskevi in Geroskipou (Σοφροωίας) and in Agia Solomoni catacomb in Pafos. In the catacomb it is recorded the name Marya Vyllem (?) (fig. 7) followed by other two fragmentary words, traced in lower case letters. The only extensive study on personal names in graffiti so far has been conducted by Matthew Champion for post-reformation England, and it confirms the insignificant number of female

Figure 5 — Archangelos Michail, Choli, inscription of Τιμόθεως ερημόναχος. Author’s photo.

Figure 6 — Karamanlidika graffiti from Kykkos, lintel of the church entrance. Author’s photo.

44 About the origin of Karamanlidika and its development between the 18th and 19th centuries see Irakleous 2013. Karamanlidika graffiti in the church of Agios Ioannis Lampadistis are presented in the contribution of Irakleous and Bakirtzis in this issue.

45 Foulias, Hadjichristodoulou 2019, p. 34.
names compared to male ones. On the other hand, pictorial graffiti do not reveal adequate elements to identify possible female authorship in graffiti.

**THE FORM**

One of the main characteristics of graffiti, as mentioned before, is the freedom of expression, with no rules concerning surfaces to use, content and form. Graffiti have always incorporated heterogeneous forms that can be grouped in textual and pictorial graffiti. For the Medieval and Early Modern period, textual graffiti record messages through alphabetical writing, while pictorial ones deliver messages through images and forms. In the field of graffiti studies, though, the concept of writing must be considered in its broader sense, not exclusively linked to textual writing. Graffiti writing is the act of delivering a message, a thought, an idea, a concept through the act of tracing signs – letters or forms. From the point of view of communication, it is necessary to know how the two different systems work. The textual-alphabetic system encodes a message through language. The idea is organised and expressed based on a linguistic structure and alphabetic writing. On the other hand, the pictorial system skips the linguistic
passage and directly expresses the concept through signs and/or forms which are associated with the message. The coexistence of the two systems within the same expressive form – graffiti – constitutes one of the peculiarities of these inscriptions, which allows holistic access to written communication and expression. The prevalence of drawings, symbols and shapes alongside texts in the Medieval and Early Modern periods in Cyprus should not be erroneously interpreted as a sign of low literacy level. In the field of graffiti writing, thanks to the absence of graphic rules, the authors had full freedom of expression. This means that even literate people could choose to use pictorial graffiti to communicate. If we consider how the two communication mechanisms work, it is evident that the choice of the system to use is mainly linked to the content to be delivered. For short messages consisting of a name and a date – which are the majority of Cypriot textual graffiti – linguistic coding is very effective. However, in the case of votive graffiti – such as ship graffiti – the message and the feelings underlying the act of offering or giving thanks are very difficult to summarise and organise in a text. Pictorial graffiti manage to condense more articulated messages into detailed and recognisable forms. Furthermore, pictorial graffiti can be more effective from a communicative point of view, as they use models deriving from visual culture. However, pictorial graffiti present a limitation compared to textual ones when it comes to interpretation. While we still know how to decipher a text today, as the alphabet has remained almost unchanged and the study of linguistic evolution is very advanced, we cannot say the same for pictorial graffiti. This kind of expression uses a communicative system that associates values and meanings with forms that often do not present continuity of use until today. Moreover, we do not have sufficient historical knowledge about the use and evolution of illustrated forms to be able to comprehend and interpret them. We must not forget that this is also the case for traditional writing systems, such as the Cypro-Minoan, which continue to be documented and analysed with alternative methods in the attempt to overcome the loss of information that would allow its reading and comprehension.

\[47\] If we consider, for example, heraldry, the name of a noble drawn in elegant cursive is not as effective as the depiction of his coat of arms. While in the first case the characteristics and elegance of writing indicate a good knowledge and practice of letters, which can indicate the high rank of the text's author, on the other hand, a coat of arms is immediately recognised and associated with the noble sphere beyond the degree of literacy of the audience. Furthermore, heraldry has a formal standardisation that makes coats of arms universally recognisable and associates them with nobility. An inscription containing the name of a noble does not have the same communicative effectiveness as, in the absence of titles or attributes relating to the person, even those who can read will hardly be able to associate it with the corresponding social status.

\[48\] An example is provided by a group of material called ‘lightning’ due to their zig-zag shape. There are still no explanations or interpretations for these forms, though they have been documented in England (there is no specific study, but they are listed within the ‘apotropaic types’ within the graffiti collected by the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey: http://www.medieval-graffiti.co.uk/page57.html), in Italy (Trentin 2011, p. 214) and in Cyprus (Trentin 2018). Their regional diffusion indicates that they are not random forms, and their frequency suggests that they had a meaning or a function within their communities. Unfortunately, the lack of comparisons with other contexts and the inability to find information about their possible value have often excluded them from documentation and study. Despite the absence of information and knowledge, these graffiti express an interaction and testify an act which needs to be considered within the whole panorama of graffiti.
The coexistence of textual and pictorial inscriptions in graffiti offers the opportunity to understand the Medieval and Early Modern informal mechanism of written communication better, exploring the ways visual and textual models were acquired, developed and reused. Studying the multimodal –textual and pictorial– communication, as recorded in graffiti, offers a precious insight on the Cypriot past society since it allows to include and embrace people and messages that are invisible in other sources.

REGIONAL AND SITE DISTRIBUTION

Though Medieval and Early Modern graffiti in Cyprus, as well as in Europe, are mostly found in religious places, this information must not mislead. Religious buildings have suffered the least from modifications and interventions across the centuries, thus preserving their original form and decorations more than other structures. Therefore, the claim that Medieval and Early Modern graffiti was a practice linked exclusively to the religious sphere is incorrect. This is evident in the study conducted by Juliet Fleming on graffiti and writing arts of Early Medieval England, which affirms that “... graffiti writing was as common, and as unremarkable, in domestic interiors as it was in the churches of early modern England”.

In Cyprus there are few non-religious sites where graffiti have been documented so far: Kyrenia castle, the Famagusta city walls, Kolossi castle and the house of Hadjigeorgakis Kornesios in Nicosia. Due to their historical relevance, these structures have been more preserved than others, along with their graffiti, as already observed in the KARABOI survey.

On a large scale, graffiti distribution across the island reflects the direction of the main routes connecting the cities and the major shrines (i.e. Kykkos and Stavrouvouni monasteries). The sites with graffiti are not precisely placed along the main itinerary but in a larger area, creating what Giuseppe Sergi defined as “area di strada” for the Medieval Italian routes. The concept aims to describe the flexibility of Medieval mobility which consisted of numerous and changing deviations around the main itinerary, defining an area rather than a specific route. This is also suggested by the study of the collected distributional data in Cyprus. Undoubtedly, further and more accurate study integrated with other material and written sources will shed light onto the Medieval and Early Modern mobility on the island. In this regard, a first step has been made in the KARABOI project. The distribution analysis of ship graffiti sites provided

49 Lohmann 2020, p. 41, n. 15.
50 Fleming 2001, p. 38.
51 Bertocci, Verdi, Şevketoğlu 2018.
53 Ibid., p. 376.
54 Ibid., p. 376.
55 Ibid., p. 367.
56 Ibid., p. 372, fig. 20.
57 Sergi 2000, pp. 3-12.
original information on the Medieval and Early Modern mobility of people related to the sea across the island.\footnote{Demesticha et al. 2017, pp. 370, 374. The paper collects an updated and exhaustive bibliography on ship graffiti.}

Apart from the regional scale, the distribution analysis can be performed on a smaller scale, focusing on the graffiti location on single sites. Within this analysis, it is necessary to point out that distribution data must take the general state of conservation of the site into account. The documented monuments often retain their original features only partially, since alterations over the centuries may have erased the graffiti.\footnote{In this regard, a significant example is the Kykkos Monastery, one of the main pilgrimage sites on the island. The current form of the monastery is the result of several interventions following the fires that damaged the complex (14th c., 16th c., mid-18th c. and 1813) (Chrysochou 2019, pp. 88-92). Despite the many changes and renovations that have affected both the church and the monastic structure, some graffiti are still preserved. These are inscriptions in Greek and Karamanlidika traced with black pigment – probably ink – on the architrave of the south-east door of the church (\textit{fig. 6}). The majority of inscriptions record the date, name and sometimes the origin and the reason for the visit – the pilgrimage. The dates, where preserved and visible, are all within the second half of the 18th century (1767-1796), roughly a decade after the last great fire that damaged the church. The high concentration of inscriptions on the lintel is comparable to what is visible in Bellapais Abbey (\textit{fig. 3}). Here many graffiti have been traced in black colour on the architrave of the refectory’s western door, indicating that their writers were not discouraged by the height of the surface (between 2.5 and 3 meters in both sites). The difference between the two sites, however, is that while in Bellapais Abbey non-restored surfaces still preserve their graffiti, in Kykkos, unfortunately, most of the surfaces have been replaced and restored numerous times, erasing any graffiti they may have had. The link between the absence of graffiti and the refurbishment of decorative and architectural surfaces in Kykkos is further confirmed by graffiti evidence inside the rooms that once housed visitors and worshippers. Some Greek inscriptions dated between 1842 and 1850 have been documented on the few plaster fragments left in place to date. The chronology of these graffiti is in line with the restorations that took place in the cells and the guesthouse after the 1813 fire. During the subsequent reconstruction and reparations, the old plaster, together with the damaged structures, was replaced, erasing any previous graffiti but creating new surfaces suitable to be inscribed.}

From the data collected in Cyprus so far, it seems that graffiti can affect every part of the building and the liturgical furniture. As already noticed in the KARABOI project,\footnote{Demesticha et al. 2017, p. 370.} graffiti are found on the external and internal churches’ walls, as well as in the temple, on the altar, on lintels, on columns, pillars and wooden furniture such as iconostasis, seats and proskynetaria.

The distribution of graffiti in each site is linked to several factors which must be considered since they contribute to recovering past people’s interaction with the building. A first element to evaluate is the spaces’ accessibility. While external surfaces of religious buildings are always accessible, internal ones can be subject to limitations. The area of the apse, limited by the iconostasis, is the space where the liturgy takes place; therefore, its access was limited to clergy, at least on a theoretical basis. Another considerable aspect is the surface’s features. Some materials are more suitable to be engraved or inscribed than others due to their smooth and non-porous surfaces. Cypriot graffiti is mainly found on frescoes (e.g. the three churches of Galata, Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis, Panagia tou Araka),\footnote{Trentin 2010, pp. 310-311.} on undecorated plaster (e.g. the apse of...}
Panagia Iamatiki in Arakapas,62 Panagia Angeloktisti in Kition,63 the refectory and dormitory of Bellapais Abbey,64 Agios Athanasios and Kyrillos in Mennogia,65 marbles (e.g. the facade slabs of Saint Sophia in Nicosia,66 the columns at the door sides in the church of Bellapais and Agios Mamas in Morphou),67 local limestone (e.g. Panagia Stazousa, Agia Marina in Psematismenos,68 Panagia Chryseleousa in Emba).69 Although rarer, graffiti are also found on wood, as on the iconostasis of Apostle Andreas’ rural chapel of Kykkos,70 on the benches in Agiasmati and the proskynetario of Agios Sozomenos in Galata.

Yet the main factor affecting the distribution of graffiti on a single site is the sacred spatial hierarchy. The religious spaces are marked by different degrees of sacredness derived from their functions and use during the liturgical ceremonies.71 The sacred hierarchy of space influenced the distribution of graffiti inside a building, as already illustrated by various scholars.72 As mentioned above, graffiti record man’s interaction with space and the message the author wants to deliver results from the combination of a content expressed through writing which is positioned in a precise place of the building.73 Some examples can clarify this concept in a better way. The primary function of a carved name or identity symbol – e.g. coat of arms or a monogram – is to record the presence of a person in that place (always keeping in mind the aforementioned considerations regarding authorship). This function can be associated with others, depending on the location of the inscription. When a name or identity mark is placed on the iconostasis or close to the relics of a saint, a devotional component arises, as it will be argued below.

Indeed, a more accurate analysis regarding the relationship between forms and distribution of the inscriptions within the individual sites will allow a more precise picture of the people’s interaction and perception of space. The ongoing research may identify certain patterns that need to be verified in order to provide complete and accurate results. So far only one study of the KARABOI project has explored the graffiti site distribution in Cyprus, though it focused on ship graffiti, detecting a predominance of this material inside the apse and on the north wall. The graffiti inside the apse have been interpreted as votive offerings, given the sacredness of the area, in line with other studies on ship graffiti distribution across the

62 Ibid., p. 312.
65 Ibid., p. 357.
67 Stylianou 1957, p. 57.
68 Demesticha et al. 2017 p. 376.
69 Ibidem, p. 376.
70 Stylianou 1957, p. 65.
71 Hani 1996.
72 Treffort 2003; Yasin 2015; Ritsema van Eck 2018; Plesch 2002a.
73 The correlation of Form, Content and Space and their mutual relevance for the description and analysis of Medieval and Early Modern graffiti are explored in a forthcoming paper (Papers from the Institute of Archaeology-University College London).
Mediterranean and beyond. Even though the reasons for the high frequency of ship graffiti on the north walls is still uncertain, the integration of other types of graffiti and the distributional analysis on a more significant number of buildings currently undertaken by GRAFMEDIA will hopefully provide a more comprehensive and detailed picture in the future.

Space, therefore, plays a major role in the study of graffiti as it indicates the point of interaction chosen by the creator both on site and in a broader landscape. This represents a fundamental element to be considered during the analysis and interpretation of the inscriptions, as it will be argued in the following part.

THE FUNCTION

As an informal writing practice, graffiti are strictly connected and stimulated by the environment and can convey many functions, which are the result of the particular combination of form, content and space in every graffito. For this reason, it is difficult to provide a definition that sets patterns because each case must eventually be considered on its own. This part, therefore, aims to offer an overview of possible functions as they have been identified so far through the analysis of Medieval and Early Modern graffiti in Cypriot religious buildings. Leaving a graffito, in general, but even more so on a religious space, aims primarily to enforce someone’s presence in that specific place. In this sense, writing becomes a form of self-affirmation and self-representation within a certain environment. The concept of space appropriation through graffiti has been studied and discussed, showing how other functions can be expressed alongside this essential aspect.

The main functions identified in the Cypriot context so far are three: recording an event, expressing devotion and requesting protection. Commemorative graffiti are among the most widespread in various contexts, as they reflect the primary function of graffiti, that of affirming the presence of a person in a specific place. They usually show the name of the author or an identifying symbol (i.e. coats of arms, monograms, identity marks, hands). In textual form, such graffiti may present elements that include the date, name, social position, origin, the reason for the visit.

Barsky offers an excellent example of potential variations within commemorative graffiti. His five graffiti have a common base but develop with different details based on the site.

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77 Van Belle, Brun 2020, pp. 30-38.
78 The shortest form consists only of the date, name, religious position and provenance, without the frame drawn in all other cases, and is located in Apostolos Andreas chapel close to Kykkos monastery. It records “Βασίλειος μοναχὸς Μοσκοβόρρωσος 1735” (Basil, the Moscovite Russian monk, 1735): Stylianou 1957, p. 65. The most articulate inscription is found in Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis, on the pillar to the left of the iconostasis, under St. Peter’s feet: “*1735* / Αναβὰς ἀπὸ τῆς τρικουκιάς /ἐις τό Τροοδος κ(α)ι ἐστορίσας τους ἐκείσε / χιόνας, τό θ’ ὡδορ τῶν αετῶν τὴν θαυμαστήν / μπαμπακόπετραν καὶ τὸν ἅγιον Μάμαντα τὸν / κουρέμενο τὸ δε λεβάδιον / ἥμετο καὶ έπερα τούτοις διακοινοῦσας καὶ πρὸς τὴν δέ σεβασμίαν / ἱερα χαρίν ἐγὼ ὁ ἐν μο/ ναχοῖς ἔλαχιστος ταύτων Μοσκοβοβορρώσθος Κυπριακοπολίτης ὁ καὶ περιθηγήτης. Ιουλίου λ’ “ (1735. I climbed
The essential elements found in Greek graffiti recording a visit (fig. 4) – date and name – are also present in Latin (figs. 3, 7), Armenian, Karamanlidika (fig. 6) and Arabic graffiti, even if the texts often record a single name with no chronological indications. Only in few cases has the typical formula *hic fuit* been documented associated with Latin graffiti (e.g. Panagia tou Araka,79 Bellapais Abbey,80 Royal Chapel in Pyrga).81 Apart from textual form, the memory of the passage can also be expressed in pictorial graffiti. Identification signs such as coats of arms and identity marks indicate the visitor's identity through other elements. In Cyprus these are not very frequent though; coats of arms, for example, are found only in seven sites out of the 82 investigated so far. According to Kraack,82 heraldry is generally attributable to Westerners, but this has yet to be confirmed for Cyprus.83

A final form to investigate is the cross, which has a commemorative value, as it expresses the identity of its writer, while also carrying devotional aspects for what it represents. The cross is a universal symbol that, within the panorama of graffiti, assumes different connotations depending on the context and positioning in the building.84 It may be isolated, used as identification like in official documents; it may precede an inscription, usually a name, in order to emphasize it. It may also represent a form of extreme humility expressed by the author in the use of an autograph, a religiously connoted mark. In the Cypriot context, crosses are not very attested (8 sites),85 and in many cases their function is not to express identity but rather the sacred value of the symbol, especially when associated with more articulated inscriptions (e.g. Agios Antonios Kelia, Agia Paraskevi Gerokipou).86

Commemorative graffiti may also record other events, such as death87 (e.g. Agia Paraskevi Gerokipou “*ΕΚΨΗΘΕ ο δούλου του θεού Γεώργιος / οκτώβρηω ΗΛ ….*” = + God’s servant up from Trikoukkiás to Troodos and I described Chiònás, Lounata ton aeton, the marvelous asvestos and St. Mamas Kouremenos, and Livadi tou Pashà and other [places]. Afterwards I came to the holy monastery to worship, I, the humblest among the monks, Basili Moscovite, Russian monk from Kiev and traveller. 30th July): Stylianou 1957, p. 92. Here not only does Barsky record his passage but he also adds many details that bring the graffito closer to his narration. The 11-lines text is surrounded by a circular frame decorated with leaves that are joined in a motif containing a cross. Barsky's content and graphic form appear to adapt to the site and the specific location within site. In a remote site, such as Apostolos Andreas chapel in Kýkkoš forest, form and content are essential, while in Agios Nikolaos tis Stegis and Agios Ioannis Lámpadístis, two major Cypriot shrines, the form and content are elaborated and refined. Barsky's travel and graffiti across Cyprus are studied and analysed in a paper in preparation.

79 Trentin 2010, p. 300.
80 Ibid., p. 304.
81 Schryver, Schabel 2003, pp. 329-331.
82 Kraack 1997, pp. 94-108.
83 The use of coats of arms by local families linked with Venice and the West through economic and political interests is attested for only a few cases, such as the Podocataro family (Trentin 2016, p. 303).
84 Champion 2015, pp. 61-69.
87 For a detailed analysis of memorial graffiti inscription see Champion 2019.
Georgios died the 31st of October; Agia Solomoni Pafos (.. g. obit”) and birth (Panagia Iamatiki Arakapas “1776 που εγενίθι ο ω του Ιώρκι” = 1776 when Yiorki’s son was born sic). These notations testify the bond between the community and the church, the latter being perceived as a repository and protector of the collective memory, as demonstrated by Véronique Plesch for the chapel of San Sebastiano in Arborio in Italy.

In addition to the commemorative function, graffiti in religious buildings often have devotional functions as well. Despite the difficulty in identifying general characteristics of devotional graffiti, these can be defined as ‘prayers made solid’, paraphrasing Matthew Champion’s expression for memorial graffiti. Just as individual prayers are personal and intimate, aiming to connect with the sacred in their way, so are devotional graffiti, which express and assert the materiality of this practice within the space. Devotional graffiti may include a name or identity mark traced near a saint’s figuration or relics (e.g. the abundance of graffiti around the saint’s relics in Agios Ioannis Lampadistis, near Agios Neophytos’ burial site in its hermitage in Pafos or around Agios Sozomenos’ burial in his hermitage). Devotional graffiti may also include commemorative inscriptions recording important events for the individual or the community, scratched or traced in close connection with a saint’s figuration, as discussed by Véronique Plesch. In general, graffiti with devotional function reflect the act of devotion and testify the request for protection and intervention of the divine. They materialise the hopes and prayers of the devotees in a graphic form on the walls of churches; they deliver the memory of positive and negative events involving the community or the individuals. Every person acts and interacts with the divine tracing graffiti with the hope of being relieved and blessed. Therefore, the votive function is similar to the devotional one; it always expresses devotion but through the practice of vow. Ship graffiti, for instance, are generally associated with voto or ex-voto, depending on the will to ask for protection during a forthcoming sea trip or to thank for escaping a shipwreck or a storm. This, indeed, is one of the functions that ship graffiti may have, depending on the context and specific location in a building.

In some cases, though, other forms of graffiti can represent an offer of a gift, as argued by Matthew Champion for the English Medieval parish churches, perpetuating a long-lasting tradition in an alternative way: instead of material gifts, the image of the offer is portrayed on the church’s walls. Votive graffiti, in this sense, serve as a substitute for votive gifts in wax or silver offered to the church, abiding to the deeply rooted and still active practice of τάματα-offerings. Nevertheless, the identification of votive graffiti must be made case by case for accurate results. Even ship graffiti, which directly recall the tradition of scale models or votive tab-

88 Foulias, Hadjichristodoulou 2019, p. 58.
89 Plesch 2002a, pp. 140-142.
90 Champion 2019.
91 See Irakleous and Bakirtzis in this volume.
92 Plesch 2005, pp. 187-188.
93 For an overview of possible functions of ship graffiti in England, but potentially applicable to other contexts, see Champion 2015, pp. 83-96.
94 Champion 2012.
lets still used today, must be evaluated case by case and not constrained to a single function. So far, with the research on Cypriot material still ongoing, votive graffiti in the form of traditional or new τάματα have not been clearly identified, with the exception of ship graffiti.

Moreover, protection marks have begun to appear in the Cypriot graffiti context. These types of graffiti have been extensively documented and studied in the UK. The intensive research performed in many counties during the last decade, a large number of vernacular buildings preserved, which offer an excellent comparative context, and the abundance of literature and historical sources on popular rites and traditions alongside religious ones have allowed more in-depth and complete investigations on practices related to magic and superstition. Drawing on the abundance of such studies in the UK, scholars could extend the apotropaic function of forms (e.g. pentangle-exalfa, compass drawn designs, hexafoil, pelta, etc.) to the field of graffiti, by observing their frequency and analysing their distribution on a single site. Such forms are defined as ‘ritual protection marks’, a preferred term over the ambiguous and misleading ‘witch marks’, and such a mark serves “to create ‘protection’ for the individual that created it – or for the area or object into which it was inscribed”. The church itself is a consecrated and protected building, and it seems that these symbols want to reinforce and call for the divine protection on space, especially in ‘weak’ points, such as architectural or functional elements that could allow access to evil forces fluttering outside the building. Such points are doors and windows, and spots with lower protection such as the baptismal font (as the person being baptized has not yet entered the community and is more vulnerable).

In the Byzantine and post-Byzantine fields, studies on magical practices and protective rituals focused mainly on the study of individual practices, while the practices linked to historical buildings and general landscapes remain inadequately explored.

A useful level of comparison is the study of private buildings. A contribution on the sculpted decoration of traditional Cypriot houses in Mitsero village documented symbols and figurations with protective value such as hexafoil and exalfa. In the analysed buildings, the hexafoil is always located at the two ends of the houses’ central arch. Moreover, the study highlights the apotropaic value of exalpha as a symbol used in Cypriot folk art in combination with other forms – such as hexafoil – which were placed on the entrance doors. The systematic documentation of these forms – hexafoil and exalpha – has just begun for graffiti, also paying attention to other materials such as wooden sculptures and pictorial decorations. This analysis aims to verify the recurrence and location of the forms mentioned above so as to provide a comprehensive picture of their potential use and value within the religious context. From a preliminary

95 Hutton 2016.
96 Champion 2015, p. 25.
98 Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, Seretis 2000.
99 Ibid., p. 420.
analysis of the material collected so far, some patterns relating to the function of these symbols may be identified and seem to be in line with the English context. The pentangle or exalpha is present both in association to figures of demons and to normal figures. In the first case, the symbol aims to annihilate the evil power by trapping the demon within its lines. An example can be seen in the narthex of Panagia in Moutoulla (fig. 2), where a pentangle and a cross are traced above the left head of the monster on which “the lord of darkness” (ο ἄρχοντας του σκότους) sits. Pentangles and exalpha can also be found in relation to non-evil figuration; in this case, they perform a protective function, as indicated by the high number of these forms scratched in the church of Archangelos Michail in Galata (fig. 8). In the same church, pentangles and exalpha are also engraved on the side of Saint George’s horse, as well as under the illustration of The Death of the Virgin (north wall). A pentangle is also present inside the apse, on the space between two figures of saints. It is worth mentioning the fresco decorations at the base of the apse arch – south side. Simple and complex pentangles and exalpha with decorated expansions are drawn in black on a white background in a completely original way. The presence of these motives inside the apse may perhaps explain their high diffusion among graffiti. Another emerging piece of evidence is the presence of simple and repetitive geometric shapes – zigzag lines, rectangles with inscribed lines, meshes, triangles – concentrated above all decoration on the apse (e.g. Archangelos Michail and Agios Sozomenos in Galata; Panagia Iamatiki (fig. 9) in Arakapas; Timios Stavros in Pelendri (fig. 10);102 Archangelos Michail in Choli). Similar forms have been documented but not yet studied in the UK; they are listed in the graffiti table of the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey and interpreted as apotropaic.103

At present, the only available information on the Cypriot material is related to the recurrence of these forms and their frequent location in the apse. In the absence of local and international research, of local comparisons with other materials and of the support of written sources it is not possible to make advanced hypotheses at the moment. Indeed, the study of these forms will shed light on practices which have left a substantial material trace on many buildings across the island yet have not otherwise been attested.

Based on the given data, it is difficult to define general rules on the function of graffiti. These depend on the relationship among the three graffiti constitutive elements: form, content and space on which the inscription is located. Forms that have a value in themselves, such as date and name (commemorative) or ship graffiti (votive), can express more complex and non-

100 Champion 2016, pp. 29-30.
102 These geometrical forms found in the apse of Timios Stavros in Pelendri could be dated, despite the simplicity of the motifs. The Pelendri graffiti were in a sealed context which allowed to establish a timeframe for their creation. They are scratched on a fresco decoration dated to 1178 thanks to a commemorative inscription still visible. This layer was discovered during a 1990s restoration by the Department of Antiquities (ARDAC 1991, p. 24; ARDAC 1992, p. 25) under a later layer of frescoes dating to the 14th century (Stylianou, Stylianou 1997, pp. 507-510). When the Department decided to detach the upper layer, the 12th-century frescoes were brought to light with many graffiti scratched on them. This lucky discovery reveals that these forms have been in use at least since the 13th century.
103 http://www.medieval-graffiti.co.uk/graffiti%20types4.pdf.
Figure 8 — Archangelos Michail, Galata, a) exalpha around Saint George’s horse; b) exalpha motives on fresco decoration. Author’s photo.
Figure 9 — Panagia Iamatiki Arakapas, geometrical forms on the apse. Author’s photo.

Figure 10 — Timios Stavros Pelendri, graffiti on the first layer of frescoes inside the apse. Author’s photo.
unique functions based on space and context. The functions that have so far been attributable to the Cypriot material show the versatility of this practice in responding to different needs (e.g. commemorative, devotional and protective) and in adapting to the building-space. The general functions that can be identified are thus declined in various ways, testifying the personal and intimate perception and the differentiated interaction that people of the past had with the buildings. In this sense, the analysis of graffiti helps to reveal the intimate and not otherwise documented character of the various religious buildings.

Conclusions

The overview on graffiti in the current paper aims at revealing some hidden aspects of Medieval and Early Modern Cyprus. The high number of preserved graffiti and their distribution across the island testify how people interacted with their spaces and landscape, leaving a tangible and material trace behind. Thus, the tangible graffiti heritage becomes a key-source for exploring an intangible one, linked to everyday practices and habits of common people not recorded by other sources. The data asserts that drawing graffiti was tolerated, even inside buildings with a public function. Moreover, it was perceived as an individual act of interaction with the sacred, fulfilling different needs: to commemorate, to worship, to protect. Despite the collective dimension of the practice attested by their distribution, the diverse graffiti typologies and people involved, graffiti is essentially an individual act, one of those private, widespread and well-known practices that people do not feel the need to mention in more common and traditional sources.  

Studying and documenting this material offer a significant contribution to our limited knowledge of unknown aspects of the past, such as religious practices, magic and superstition. The intangible dimension revealed by graffiti enriches our understanding of historical monuments with new elements, such as their active relation with people though their messages, prayers and hopes, their fears and exorcisms.

Graffiti helps to integrate the social and historical value of historic buildings and landscapes, recovering the voices of people living and experiencing those places in the past. On the other hand, considering the more material and formal aspects of graffiti, it can be observed that

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104 An argument supporting this hypothesis is provided by Barsky’s experience. Despite his enlightening habit of observing and describing places, people and traditions, there is no mention of the graffiti in his detailed account (Della Dora 1996); neither of those already present in the places he visited nor of those made by him and preserved in five of the churches he visited. On the other hand, Barsky never mentions the personal prayers he surely did, while he dwells on the description of major celebrations, as in the cases of Kykkos and Machairas (Grishin 1996, pp. 46-49, pp. 85-91). Barsky probably perceived his graffiti like his individual prayers, as an intimate and personal moment, with no place in a narration created for a wide audience. This aspect should be further investigated within the general practice of leaving graffiti on religious sites. On a wider scale, this might explain why there are very few mentions and references to the presence of graffiti especially to those created between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.
writing – in a broad sense – was widely practised even in rural areas about which there is often no other written evidence. The writing that emerges from graffiti is a functional one, focusing on its most essential characteristics: recording information and self-affirmation.

The formal variety present in graffiti – alphabetic and pictorial – reflects the expressive and communicative richness of people from different social strata and different origins who shared the same spaces. The presence of graffiti in five different alphabets and the variety of shapes and motifs of pictorial graffiti reflect the multicultural character of the island and the ability of people to interact and communicate with multimodal solutions. The ongoing study on pictorial graffiti forms has begun to reveal interactions with other media, such as stone carving mentioned above, as well as ceramics and wood carving. Along textual language, another language is emerging: the representation of images and forms that delivers ideas and concepts displayed on different media, and which is perpetuated over time. Its evolution has not always preserved the memory of the forms' value and meaning, as in the case of the abstract forms in the apses mentioned above. In some instances, meaning and value have changed, as in the case of the hexafoil-rosette which continues to be used in folk arts but with decorative value. The ongoing research aims to collect these ‘alphabets’ of letters and shapes in an attempt to recover their meaning and give voice to the collection of messages, hopes and prayers still preserved in the historical monuments of the island.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Department of Antiquities, the Kykkos Museum and Research Center, the bishoprics of Morphou, Constantia and Pafos for granting the permission for studying and documenting the monuments and their graffiti.
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