

Lorenzo Paveggio, Padua: Material Fake and the Production of Authenticity: Objects, Resemblance, and Social Recognition in the Early Middle Ages

This paper proposes a conceptual shift in the study of falsity in Late Antique and Early medieval Europe (600-800 CE), moving away from the opposition between authentic and inauthentic artifacts towards an inquiry into the conditions under which objects become socially recognizable as authentic.

Building on recent accounts—in semantics—of “fake” as a relational structure defined by both resemblance and non-membership (Guerrini, 2024), I suggest that falsity should be understood not as a deviation from authenticity, but as a productive mode of material and organisation. In this perspective, “fake” objects do not simply imitate originals; they instantiate regimes of resemblance that enable recognition, circulation, and institutional efficacy.

Rather than treating forgery as a purely textual phenomenon, the paper approaches falsity as a cross-medial condition operating across documentary, monetary, and visual cultures. In Late Antique material culture, *contorniati* (Novello 1999), objects whose status oscillates between imitation, token, and gift, is already addressed in the context of *munera* (games). In the early Middle Ages, the semantic transformation of *munera* toward meanings associated with bribery further indicates a broader reconfiguration of exchange, in which legitimacy is increasingly defined through contested attributions of authenticity and corruption, in a context where even openly fake documents are accepted in the case of a dispute settlement, as it has been showed in the forged document of *Flexum* (Lazzari, 2017).

The paper considers Carolingian and pre-Carolingian textual traditions in France and Italy, with particular attention to material culture. By tracing continuities between Late Antique pseudo-objects and early medieval social practices, the paper argues that falsity must be understood as a constitutive dimension of social recognition itself, highlighting the conditions through which authenticity becomes thinkable, visible, and operative.