

Rural Economy and Society in Early Modern Cyprus (RURAL-CY): An Introduction to Project Objectives and Technological Infrastructures.

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Abstract

Following the Ottoman conquest of 1571, the Christian Orthodox Church of Cyprus developed into one of the main political, economic, and social actors on the island. In order to consolidate and expand its power, the Church undertook various agriculture-oriented income generating activities and became involved in wide economic networks spanning the island and beyond. Those activities are documented in a number of invaluable textual sources, including monastic property lists, which are the focal point of the RURAL-CY project, an internally funded project of the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of Cyprus. Specifically, the project aims to explore the dynamics, strategies, and patterns of rural-based economic activities by fully digitising, systematically recording, and statistically-spatially analysing the Grand Manorial Codex, an unpublished document of 1188 pages dating to the late 18th century AD, which records in detail the movable and immovable property of 213 ecclesiastical institutions (churches and monasteries with glebes), located mainly in rural areas across Cyprus. In order to fulfil the above objectives, a novel archaeological information recording system has been developed with a view to capture textual data in a manner that renders them quantifiable and meaningful. The system consists of a fully normalised MySQL database and a custom-made GUI developed in Microsoft Access 365. Beyond data input, management, querying, filtering, and output, the system allows the user to construct in-depth nested vocabularies by associating specific words with abstract terms, enrich the vocabularies with multimedia and bibliography, produce and record a logical topology of information representing the physical and conceptual structure of the Codex, transcribe, automatically transliterate and translate the source text; and analyse the latter's contents by breaking them down into a selection of their constituent concepts, constructing further logical relationships between them and assigning certainty values to each recorded piece of content to allow metanalysis using fuzzy statistics after data collection. Added to the above, a geodatabase has also been constructed with a view to associate mentions of spatial entities in the text (e.g., toponyms, monasteries, metochia, churches, etc.) with relevant geodata and to perform spatial-statistical analyses to the extent allowed by the data.