

Spolia: A Definition in Ruins

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Marble Necessarily Entails Reuse

This essay was written to accompany a book about marble, which perforce dealt with the reuse of that material in centuries when the majority of the quarries were closed.¹ In it I look first at how broadly various terms can be applied, and then at the classical meaning of *spolia*. I go on to delineate various levels of reuse, and to suggest suitable terminology which should help damp down the inevitable desire to find meaning in every reused stone. Such a desire betrays a fatal misunderstanding of the extent and longevity of classical ruins, and of how medieval and later cities, towns and villages looked before they were either “cleaned out” of useful building materials (and sometimes destroyed to the foundations) by population expansion, or “cleaned up” by town improvement and modernization (when so many late antique city walls were demolished), usually toward the end of the nineteenth century.

It is only by placing all kinds of reuse in context that we can assess and then appreciate the innovations of those who did indeed use earlier materials creatively. My aim is to restrict the breadth of a field which, “as explored in a large number of recent publications dealing with the popular topic of reuse, is perceived in the light of ideology, magic, exorcism, appropriation, citation, nostalgia, memory, triumphalism and historical awareness”.²

Many papers in this field are mechanical, and akin to stamp-collecting (after all, there are an awful lot of buildings with reused elements), with a simple *modus operandi* and inevitable conclusions. First find a monument, usually a church (but sometimes a mosque), enumerate the items reused, and then

1 This chapter is an abridged version of the essay found on the DVD of Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present*.

2 Kiilerich, “Making sense of the spolia”, pp. 104–5; cf. Quintavalle, “Gli antichi come modelli”, p. 14.

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elucidate the constructors' interest in the aesthetics of balance, color-matching, and one or more of the perceived attitudes enumerated above, generally laced somehow with "power". Because of the general lack of evidence of intention, I prefer to argue that it is the material itself – marble – that we know to have been prized when it was used in locations distinct from its ancient resting-place. Unless there is compelling evidence (which does sometimes exist), it is surely redundant to argue for "meaning" in material reused in close vicinity to antique sites such as Rome or Venosa.³ We can even find an inscribed antique statue largely obscured by the column it supports described as a "revival of antiquity".⁴ In *Marble Past, Monumental Present*, I generally avoided the entangling thickets of footnote-buttressed memory,⁵ power,⁶ prestige, self-image, civic pride, the pedigree of personal and community aspirations, appreciation of ancient beauty, desire, intention, triumph of Christianity (or Islam), and other generalized, over-inflated and frequently nebulous claims which the subject generates among some art historians.⁷ I tried to avoid reading modern conceptions of the antique into medieval reuse, and using these conceptions as part or all of a rationale,⁸ as is the case with "memory", so often "not preserved essences", but "reconstructed on the basis of the present".⁹ This kind of re-creation – which is *not* lived history – occurred in Antiquity, as when a first-century BCE stele at Lindos commemorated the (legendary) possessions of the Temple of Athena because, as it stated, "it happens that most of the offerings together with their inscriptions have been destroyed by time."¹⁰ Columns certainly had crosses added, as at Sardis¹¹ (or Arabic inscriptions), and pagan altars got reused – but is it true that such reuse and signing "metaphorically asserted Christianity's victory over the old gods"?¹² A good proportion of Roman inscriptions survive because their

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3 Or indeed Kyoto, where the aesthetics of spolia are very different; see Greenhalgh, *Marble Past, Monumental Present*, dvd_kyoto_spolia_wall.doc.

4 Tucci, "The Revival of Antiquity".

5 Calò Mariani, "La memoria dell'antico"; an excellent piece, but surely about tradition rather than memory.

6 Cf. Ousterhout, "Ethnic Identity and Cultural Appropriation", p. 48, quoting Henry Maguire: "While theorists are deconstructing their discourses, time and the elements are deconstructing the monuments."

7 Fabricius Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation*, pp. 36–9 (an attempt to link *spolia* to rhetoric), 210–11.

8 For example, Morrone Naymo, "Il reimpiego di materiale classico", in an excellent essay where, however, the author seems to me to go too far.

9 Dietler, "A Tale of Three Sites", p. 84, citing Halbwachs.

10 Shaya, "The Greek Temple as Museum", who comments that this imagined treasure is constructed "out of memories and testimonials and framed with texts, documents, references, and stories" (p. 428).

11 Foss, *Byzantine and Turkish Sardis*, p. 49: at least 25 crosses on the cella wall of the Temple of Artemis opposite the church.

12 Moralee, "The Stones of St. Theodore", p. 205. Compare the gloss of a Canadian couple with three crucifixes in their living room: "They have no religious significance for

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marble was reused, but this was overwhelmingly for convenience rather than to proclaim any meaning.¹³ Assertions of meaning can provide ekphraseis rivaling those of medieval writers, but are gainsaid by Coates-Stephens, who notes “an art historical obsession with spolia”.¹⁴ Indeed, it is perhaps significant that neither historians nor archaeologists are overexcited by reuse, surely because they take it as a normal part of medieval building practice encountered on actual excavation sites.

I have tried to argue according to evidence (sparse, fragmentary, and usually *en passant* rather than directly addressed to marble architecture) instead of building theories for which documentation or other support is lacking. In other words, while acknowledging that the monuments I deal with are about memory¹⁵ (how sweet the embrace of etymology!), and probably in some vague way about power, superiority, conquest, triumph, or trophy-making (the bigger and more sumptuous the building, the louder the message – but exactly what message?), and although I am aware of the uses of the past to legitimate the present,¹⁶ I yearn for evidence. Measurement is a useful concept: how big are the monuments reusing materials? How heavy the members? How far from their original location? Here Roman practice helps, because it is unequivocally down-to-earth, if with a preoccupation shading toward mania: don’t use local materials if you want to make a splash; the marbles should be as exotic, rare, and difficult of access as possible;¹⁷ and the larger the better, since technology aids enthusiasm.¹⁸ Indeed, such a struggle was involved in some of the marbles used by the Romans that they are indeed almost *spolia* – trophies wrested not from an enemy, but from the earth itself, and triumphantly taken across the sea. As a result, it is difficult not to view their marble monuments (usually extensively inscribed) as an implicit statement of Roman power and “reach”.

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It is the example of the Romans that leads scholars to read so much into the medieval use of marble. Just as for the Romans, transporting marble over great distances in the Middle Ages certainly made a statement – but what did it say? Should we invoke “the classical tradition” and admiration for Rome, Christian triumph over paganism, dynastic, city-to-city or country-to-country one-upmanship, aesthetics, convenience, revivalism, or any other

us – they’re part of our heritage, that’s all” (*Le Figaro*, March 13, 2007, p. 4).

13 For one example among hundreds: Espérandieu, *Étude sur le Kef*, is all about inscriptions, many of them read in houses, in tower bases, and so on.

14 Coates-Stephens, “Epigraphy as spolia”, p. 275.

15 Meadows and Williams, “Moneta and the Monuments”, pp. 41–2: “In Latin, anything that is intended to call to mind (*monere*) the memory of a person or event is a *monumentum*, be it a work of history or poetry, an inscription, a building or a statue”; see the papers in Sot, *La mémoire de l’antiquité*.

16 Hen and Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past*.

17 Texier, *Asie Mineure*, p. 433 on the difficulty of transport.

18 Cf. Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, pp. 57–8, 64.

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of many “isms”? Except where evidence exists, or a motive may reasonably be adduced, I avoid such grand ideas, and concentrate on the mechanics of how marble-rich monuments came into being, often far from the deposits of antiquities left behind by the Romans.

Problems with Definitions

The first problem is one of language. Many words have strict meanings and entail unfortunate consequences when they are misused, or used too loosely. Computer programmers know this well, as do classicists. Medievalists concerned in any way with the reuse of earlier materials should be very careful how the objects of their attention are named, for to call them “*spolia*” is to include the baggage and prejudices of the term. A more general problem is the search for meaning in what the Middle Ages did, prompted by our natural desire to step away from intimations of chaos toward some plan or indeed progression, generally linked somehow to the past and some traceable tradition (*traditio* = “handing on”). Terms such as “classical tradition”, “*renovatio*”, and “*romanesque*” appear frequently, because they imply an intention or a plan which, by making a pattern, helps to make sense of the architecture of a period, a reign, or a country by introducing the seductive notion of intention: “X did such-and-such. We recognize the materials he used as Roman with meanings ABC and DEF. Therefore surely he intended these meanings.” Unfortunately, our knowledge of the Middle Ages is fragmentary, both with regard to the monuments and why people built them the way they did. Most of the monuments have disappeared, and the often extensive contemporary or later literature rarely has anything detailed to say about artworks. Hence it is all too easy to fall back on the very fact of reuse, and from that fact to extrapolate one or more meanings, in order to erect a neat pattern of intention, and even of an attitude toward the past. Thus Charlemagne, the popes of ninth-century Rome and Frederick II are all acknowledged to have been involved in some kind of renewal (not necessarily architectural), and their actions are extrapolated to others who reused in various ways some of the monuments of the past.

The second problem is one of terminological origins. “*Spolia*” in the strict classical sense refers to armor and weapons (and by extension trophies such as standards, ship-prows, and so on), which were taken from the defeated, then preserved and displayed. The most prominent were the *spolia opima*, spoils taken by a Roman commander-in-chief from a defeated monarch and displayed in a triumph; they might include statues of bronze and marble, and gold and silver, as well as weapons and human and animal captives.¹⁹ The

19 Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, pp. 150, 169.

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term *spolia* has been taken over and used too generally;²⁰ the very use of the term implies that spoliated objects were prized for their programmatic utility. “Reuse” (*reimpiego*, *réutilisation*) is a better term, because it is colorless and non-judgmental.

The third problem is one of meaning. Any survey of reuse introduces awkward questions about the relationship between marble and reused blocks. For what solid evidence is there that such blocks were appreciated as relicts of the past, rather than for the material of which they were made; that is, that their antique connotations were prized even if they were not fully or even partly understood, or indeed were completely misunderstood? Did marble = luxury = empire, as it probably did to most ancient Romans?

One scholar writes that reused antiquities “had the potential to remind the Christians of the past”²¹ – in part a past they already knew about from the Bible and other books. Another asserts that “*spolia*, both architectural and epigraphic, served as ‘carriers of memory’ (*Erinnerungsträger*), forming the raw material for a larger narrative of victory over paganism and sanctification that was consciously articulated by Christian elites at both the center and the periphery at the end of the fifth century.”²² Such bar-room psychology is frequently laced with such words as “evidently” or “clearly” (that is, not at all evident), if sometimes modified by “probably”. But with the exception of Gerasa, where inscriptions point the meaning, where is the evidence?

It is worth noting that “*spolia studies*” is a recent innovation in archaeology and especially art history, and that “memory” is of about the same vintage, so that the field seems to some to fit easily in modern as well as earlier times.²³ Students of “*spolia studies*” are often content to enumerate the reused materials in a particular monument, and then to advance reasons for such reuse, calling into action whatever contemporary (or even parallel) sources they can find. “Memory” has become a fashionable term for dealing with the darker side of twentieth-century history. Although no one would deny that places do indeed carry memories, could someone venture to estimate for how long such memories survive? Two or three generations, perhaps? Nevertheless, the *Lieux de Mémoire* theme has leapt out of the twentieth century to infect and enthuse mediaevalists – fittingly, perhaps, since “memory” can stand duty for a complete lack of evidence.

This is not to deny that startlingly long “memory” can exist; the works of “Homer” writing accurately about the Bronze Age five centuries after its end are one early marker. But in that case the evidence has been *written*

20 For example, Kiilerich, “*Antiquus et modernus*”, p. 135.

21 Fabricius Hansen, *The Eloquence of Appropriation*, pp. 261, 267–70 on “*spolia* and the art of remembering” – with no links explicit or implicit to *spolia*.

22 Moralee, “The Stones of St. Theodore”, p. 214.

23 See *Das Munster. Zeitschrift für christliche Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft*, 60/1 (2007) for a variety of papers on the theme of *spolia*.

down (although nobody knows exactly when), so it exists as at least pseudo-documentation. But where in the oceans of medieval documents, saints' lives and other accounts are the indications that some people appreciated the works of the Roman past? Where is the evidence in earlier medieval architecture for any attempt to resurrect (following the term "*renovatio*") Roman architecture except in the modified form of the early Christian basilica? Who, before Vasari, was alert to some of the implications of the reuse of materials in buildings, beyond quotidian convenience?²⁴ "By using spolia", writes Kiilerich, "time is manipulated, as are contents and meanings".²⁵ But is it not today's scholars who are doing the manipulating, and that without sufficient or sometimes any evidence?

Words with non-specific meanings are useful when evidence is lacking; a good example is "power", the use of which can be argued in many ways, none of them documentable. Does the destruction of classical temples or their conversion into churches demonstrate the power of the new religion? Where inscriptions survive (as at Gerasa), evidently yes. But is it permissible by extension to suggest that the conversion of mosques in Spain is also about power, especially since so many of them were annihilated?²⁶ More tangible is El-Hasan's threat in 952 to the inhabitants of Reggio Calabria, that his great mosque "should remain intact, and the taking of a single stone from it would be the signal for the destruction of all of the churches in Sicily and Ifriqiya";²⁷ but it is unclear whether he envisaged mere vandalism or the specific pilfering of materials, surely including marble.

Occasionally, the context makes it clear that reuse does have a meaning,²⁸ but hard evidence is generally missing.²⁹ If people in the Middle Ages were indeed alert to such matters, were antiquities used to give a building "age", to make it look old, perhaps to display, in Moralee's phrase, "representations of a disfigured past and a sanctified present"? After all, Antiquity itself can be forged.³⁰ And how are we to view cities such as Apollonia,³¹ where old blocks were used in the sixth century alongside newly quarried marble suites? In contrast, were ancient buildings really demolished for political reasons, to erase memory?³²

24 Cf. Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. 1, p. 224 on the Arch of Constantine.

25 Kiilerich, "Antiquus et modernus", p. 136.

26 Buresi, "Les conversions d'églises et de mosquées", pp. 341, 348.

27 Ibn El-Athir, *Annales*, p. 354.

28 As in the reuse of Carolingian ivory and Byzantine enamel by Emperor Henry II: Nielsen, "*Hoc opus eximium*".

29 Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory", p. 145 notes the "use of memory as a supplement, or more frequently as a replacement, for history".

30 For example, the provision of a Hellenistic replica of a Bronze Age doorway in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods on Samothrace: Rotroff, "Material Culture", pp. 151–2 and fig. 10.

31 Ward-Perkins et al., *Christian Monuments of Cyrenaica*, pp. 4–8, 27–9, 48–52.

32 Howell, "The Demolition of the Roman Tetracylon".

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Such a profusion of unanswerable questions leads us back to the basics, namely the various possibilities for reuse. These boil down to pragmatism, aesthetics, and ideology. Pragmatism reuses materials because it is either the only way to get cheap stone, or much cheaper than carting it from afar, let alone quarrying it. This is an economic reason for reuse, and probably covers some 95 per cent of all blocks of stone or marble reused from ancient monuments. In some cases, it can be difficult to tell whether such blocks are indeed ancient, because economics also dictates that it is cheaper to rework them than to search for fresh ones. Here the aesthetic dimension appears. Were blocks recut because they looked ugly? Or were some blocks left as they were because the builders or patrons appreciated the beauty of elegant shafts, intricate entablature blocks or Corinthian capitals? Without any kind of documentation how are we to assess the possibility that aesthetics might have been mixed with, or trumped by, some ideological overtones read into the stones so that somehow they represented a return to a glorious past?

Ruins in the Medieval Landscape

One aspect of the premodern landscape which seems to go unnoticed in some contributions to “spolia studies” is the enormous extent of Roman ruins throughout the territories of the erstwhile Roman empire. It is crucial to realize that many people in the medieval West lived cheek-by-jowl with ruins, which were a feature of all originally Roman towns. Such a landscape may still be seen; at Isernia (Molise), for example, antique marble statues flank an arch, funerary stelae are set into houses, and the Fraterna Fountain is constructed largely from reused blocks. The population expansion of the later Middle Ages swallowed up large quantities of ruins, in both lime and rebuilding, so that those surviving structures with antiquities built into their walls are but a small fraction of what was originally there. This is the case even for cities once very rich in reuse, such as Genoa.³³

Travelers’ accounts of North Africa, where the move from a small town-dwelling population to a much larger one took place largely in the nineteenth century, describe a ruinscape that at the beginning of the century had changed little since the Byzantines left (apart from some Islamic settlements), and which must have been similar to that of southern Europe in the Middle Ages. Even in the twelfth century, accounts by Islamic travelers were quite clear about the nature of Roman ruins, and how to distinguish such settlements from Islamic-founded ones.³⁴ By the same token, just as Latin inscriptions

³³ Müller, *Sic hostes Ianua frangit*, pp. 189–242 for a catalogue of survivals, totaling only 25 items.

³⁴ Fagnan, *L’Afrique septentrionale au XIIIe siècle*, pp. 38, 41–4.

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could certainly be read in the West (and Greek ones, of course, in Byzantium), there is the possibility that hieroglyphics and demotic were read well into the Middle Ages.³⁵

The nineteenth century changed “ruin landscapes” for good, as any comparison of the plans of Milan, Rome, or other cities in 1800 and 1900 will make clear. This might have been the century of museum creation, but more antiquities were lost to city development than ever before, and travelers could see it happening before their eyes.³⁶ What is more, medieval monuments were “cleaned up” (and sometimes near-rebuilt) so vigorously that it can be very difficult to say what is medieval and what is not. This applies especially to material in reuse, quantities of which were tidied off the façades of cathedrals in cities such as Parma and Cremona without any note taken or (in some cases) the materials conserved. Treasure-hunting has always gone on, and continued to cause great wreckage to classical monuments, but the century also saw the development of classical archaeology, most of the practitioners of which were uninterested in and certainly did not record any medieval structures which got in their way.

There is a comprehensive history to be written about the nineteenth-century destruction of antiquities not only by archaeologists, but also by military invasion, which changed the “medieval face” of Cairo and of much of Algeria, as the evidence for large numbers of reused blocks was recycled into fortresses and city defenses. If we accept the view of Abd-al-Rahman al-Jabarti, the French in Cairo set about quite deliberately dismantling elements of Islamic heritage for their forts there.³⁷ To repeat, these late depredations are mentioned here because they blotted out so many antiquities. In other words, they must affect our view of what the “medieval landscape” actually looked like beforehand.

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From Rubble to Reuse

We can try to render order out of chaos by erecting a pyramid of reuse possibilities, from a very broad base of economic and casual reuse to the gleaming and distant tip of probable meaning:

1. *Stones are broken up for other purposes.* This was very common, and startled European travelers who saw antiquities needlessly (to them; usefully for the perpetrators) destroyed. Examples: antiquities in the

³⁵ Evetts, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, pp. 111–12 (a man from Upper Egypt who can decipher hieroglyphs).

³⁶ Tissot, *Itinéraire*, pp. 14–15 (Roman ruins at Dchar Djedid [Ad mercuri] near Tunis nearly all gone).

³⁷ Cuoq, *Abd-al-Rahmân al-Jabarti*, pp. 60, 89–90.

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land walls of Constantinople;³⁸ in Egypt, splendid column shafts sliced up for millstones;³⁹ old churches broken up to provide materials for new ones;⁴⁰ and antique cities dismantled for their materials.⁴¹ Jaffa was furnished with marble from Caesarea as late as the 1880s, and columns were still being sliced up in the early twentieth century.⁴² Inscriptions on marble were cut up for tombstones,⁴³ and statues used in foundations.⁴⁴ In many cases, evidence of recutting survives;⁴⁵ but extensive recutting leaves no data-trail. In the later eleventh century, a proclamation in Cairo ordered the ruined areas around Cairo and Fustat to be rebuilt and, if funds were unavailable, “to sell or rent them without diverting any ruined material”.⁴⁶

2. *Stones are used whole for a purpose different from their original one.* Large quantities of flat, smooth and conveniently sized inscribed slabs of marble were reused. Examples: a large proportion of the approximately 180,000 inscriptions in the 17 volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.⁴⁷ When shafts were lacking, it was not unknown to form a “column by superimposing several capitals, or using capitals as bases”.⁴⁸ Tit-for-tat destruction could come under this heading, as with Harun Rashid’s actions in Cessunia c. 786.⁴⁹

3. *Building work itself uncovers reusable materials.* This must have been common, the more so since churches are often built on the site of temples, and fortresses were usually rebuilt again and again on the same site. Example: when the Koutoubiya at Fes was enlarged in the early 1200s, materials were discovered on site.⁵⁰

4. *Stones are left unaltered, and reused within five or ten kilometers of the first building in which they were found.* This is casual reuse, and the commonest of all. The great majority of medieval buildings before the Millennium were built in this fashion, and it is difficult to attribute any meaning at all to such reuse. Examples: houses and fountains in nineteenth-century Gallipoli: stones from the temple at nearby Lampsaki are

38 Asutay-Effenberger, *Die Landmauer*, pp. 182–203.

39 Goyon, *Voyage ... d'Anthoine Morison*, p. 158; Mascrier, *Description*, p. 192.

40 Gerola, *Monumenti veneti*, vol. 2, pp. 90–94.

41 Sandys, *A relation of a iourney*, p. 149 (Gaza); cf. Guérin, “Description de Gaza”, pp. 196–7, 203, 204, 206.

42 Fischer, “The Fate of Holy Land Marble”, pp. 281–4, fig. 6.

43 Castellan, *Lettres sur la Morée*, vol. 2, 199–200.

44 Scholz, “Voyage”, p. 70.

45 D’Onofrio, *Rilavorazione dell’antico*.

46 Casanova, *Livre des admonitions*, vol. 1, p. 177.

47 http://cil.bbaw.de/cil_en/dateien/forschung.html.

48 Gerola, *Monumenti veneti*, vol. 2, figs. 8, 129.

49 Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography X*, at <http://rbedrosian.com/BH/bh17.htm>.

50 Beaumier, *Roudh el-Kartas*, p. 78.

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simply rolled down the hill.⁵¹ At Sallee near Rabat, classical structures are used to build houses. At Merdj, in the Barca, antiquities were still being used for new construction in the nineteenth century.⁵² At Sousse, antiquities are built into houses.⁵³ Whether the excavations Guérin saw at Sabra were medieval or later is impossible to tell, but marble at Le Kef was still being reused when he visited.⁵⁴ Several mosques (and churches?), especially at Fustat, were demolished to restore the Mosque of Amr after the earthquake of 1333.⁵⁵ Fortresses were rebuilt, unless dismantlers took good care to put the materials far away.⁵⁶ In some Muslim lands, churches could be rebuilt, but using only the existing materials, and no more.⁵⁷ Embellishment, perhaps with filched marble, led in one case to execution.⁵⁸

5. *Ancient buildings are reoccupied and perhaps refurbished.* This is a common occurrence, and in most cases is mere squatting. In some areas, even pagan temples were turned into churches, but no indications of any notions of triumph have survived, except in those few cases where inscriptions point out the triumph of the new religion over the old, as at Gerasa. Examples include the majority of theaters and amphitheaters (Lucca, Arles) and numerous temples, usually outside Rome,⁵⁹ as well as many buildings within Rome.⁶⁰ Temples and churches were converted into mosques in the Islamic world.⁶¹

6. *Ancient structures are rebuilt.* In fact, this never seems to have happened, and I include the possibility to underline just how far are medieval ideas of building from those of the ancient world. What price *renovatio*? The term is usually applied to political and religious concepts, not to architecture; just as Panofsky's *Renaissance and Renascences* deals largely with sculpture, and well after the Millennium at that. This is another way of pointing out how detached are medieval forms from ancient ones. Both Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages reused many of the building blocks of Roman architecture to develop new typologies.

51 Castellan, *Lettres sur la Morée*, vol. 1, pp. 216, 221–2, 254–5 and plate 23.

52 Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa*, pp. 134–5.

53 De la Berge, *En Tunisie*, p. 240.

54 Guérin, *Voyage archéologique*, vol. 2, pp. 334–5, 53–4.

55 Hauteceur and Wiet, *Mosquées du Caire*, p. 139.

56 Shirley, *Crusader Syria*, p. 56; by contrast p. 111, stones taken away to prevent reuse.

57 De la Primaudaie, "Les arabes en Sicile", p. 157.

58 Abu Shama, *Complément des Deux Jardins*, pp. 191–2.

59 Vaes, "Christliche Verwendung antiker Bauten".

60 Meneghini, "Edilizia pubblica e riuso".

61 Castellan, *Lettres sur la Morée*, vol. 3, pp. 8–9.

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7. *Earlier structures are dismantled for their materials.* Examples include Madinat Al-Zahra; a capital from its mosque is in the Alcazar at Seville.⁶² Churches in Baghdad had their pillars cut and used as projectiles.⁶³ The nineteenth-century Mohammedia, built by Bey Ahmed (1842–47), was intended to rival Versailles, but was plundered by his successor after his death, and the furniture, gilding, marble veneers, and so on were all taken for use elsewhere.⁶⁴ The theatre at Miletus was completely stripped, though it is not known when.⁶⁵ Little remains of Roman settlements around the Guadalquivir, so comprehensively have the buildings been stripped and dismantled.⁶⁶ Many ancient colonnades must have been demolished so that projectiles fashioned from their shafts could be fired from mangonels and trebuchets – as at Acre, where in 1256–58, ten of the 60 engines fired projectiles of 1,500 pounds.⁶⁷ Carved marble and granite projectiles were still in great demand in mid-nineteenth-century Turkey.⁶⁸

8. *Inscribed or decorated stones are used in walls, especially for wrapping round corners.* Anyone who has built a wall will know the value of a firm corner and of straight edges; so attempts to argue that this Roman altar or that funerary inscription represent the triumph of Christianity over paganism, or an interest in the aesthetics of lapidary capitals, should be firmly resisted, unless it can be shown that the object in question has been brought a great distance. This is unlikely, and the large number of examples of “convenient reuse” alongside the great consular roads should warn us to be very careful about endowing such reuse with meaning. Examples: antiquities make the walls of Nicaea both structurally sound against assault, and decoratively informative as well.⁶⁹ Even at Tunis, so close to ancient Carthage, antiquities were demolished and appear in the walls of houses.⁷⁰

9. *Stones are reused in a clearly decorative arrangement.* This can certainly be interpreted as aesthetic, but does not necessarily imply any attempt to make a connection with some version of the past. Examples: in Al-Azhar, all types of capitals co-exist.⁷¹ The more than 50 crosses cut into

62 Pavón Maldonado, *Memoria*, pl. XXI. Presumably the Salón Rico was buried by a landslide while much of the rest of the site was comprehensively spoliated.

63 Bar Hebraeus, *Chronography X*, at <http://rbedrosian.com/BH/bh18.htm>.

64 Guérin, *Voyage archéologique*, pp. 274–7.

65 Texier, *Asie Mineure*, p. 335.

66 Ponsich, *Implantation rurale*, vol. 1: of 222 sites at Lora del Rio prospected, few now contain marble.

67 Shirley, *Crusader Syria*, p. 117.

68 Texier, *Asie Mineure*, p. 173.

69 Texier, *Asie Mineure*, p. 259.

70 Hebenstreit, “Voyage a Alger”, p. 19.

71 Barrucand, “Les chapiteaux de remploi”, p. 54.

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the reused stones on the exterior of the Little Metropolis in Athens have been interpreted as “a visual manifestation of religious identity” aimed at the Ottomans.⁷² But who needed reminders? Were the Ottomans particularly obtuse?

10. *“Foreign” stones are set in a new context*, as when elements from Christian buildings are set in mosques. Where are we to place such use on the scale from opportunism to triumphalism? Examples: Lucy-Anne Hunt sees a small relief set into the Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo as meaningful; coinciding with the 1354 date of further restrictions against the employment of non-Muslims, “[it] implies an attempt at cultural as well as political subordination, or integration, of Christian culture.”⁷³ The church portal from Acre reused in the madrasa of Al-Nasir Mohammed is often cited as a definite instance of Moslem triumph over the Christians, yet it was much reworked with inlay, and given a long inscription which contains no intimation of triumph. What is more, reusing door-cases was not at all unusual in the Muslim world.⁷⁴

11. *Stones with particular designs are reused frequently*. In some cases, we may view such reuse as apotropaic – the attempt to ward off evil, or dangerous insects, infestations, birds in the sanctuary – the more so because this is one of the few areas where we do indeed possess medieval affirmations of what such stones are intended to achieve. Examples: the crosses on the Little Metropolis in Athens, and stones placed at the entrance of many Egyptian mosques or madrasas. Perhaps the Muslims adopted the practice from the Copts.⁷⁵ These stones are visible, while the majority of old Pharaonic stones were reused simply as building materials.⁷⁶

12. *Column shafts and capitals are used at a more or less great distance from their original location*. The difficulty is to prove that this is the case. For whereas the Romans gaily transported materials around the Empire (and often the further from the difficult-to-reach quarries, the better), this very fact means that we usually cannot know how far such materials were transported in the Middle Ages. Had the Romans stuck to a use-it-near-the-quarry policy, matters would have been much easier; and although various techniques have been developed to fix the source-quarries of marbles and granites, this cannot help with reuse. Examples: shafts imported to Mecca, to Córdoba and to

72 Kiilerich, “Making sense of the spolia”, p. 111.

73 Hunt, “Churches of Old Cairo”, p. 337, figs. 9–10.

74 Sauvaget, *Matériaux pour servir à l’histoire*, p. 174.

75 Evetts, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, pp. 111–12 (apotropaic use of a stone with hieroglyphs).

76 Cf. Wissa, “Un exemple éclatant de remploi”.

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Kairouan, none of them particularly tall. Pisa obtained her shafts from Elba and Sardinia (no great distance); we do not know whether the great monoliths for the Dome of the Rock were already in Jerusalem.

13. *Documentation of some kind exists to confirm the movement of materials.* This is always rare, and what probably *did* happen often gets mixed up with what *should* have happened; that is, conventional phrases are employed as if actual actions were asserted. Examples: while we can believe that Desiderius actually did get materials from Rome (he had several links with the City), did he really send for workers from Constantinople, supposedly since the *magistra latinitas* was in bad shape? Again, at least three Islamic rulers supposedly sought help and/or materials from Byzantium, but did this actually happen?

14. *Buildings not dismantled because they were known to be old, and important.* This is a kind of anti-spoliation, and documented instances are rare. But the inhabitants of Al-Farama (ancient Pelusium, the largest Roman fortress in Egypt, a seaport and, as recent digs demonstrate, rich in marbled Christian remains as well as Roman ones) prevented the destruction of the walls for historical reasons.⁷⁷

15. *Buildings are dismantled because their materials would fetch money, and others are left undescribed because their appearance is unaesthetic.* This happens in the nineteenth century, when much evidence of medieval (and later) spoliation is lost in the hunt for museum artifacts. Examples: Tolmeta and Tanera.⁷⁸

16. *Triumphalism of one religion or state over another.* To display the artifacts of conquered peoples is a very old practice, but it can be difficult to decide intention. Examples: are the capitals in the courtyard of Al-Azhar associated with the triumph of Islam?⁷⁹ We must sometimes accept the takeover of churches for mosques as triumphalism rather than basic practicality.⁸⁰ Presumably the shaft erected by the Venetians at Zadar (Zara) is antique: with the Venetian lion on top, its message is very clear. In the Delhi Sultanate, commemorative pillars from earlier cultures were re-erected.⁸¹

17. *War trophies.* The medieval equivalent of the *spolia opima*. Trophy-looting was a thriving practice in Indo-Muslim states, from 1193 to 1392/3, where temple desecration was usually carried out by military officers or officials of the state as a specifically state activity, sometimes right behind military campaigns, and included “the seizure of the

77 Evetts, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, pp. 168–9; this in spite of p. 172: “Al-Farama is surrounded by a fortified wall of stone without gates, which is in a state of ruin.”

78 Hamilton, *Wanderings in North Africa*, pp. 143 (Tolmeta), 147 (Tanera).

79 Barrucand, “Les chapiteaux de remploi”, pp. 54–5.

80 Abu Shama, *Le Livre des Deux Jardins*, p. 305.

81 Flood, “Pillars, Palimpsests”.

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image of a defeated king's state-deity and its abduction to the victor's capital as a trophy of war". In such cases, all of which were highly selective, "the deity's image, taken as war trophy to the capital city of the victorious sultan, became radically detached from its former context and in the process was transformed from a living to a dead image."⁸² Further west, although war spoils were certainly collected in our period, they were usually arms and armor, treasures (including gold, silver, and textiles), and human beings to be ransomed or sold as slaves. Christian images seem to have been spared by the Muslims, but crosses were not. Examples: the great cross at Hattin was taken to Baghdad to be defiled.⁸³ If we except the Acre portal,⁸⁴ there is little evidence that marble was carried off as trophies, but marble from the spoliation of the Holy Sepulcher was sent to Mecca in 1244.⁸⁵ Anna Dagnino sees the sarcophagi on the façade of San Martino in Genoa as war trophies, while admitting that there are too many of them around the city for all to be such. A better bet, given the Genoese track record of taking inscriptions from the Pisans, would be the two kufic plaques in Santa Maria del Castello, which she believes might be booty from North Africa.⁸⁶ Baybars II brought a marble window from the Abbasid palace in Baghdad (through which the caliphs watched their subjects) to Cairo, and attached it to the mausoleum of his khanqah. Given that there is an Islamic tradition of abstracting fittings from conquered towns, this is perhaps an indication that the window should also be treated as a trophy.⁸⁷ In 1263 the same Baybars II had a gate of the Fatimid Palace, the Bab el-'Id, taken to Jerusalem for a caravanserai he was building there.⁸⁸ On the Christian side, one might have imagined that the Crusades would have been a high point of deliberate spoliation, but the evidence for this is sparse.⁸⁹

82 Eaton, "Temple Desecration", p. 300.

83 Abu Shama, *Le Livre des Deux Jardins*, p. 395: the gilded bronze cross was placed in threshold of the Bab en-Noubi Ech-Cherif.

84 Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture*, p. 176.

85 Shirley, *Crusader Syria*, p. 64.

86 Dagnino, "Scultura e architettura", p. 131.

87 Jarrar, "Al-Maqrizi's Reinvention of Egyptian Historiography", referring to Al-Maqrizi's *Khitat* 2:416.

88 Hautecoeur and Wiet, *Mosquées du Caire*, p. 139.

89 Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, catalogues 288 items, but he sees only three of them as genuine spolia: pp. 72–92.

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Misleading Monuments

We should always be very careful about assuming that a conspicuous surviving monument is in some way typical, and therefore capable of extrapolation to other centuries and places. An example is the monument that features large in many considerations of reuse because it is the first surviving major spoliated construction in the later Roman world, and a spectacular and exhaustively studied one at that. The Arch of Constantine in Rome is a rebuild performance of great sophistication, although far from the first creation to use older blocks.⁹⁰ Into it, various types of explicit links with previous centuries have been (accurately) read. But although it is almost always cited in treatments of reuse, it is completely atypical in both its sophistication and its arguably programmatic nature; and, what is more, just about useless for any accurate extrapolation into the Middle Ages, which did not erect triumphal arches, give or take the Lorsch Gatehouse. The arch was evidently “designed”, and talent scouts must have scoured Rome for blocks that would fit, since one of the Dacians has “ad arc(um)” chiseled into its back.⁹¹ There are no comparable monuments anywhere in any period of the Middle Ages. Nor yet is there any propensity to treat any large suitable surface as this kind of historical picture-show, or sculptural coat-hanger. This approach was aptly described by Jaś Elsner as “syncretistic bricolage”⁹² – or, as Wright puts it for reuse as a whole, “the acceptance of heterogeneity and irregularity of detail in building”.⁹³ It is equally misleading to view such works from the other end of the telescope, as it were, and assume that a monument such as Frederick II’s Gate at Capua was somehow in the same tradition, when it is unclear what antiquities, if any, decorated it. Another arrangement of reused antiquities, immensely attractive to us today, was the large selection of antique statuary decorating the spina of the Hippodrome in Constantinople, which had a function parallel to that of the Arch of Constantine.⁹⁴ But once more, there was no medieval take-up whatsoever, if we except the preservation of works such as the *Capitoline Wolf* and the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius.

Conclusion

The above account has attempted to categorize the various ways in which the detritus of the antique past was reused during the Middle Ages in the West, Byzantium, and Islam. These are extensive, and it is certain that there

90 Elsner, “From the Culture of Spolia”, pp. 153–4.

91 Panella, “Tecnica costruttiva”, p. 35 fig. 25 for the chiseled inscription.

92 Elsner, “From the Culture of Spolia”, p. 177.

93 Wright, *Ancient Building Technology*, vol. 1, p. 132.

94 Bassett, “The Antiquities in the Hippodrome”, p. 96.

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are plentiful examples (and probably spectacular ones) of which we have no knowledge because population expansion destroyed them during or after our period. It goes against the academic grain to omit attributing some kind of meaning to such reuse, in an attempt to make ordered sense of the past. Unfortunately, evidence for meaning is generally lacking. From the list of popular theses offered at the start of this account, how many stand up, bolstered by any kind of evidence? Ideology is always difficult to assess, because it is rarely written down, and we can scarcely progress beyond the notion (with which we all can agree) that big architecture is about power, the bigger the more powerful. Magic and its fellow, exorcism, are easier to assess, since there are antiquities reused for what seem to be apotropaic reasons on several surviving monuments, Christian and Muslim. But – excepting lions – just where a certain block stops being apotropaic and becomes either decorative or inconsequential, we usually cannot say. Appropriation is a very slippery term, and (with its fellows “citation” and “historical awareness”) it is impossible to pin down, for, again, there is very little evidence that antiquities were reused in programmatic fashion. Nostalgia, as we all know, is not what it used to be; but it has had life breathed into it by the concept of memory, which I confess to finding a substitute for history, lacking as it does any kind of documentation. Indeed, as if by osmosis, the very notion of memory has bled from the twentieth century (with its equally dubious certainties about the veracity of “oral history”, viz., memory with a tape-recorder) back into the Middle Ages. For some investigators, this seems to be a handy way of compensating for a non-existent rationale for why antiquities were reused. Finally, how about triumphalism? This is equally difficult to demonstrate, and brings us back to the strict definition of *spolia*.

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If most rationales are weak, and meanings elusive, what then is the point of studying the reuse of marble in the Middle Ages? First, because the very use of marble implies the selection of material, sometimes the discrimination between various kinds of marble, and often the discarding of (at least) the poorer grades of limestone. Secondly, because marble was chosen (and brought from lesser or greater distances) when it would usually have been easier to build in humbler, local materials. Third, because the continuing interest in the material throughout the Mediterranean makes a statement about high-quality and sometimes luxurious architecture which links its use back to the ancient world. It is not necessary to believe that every Ummayyad in Damascus, every Mamluk in Cairo or every Christian in the Italian peninsula necessarily had any clear ideas about the pagan or early Christian past. Nor is it difficult to accept that they kept their eyes open and admired some of the building elements of the ancient structures that littered the landscape – that is, the inescapable fact of Rome. That nobody wished to resurrect Rome is proven by the absence (except for some basilican churches) of structures which seek accurately to reconstruct that past. This brings us to the inevitable conclusion

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that the medieval attraction to marble was certainly to the beauties of the material itself – and possibly in some unverifiable instances to the associations it evoked. In general (and using the terminology loosely), the great churches and mosques of our period may be viewed as triumphs over the past – or over neighbors, enemies, or commercial rivals – and as celebrations of the effort involved in discovering, transporting, and erecting large buildings in sophisticated materials.

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