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The Reuse of Red Imperial Porphyry in the West from the End of the Ancient World

The red imperial porphyry, which came from the Egyptian quarries of *Mons Porphyrites*, is a rare, appreciated and expensive marble of the antiquity [17, p. 4]¹. Its use dates back to the age of Trajan, when, in 113 A. D., the systematic quarrying of the material began. The quarries remained active until the first half of the 5th century. Later they became shelters for hermits, and the exact extraction place was forgotten, even though the memory and the suggestions that came from such a fascinating stone remained alive over the centuries [20, p. 157].

This material was particularly hard to work and this is precisely where its value lay, as its hardness made it possible to obtain a fine polish. The difficulty of working it, as well as its rarity, has meant that there are far fewer pieces made from this marble than from others. Many materials are fragmentary today because they have been damaged over the centuries and often their original appearance is no longer legible because they have been reworked in later periods. This is the case, for example, of basins reused as tombs and inserted in altars, of columns reused in churches and of all the pieces that have been part of the most important private collections for centuries, restored and often reworked according to the fashions of the times and the different needs of the owners.

During the Late Antique period, there was a sort of boom in the use of this stone with significant results in an artistic point of view, despite a certain involution in the figurative expressions of this period. While coloured marbles were used in the Roman world mainly for floor decorations and columns, porphyry was an exception because it was also used for statues and heads [21, p. 346]. If porphyry objects are a minority, the reason is not only the difficulty of working them, but also the actual scarcity of suitable blocks for statuary, considering also the relatively rapid depletion of quarries. All in all, in proportional terms, it was preserved in a higher percentage than other stones, because it was not suitable to be destroyed in lime kilns, but rather, thanks to its hardness, it was preferable to rework it.

From the Late Antique period onwards, the new ideology of imperial power was established, symbolically expressed by the “purple colour”. Then the porphyry, for the obvious chromatic combination, was closely linked with the concept of royalty. This combination was transmitted not only to the Byzantine age, that directly comes from the Empire, but also in more recent times, whenever the sacredness of power had to be emphasized. So, it found special appreciation in all the political realities that were inspired by the imperial ideology, such as the

¹ The stone was commonly called *lapis porphyrites*, i. e. “purple stone” or also “Thebaic stone”, because of the great abundance found in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt.

Church, the Carolingian Empire, the Ottonian dynasty, the Norman kings of Sicily, the Swabian emperors, up to the sultans of the Ottoman Empire.

With the transfer of the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople, pieces of porphyry were brought there either raw, directly from Egyptian quarries, or already worked from Rome. These were mostly columns that could be re-used as such or transformed for different uses.

Constantine had a large honorary column erected in his Forum [7, pp. 140–145], known as the “burnt column” or the “ringed column” (*Çemberlitaş*). In 330 A.D., the 57 meter column was removed from the Temple of Apollo in Rome and erected in the square that had been once called *Forum of Constantine*. The column was formed by placing 8 3-tons columns and 3-meters diameter rings and a pedestal on each other (Ill. 1)².

The Emperor Constantine ordered the replacement of the sculpture of Apollo saluting the sun with its own sculpture following its erection in Constantinople. Later on, it was replaced with the sculptures of the subsequent Roman Emperors Julianus and Theodosius. The column was struck by lightning in 1081. Alexios I Komnenos ordered the repairs of the column and placement of a column head with a pedestal and a big cross on the top.

However, the cross was removed upon the conquest of the city in 1453. After the conquest, the column was renovated for the first time after 1470s, in the age of Selim I (1512–1520).

Later in the Ottoman era, the column of Apollo and its marbles were severely damaged in a fire. Sultan Mustafa II (1695–1703) ordered addition of walls under the column and iron rings around to reinforce it. From that day, it has been called *Çemberlitaş* (column with rings).

Large porphyry columns were used in the *Hagia Sophia* church [7, p. 118], and we must not forget the columns in the room where future Byzantine emperors were born, whether one interprets the term “porphyrogenite” as being “born in the purple” or “within porphyry walls”³.

The city’s main square was also decorated with porphyry statues: the *Philadelphion* (“place of brotherly love”). It was thought to be the physical centre, or *mesomphalos*, of the city. It was one of the squares where the Imperial processional ceremonies were performed⁴.

Statues of Augusti and Caesars (Tetrarchs) in act of embracing, were supposed to be placed on the shaft of two columns⁵. The statues were originally designed as two separate sculptures, each consisting of a pair of armoured late Roman emperors embracing one another⁶. The columns no longer exist. In the 1960s, the heel part of the missing foot was discovered by archaeologists in Istanbul close to the Bodrum Mosque (inv. 5848).

² All photographs are free and were made by the author.

³ Perhaps the gestural chairs of princesses were also made of porphyry. In Rome there is a specimen in the Vatican Museums made of red marble, chromatically similar to porphyry.

⁴ We are unable to locate the site of the *Philadelphion* with certainty: “era nel Tauro, cioè nella zona dell’attuale piazza di Bejazit ma il sito preciso di esso non è chiaro: esso ricorre negli itinerari dei cortei imperiali, documenti notoriamente incerti e talora contraddittori: le tappe erano determinate talora dal cerimoniale con precedenza di visita ad opere di particolare significato e non dalla via più breve” [25, pp. 11–12].

⁵ There is no certain identification of the four figures. The most accredited hypothesis among scholars is that they are the dynasties of the first tetrarchy (Diocletian and Maximian as Augusti, Constantius Chlorus and Galerius as Caesars). The gesture of the embrace would symbolize *fraternitas* in the sense of tetrarchic ideology, more precisely fraternity between emperors of the same rank [18, p. 383].

⁶ One of the pairs is made of a monolithic block, while the other is made of three blocks placed side by side. The columns on which they stood must have been presumably 7–8 meters high.

The Four Tetrarchs were plundered by the Venetians when the city was sacked during the 4th Crusade in 1204 and have been fixed to a corner of the façade of St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Philadelphion square existed intact until the 18th century.

To get an idea of the original appearance of the columns with the Tetrarchs, a comparison can be made with the sculptural group of the Vatican Library, even if the characters are smaller in size.

Even the tombs of the emperors were made of porphyry, starting with the Constantine's one⁷. The dynastic mausoleum was located in the church of the Holy Apostles, which no longer exists. In its place is the Fatih Mosque with the tomb of Sultan Mehmed II (1451–1481). The Church was built to preserve the holy relics of the twelve Apostles; however, only relics from a few of them could be obtained. The church's mausoleums were the resting places for most Eastern Roman emperors and members of their families for seven centuries, beginning with Constantine I (d. 337) and ending with Constantine VIII (d. 1028). With no more space available at that time, emperors began to be buried in other churches and monasteries around the city [2, p. 99]. The tombs located at the church of Holy Apostles are known only from lists in literary sources, *De Cerimoniis* by Constantine VII (2, 42).

At present, five porphyry sarcophagi are preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Istanbul [7, pp. 221–227]: four of them, undecorated, in front of the museum's façade and one, decorated, inside; two in the courtyard of the Church of St. Irene [2, pp. 77–85], barely visible because they are protected by a glass wall (Ill. 2); one in the courtyard of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque. Since almost all of them are of the smooth box type, there are no elements that allow a sure attribution.

We can make only some considerations. Emperor Julian died in battle when still young, so an earlier Ptolemaic sarcophagus was reused, probably, because of the lack of time to make one especially for him, which is identified in the specimen of the Archaeological Museum, inv. 3155. Valentinian I also died suddenly and it is plausible that a reused sarcophagus was used in his case as well, perhaps to be recognised in the square slabs of the Nuruosmaniye Mosque. The only sarcophagus decorated with vine leaves, bunches of grapes, cupids harvesting grapes, and plant racemes, of which only a fragment remains, is the one in the Archaeological Museum, inv. 806, which is attributed to the emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus on the basis of a comparison with the Roman example from the mausoleum of Santa Costanza on the Via Nomentana. Due to its size and type, it could also be related to the head in the Bode Museum in Berlin (inv. 6129) [6, p. 107 H29], which appears to have been purchased in Constantinople in 1908. A proposal of identification has also been made for the other specimens in the Archaeological Museum: Arcadius (inv. 2391), Theodosius I (inv. 3154) and Constantius II (without inv.).

The city is also full of porphyry materials scattered in the courtyards of mosques and palaces. Among these are the fragments in the courtyard of the Molla Fenari Mosque (Ill. 3), which, due to their square shape, could perhaps be attributed to another sarcophagus, or to one of those already known.

⁷ The sarcophagi of St Helena, Constantine's mother, from the tomb at Tor Pignattara, and that of Constantina or St Constance, the emperor's daughter, from the mausoleum with the same name on the Via Nomentana, were made of the same materials in Rome. Both specimens are currently kept in the Vatican Museums.

Marcian was the last emperor for whom a porphyry burial was made. After him, it was necessary to use waste materials such as columns or thermal baths, as in the case of the Norman kings in Sicily, made from the shafts of gigantic columns, or in the tombs of the Popes in Rome, whose “urns” were nothing more than water tanks.

The case of the so-called sarcophagus of Hadrian, mentioned in the *Marvels of Rome* (*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, 12th century), and located at that time in Castel Sant’Angelo, is complicated: “Nel cerchio mediano il sepolcro in porfido di Adriano, che ora si trova nel Laterano dinanzi al lavatoio; il coperchio di tale sepolcro sta nel paradiso di San Pietro sopra il sepolcro del Prefetto” [11, p. 75].

This particularly valuable and symbolic sarcophagus was dismembered during the Middle Ages and divided between the two main Roman basilicas: the lid in St. Peter, the lower basin in St. John. To be honest, it was thought that this second piece might not be a sarcophagus, but a thermal bath. On the other hand, it is easy to confuse the two types, which are very similar. The lower part of the porphyry tomb at the time of the *Mirabilia* was located in the *Campus Lateranensis*, right in front of the wash-house (*ante fulloniam*), which was fed by the Claudian aqueduct. And perhaps this detail was the reason for the incorrect connection to the water. But, in reality, it could have been in that position, where the obelisk is now, only for ornamental purposes, as it happened later in Rome, for the porphyry basin in front of the Pantheon or for the granite ones on St. Mark’s Square and Farnese Square. But this basin then returned to its original funerary function, this time to hold the bones of Innocent II, who died in 1143 and was placed inside only in 1148 [15, p. 7]. Unfortunately, when the roof of the Lateran Basilica collapsed following a fire in 1308, the porphyry basin broke into several fragments, which were later dispersed, almost certainly at the time of Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590), as part of the Lateran’s redevelopment. So, after the end of the 16th century, there is nothing left to document the lower part of Hadrian’s tomb.

The lid, however, had ended up in the Vatican, as is also testified by a description of the basilica made by the canon of St Peter’s, Pietro Mallio, which refers almost with the same words to the *Mirabilia*: “Nel cerchio mediano [del Mausoleo di Adriano] ci fu il sepolcro in porfido che ora si trova in Laterano, nel quale è stato sepolto Innocenzo II. Il coperchio sta nel paradiso di S. Pietro sul sepolcro del Prefetto” [23, p. 5]. It is interesting to note that in this case there is a description that refers to the Hadrian’s mausoleum, but the information that the sarcophagus belongs to the emperor Hadrian is omitted. This omission can be justified, according to Cesare D’Onofrio [9, p. 151], as a desire on the part of the canon of St. Peter’s not to give too much importance to the rival basilica (St. John’s), which was in possession of the lower part, much more substantial and therefore more valuable. This information is, however, reported by the canon of St. John Lateran, who specifies that the tomb belongs to Hadrian [17, pp. 97–103].

The history of the lid is quite troubled. At first, it was used to cover the tomb of Otto II, the emperor who died at the age of twenty eight in Rome. Although he had been hated during his life, he was particularly appreciated by the Roman people when he died in Rome. There had not been a similar event in the Eternal City for centuries. And in this case, too, the royalty of porphyry comes to light: it was the only material worthy of the emperor and there was no better piece than the one coming from the most solemn tomb in all of Rome. We are in the year 983 A. D., but by the time of the *Mirabilia*, about 50 years later, something must have changed,

because the porphyry lid had become the cover of a prefect's tomb. Presumably we are not talking about a particular personage — although some have suggested that this person should be identified as the *praefectus urbis Cintius*, who lived at the time of Gregory VII (1073–1085), or *Anicius Probus*, who lived at the end of the 4th century — but about a particularly coveted position with many powers, which had become exclusive to a single family, the Prefects of Vico.

But the lid will return again to the emperor's tomb. The description by Jesuit Father Andreas Schott in an *Itinerarium* of 1587 is significant in this regard: "Here is the porphyry tomb of Emperor Otto II, buried in the year of Christ 1486. In the whole of Italy there is no greater porphyry than this, except that which is on the roof of S. Maria Rotonda in Ravenna, which was once the tomb of Theodoric King of the Ostrogoths". The year 1486 clearly indicates not the date of the emperor's death — it would be too strange for Schott not to know it — but the date of the tomb's restoration, an event about which the Jesuit father had presumably read in an epigraph. After other vicissitudes, also due to the sack of Rome in 1527, when the emperor's tomb was again uncovered, in 1610 the porphyry cover was again in place when St Peter's Paradise was dismantled. Then it was decided to transfer the burial to the Vatican Grottoes [9, pp. 160–161]. And it was from there, at the end of the 17th century, that the architect Carlo Fontana drew it for the construction of the baptistery of the Vatican Basilica, who adapted the porphyry lid by exploiting its internal cavity [16, p. 126].

Fortunately, a handwritten description of the piece made by the architect himself in 1697 has been preserved: "Del lavoro delle prime cornici grossamente intagliate, che appariscono intorno a questa gran lapide di porfido la quale è longa più di palmi sedici e mezzo (= 368 cm) e larga otto e mezzo (= 190 cm), si comprende chiaramente esser stata fatta in Egitto, e non in Roma, dove li scornisciamenti si facevano con più delicata maniera, e perciò si crede certamente, che prima servisse a qualche sepolcro di quei famosi Re di Egitto, e di là fosse trasportata per ordine di Adriano imperatore, per valersene anch'egli di coperchio al Sepolcro interiore nel suo gran Mausoleo, oggi detto Castel S. Angelo, da dove è indubitato, che con tante altre colonne e pietre antiche fu trasportata nel Vaticano, e gettata sopra il picciolo Sepolcro d'Ottone Secondo Imperatore, che stà sotto alle sotterranee Grotte, quasi spezzata, come pietraccia vile, inutile, ed in parte rotta per tante trasportazioni fatte di essa con così poco riguardo"⁸.

Architect Fontana is particularly careful to provide us not only with the measurements of the piece, but with a detailed description of its appearance, which must have been very particular and quite original. In this way, we can try to deduce what Hadrian's sarcophagus must have looked like originally, including the lower part, something that is no longer possible by looking at the remaining fragments, since the lower part has been lost and the lid broke into five pieces during the transportation from the Vatican Grottoes to the chapel of the baptismal font, due to the use of soaked ropes. It was Fontana who had to put the fragments back together again, but at this point he made some modifications using pieces of porphyry that he had found at the port of Ripa Grande, in order to create a heavy frame that would overlap the light original edge [13, p. 473].

In the 12th and 13th century, on Sicily, a group of porphyry sarcophagi were produced from the reign of Roger II onwards and used for royal and then imperial burials, namely those of King Roger II, King William I, Emperor Henry VI (Ill. 4), Queen Constance, and Emperor

⁸ *Descrizione della Nobilissima Cappella del fonte battesimale della Basilica Vaticana ... delineata dal Cav. Carlo Fontana etc.*

Frederick II [8, p.226]. They are all now in the Palermo Cathedral, except William's one in Monreale Cathedral. The tombs of emperors and royal figures moved to the Palermo Cathedral in the 18th century from their original sites (mostly from the basilica itself).

The same characteristics as in the tomb coming from the Baths of Agrippa in Rome and now in the Basilica of St John Lateran have been recognized in the examples of Henry VI, William I, and Constance of Altavilla [4, pp.70–75]. In particular the most similar sarcophagus is the one of Henry VI. This basin was certainly placed in the Piazza del Pantheon from the mid-12th century until 1734, when it was brought to St John Lateran to build the tomb of Pope Clement XII.

They were presumably carved by a local workshop from porphyry imported from Rome, the latter four plausibly (based on observation of their fluting) all from a single column shaft that may have been taken from the Baths of Caracalla or the Baths of Diocletian. These Sicilian porphyry sarcophagi are the very first examples of medieval free-standing secular tombs in the West, and therefore play a unique role within the history of Italian sepulchral art (earlier and later tombs are adjacent to, and dependent on walls).

Lucia Faedo believes that the complete tomb of Roger was formed by a Roman sarcophagus, placed on a marble base and surmounted by a canopy supported, presumably, by porphyry columns. Clues of this reconstruction would be obtained from a piece of porphyry architrave, today preserved in Calabria as an altar step in the co-cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption (Chapel of the Holy Sacrament) in Nicotera (Ill. 5), where it would have already arrived after the earthquake of 1659, when marble and other valuable things of the Trinity church ended lost or sold. The architrave is decorated with three masks with human faces very similar to those carved on the canopy of the tomb of Frederick II in Palermo [12, p.696].

We have seen that throughout the Middle Ages the difficulty of working the Porphyry meant that almost all reused pieces were fragmentary. Statuary in this period seems to be completely absent.

Porphyritic baths, normally transported inside churches already in this period, rarely seem to have a thermal origin. One such example, albeit with some uncertainty, is the basin reused in the baptismal font of Metz Cathedral, dating to the 4th century A.D. This is reported in 1610 (when the king Henry IV visited Metz) by a local historian, Martin Meurisse, who, in listing the monuments in the city, dwells on what he considers to be the most beautiful, namely the porphyry bath tub that must have come from the city baths.

In Rome, bathtubs were often reused for funerary purposes, as in the case of the sample in the Galleria Borghese (room V, inv. CLXV), characterised by a simple basin crowned by a series of moulded cornices and figured supports with griffins.

The example from the Basilica of St Bartholomew on the Island in Rome (Ill. 6), placed under the high altar and adapted to house the relics of the titular saint, presents the motif of the naturalistic lion protome with a mane of wavy locks and two large handles with an ivy leaf in the centre. It is probably dated to the 2nd century A.D., but later alterations cannot be excluded. The hand holding a ring with an ivy leaf in the centre of the sarcophagus of Henry VI was originally inspired by this basin. The same motif of rings with hinges and a central leaf is also used in the basin of the Church of St. John and St. Paul.

In addition to the basins, a series of large and medium-sized *labra* have also been made of porphyry, ranging from the most luxurious to the simplest types, characterised by excel-

lent workmanship that further accentuates the exclusivity of the material. These are a series of circular basins for collecting water, often dependent on imperial commissions, designed to be displayed in public, perhaps in large open spaces such as squares, forums or more simply in places associated with water.

The *labrum*, from the Latin word *lavabrum*, is a large basin or cup with a flat bottom placed above a support. The main feature is that the upper circumference is much wider than that of the bottom. The labra were used for decorative purposes. Their provenance is known only in a few cases.

The *labrum* of the basilica of St. Zeno in Verona (Ill. 7) for centuries was placed in the square in front of the church [1, pp. 188–191 L11]. It could be used for the ritual ablutions of the faithful. Its position was symbolic and recalled the Lateran square in Rome with its porphyritic *concha*, in which Constantine was baptized.

This cup could have come from the Roman public baths or from a luxurious private bath. Legend has it that this specimen comes from the East: the chips on the surface are said to be the marks left by the devil's nails which, by order of St. Zeno, would have transported it from Syria to Verona.

The columns are undoubtedly the structural element most suitable for reuse, but because of their simplicity of construction they are the least datable. Almost all of those that have survived are bare and no useful information about their original location can be drawn from the sources either.

A number of porphyry columns have been preserved, but for none of them it is possible to establish, to which buildings they had belonged. The columns are scattered throughout the Middle Ages in churches and buildings.

In Rome, the larger ones were reused in the Lateran Baptistery (8 in the central ring and 2 in the atrium of Plautius Lateran).

Those reused in the altars or in the chapels of the churches are of more modest proportions and certainly their original location must be sought in the upper orders of a building and not in a load-bearing function.

Eight porphyry columns decorated the “Cantaro” (fountain for ablutions) located, until it was dismantled around 1610, in the atrium of the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter in Rome [11, p. 75]. In the centre, there was the famous bronze pinecone, now in the courtyard of the same name in the Vatican. In a drawing attributed by Malgouyres [19, p. 52] to Simone del Pollaiuolo (1457–1508) depicting the “Cantaro” (Fig. 1), a column with a bust protruding forward can be clearly distinguished. The bust could be recognized in the sample of the Pio-Clementino Museum (Sala dei Busti, inv. 598), given its forward position. It is, in fact, plausible that the statue was detached from a column. The bust represents a young man dressed in anatomical *lorica*, with the cloak fastened with a fibula on the right shoulder.

However, the columns of the Louvre with the portraits of Nerva and Trajan [19, pp. 51–54], of unknown origin, which became part of the collection of Palazzo Altemps at about the end of the 16th century, following the desired purchase, cannot be connected, even if similar in shape⁹.

⁹ The columns of the Louvre, only 236 cm high and 40 cm in diameter, would have been too thin to support a canopy placed above the pinecone.

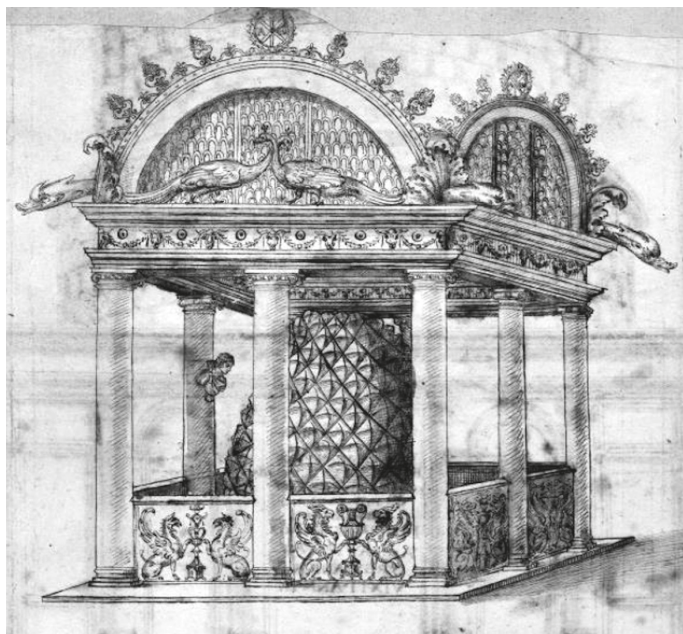


Fig. 1. Anonymous, formerly Il Cronaca (Simone del Pollaiuolo) "Cantharus" of Old St. Peter's in Rome, c. 1515–25. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi. Photo by F. Licordari

The *Rotae porphyreticae* are the disks of sawn columns. They are used normally to decorate the floors of churches. The most famous *rota* is in the St. Peter in Rome. It is of 2.6 meters in diameter [7, p. 149]. It was already present in the old basilica from the 9th century and played a very important role: starting from Charlemagne, all the emperors had to kneel down to be crowned by the pope himself. Charlemagne was crowned *Imperator Romanorum* by Pope Leo III (pontiff from 795 to 816) on Christmas Evening, 800.

Cosmatesque style floors are frequently found in Roman churches [5, pp. 139–178]. It is a style of geometric decorative inlay stonework typical of the architecture of Middle Ages in Italy, and especially in Rome and its surroundings. It was used most extensively for the decoration of church floors, but was also used to decorate church walls, pulpits and bishop's thrones. The Cosmatesque style takes its name from the Cosmati family, which flourished in Rome during the 12th and 13th centuries and practiced the art of mosaic. The Cosmati's work is peculiar in that it consists of glass mosaic in combination with marble. It used white or light-coloured marbles for backgrounds; they were inlaid with squares, parallelograms, and circles of darker marble, porphyry, or serpentine, surrounding them with ribbons of mosaic composed of coloured and gold-glass *tesserae*.

This style reminds of the ancient *opus sectile*, a roman art technique where materials were cut and inlaid into walls and floors to make a picture or pattern.

The last classic example is probably the so-called head "Carmagnola", perhaps the portrait of Justinian II Rinotmetos [6, pp. 110–111 H44]. There had been seen the similarity with the

Venetian captain of fortune Francesco Bussone known as “Count of Carmagnola”, who was beheaded by the Venetians in 1432 on charges of treason. The head would therefore have been placed in a clearly visible position on the balustrade of the parapet of St Mark’s Basilica in Venice to act as a warning to the people.

Only in the Renaissance the techniques of Porphyry working were rediscovered, about which Giorgio Vasari gives us information in the first chapter of *The Lives* dedicated to architecture, when he describes the different stones used in the ornaments. In Florence, the material was very popular among artists of the court of the Medici: “All that remains to be said of porphyry is that, because the quarries are now lost to knowledge, it is necessary to make use of what is left of it in the form of ancient fragments, drums of columns and other pieces; and that in consequence he who works in porphyry must ascertain whether or not it has been subjected to the action of fire, because if it have, although it does not completely lose its colour, nor crumble away, it lacks much of its natural vividness and never takes so good a polish as when it has not been so subjected; and, what is worse, it easily fractures in the working. It is also worth knowing, as regards the nature of porphyry, that, if put into the furnace, it does not burn away (*non si cuoce*), nor allow other stones round it to be thoroughly burnt; indeed, as to itself, it grows raw (*incrudisce*) as is shown in the two columns the men of Pisa gave to the Florentines in the year 1117 after the acquisition of Majorca. These columns now stand at the principal door of the Church of San Giovanni; they are colourless and not very well polished in consequence of having passed through fire, as Giovanni Villani relates in his history” [24, p. 34].

Soon after, the use of the material spread to the French court, probably thanks to the arrival of the two Tuscan queens, Catherine and Marie de’ Medici: new products are made with an exclusively decorative purpose, as proved by a large number of vases, perfume burners, cassolles, etc. It also found great success among the families of the European nobility.

The last attempt to rediscover the quarries of the ancient porphyry was made between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century by James Burton and John Gardner Wilkinson of the Royal Geographical Society (until that moment there was only an approximate indication of the latitude, 26° 40’, calculated on the basis of the information from Ptolemy¹⁰), but it failed due to the impossibility of finding blocks of good quality and sufficient size. In addition, the new European porphyries are now available at more competitive prices and therefore there is no definitive use of this ancient material, which thus acquires more and more prestige.

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¹⁰ Γεωγραφική ύφήγησις, 4, 5, 27.

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Title. The Reuse of Red Imperial Porphyry in the West from the End of the Ancient World

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Abstract. The red imperial porphyry is a rare, appreciated and expensive marble of the antiquity. The ideology of imperial power is symbolically expressed by the purple color. Therefore, the porphyry, for the obvious chromatic similarity, is closely linked with the concept of royalty. This combination was transmitted not only to Byzantium, which is direct continuation of the Empire. It was also used in more recent times, whenever there was the need to emphasize the sacredness of power (in the Church, in the time of Carolingian Empire, of the Ottonian dynasty, of the Norman kings of Sicily, of the Swabian emperors or in the Ottoman Empire). Throughout the Middle Ages the difficulty of working the porphyry, a very hard marble, meant that almost all reused pieces were fragmentary: this is the case of the basins, reused as sepulchres or inserted in the altars, of the columns reused in the churches, of elaboration of the floor decorations (*rotae porphyreticae*, Cosmatesque floors) and so on. Only in the Renaissance the techniques of porphyry working were rediscovered. In Florence, the material was

very popular among the artists of the court of the Medici. Soon after, the use of the material spread to the French court, and it also found great success among the families of the European nobility. The last attempt to revive the use of the ancient Porphyry was made between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, but it failed due to the impossibility of finding blocks of good quality and sufficient size. In addition, the new European porphyries were now available at more competitive prices and therefore there was no extensive use of this ancient material, which thus acquired more and more prestige.

Keywords: red porphyry, reuse, sarcophagi, columns, basins, royalty

Название статьи. Повторное использование красного императорского порфира на Западе в после-античное время

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Аннотация. Красный императорский порфир — редкий и высоко ценимый в древности камень. Идеология имперской власти символически выражалась в пурпуре, поэтому порфир, из-за очевидного цветового сходства, оказался тесно связан с концепцией царской власти. Эта традиция перешла в Византию, непосредственно продолжившую Римскую империю. Она была востребована и в более позднее время, когда хотели подчеркнуть святость власти (например, в Церкви, в эпохи Каролингов, Оттонов, норманнских королей Сицилии, в Священной Римской империи, в Османской империи). На протяжении всего Средневековья сложность обработки порфира, особо твёрдой породы, приводила к тому, что почти все spolia были фрагментарными: это касается бассейнов, вторично используемых в качестве гробниц или вставленных в алтари, колонн, деталей напольных украшений (rotae porphyreticae, полы в стиле Космати) и так далее. Только в эпоху Возрождения техника обработки порфира была открыта заново. Во Флоренции этот материал был очень популярен среди художников двора Медичи. Вскоре его использование распространилось при французском дворе и приобрело большой успех среди европейской знати. Последняя попытка возродить древний порфир была предпринята между 1850-ми и 1950-ми гг., но потерпела неудачу из-за невозможности добычи блоков достаточно высокого качества и большого размера. Кроме того, новые европейские порфиры теперь доступны по более конкурентноспособным ценам, и поэтому в последнее время этот древний материал используется редко, таким образом, приобретая все больший престиж.

Ключевые слова: красный порфир, повторное использование, саркофаги, колонны, бассейны, королевская власть



Ill. 1. Column of Constantine. Istanbul. Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 3. Fragment in the courtyard of the Molla Fenari Mosque. Istanbul. Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 2. Sarcophagi in the courtyard of the church of St Irene. Istanbul. Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 4. Sarcophagus of the emperor Henry VI. Palermo. Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 5. Altar step in the co-cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption. Nicotera (Calabria). Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 6. Basin in basilica of St Bartholomew on the Island. Rome. Photo by F. Licordari



Ill. 7. *Labrum* of St Zeno's basilica. Verona. Photo by F. Licordari