CHAPTER NINE

ITALY AND SICILY

Introduction

This chapter explores what re-use meant to commissioners and builders in Italy and Sicily, and how such meaning(s) may have changed over time. After a brief review of the place of marble supply in architectural revivals in Rome (which set the tenor for the rest of the peninsula), it examines the impact of marble on centres to its north and south, and over the Straits in Sicily. It will conclude that the use of marble was not continuous, but depended (in those cases for which we have some documentation) on individuals entranced by its properties, following Early Christian and Byzantine precedent, and possibly by some kind of politico-religious agenda.\(^1\) The context is the startling variety of marbles re-used; and we may hope that the approach of Bugini & Folli to Lombardy (survey by stone, ordered by place, and divided up in-situ-scavo-museo-riuso—and demonstrating cipollino as by far the most popular in re-use) will be pursued elsewhere.\(^2\)

Urbanism in Italy shows several centuries of near-crisis, a downturn in aristocratic building, and a perhaps natural propensity for eulogising the past rather than describing the present.\(^3\) Rome is, today, the centre of the study of the antique,\(^4\) not just because she certainly contained more

\(^1\) Christie, *From Constantine to Charlemagne*, 78f. for useful dot-points on churches as an aid to understanding the period, including devotion, investment & patronage, pilgrimage, burial, epitaphs & dedications, and pride in stone-buildings.


\(^3\) Wickham: *Framing*, 644ff; he instances the 739 *Versus de mediolano civitate*, which says how great Milan was (“firme stratum silice”)—when all the diggers have found is beaten earth; again, 213: the *Memoratorium de mercedibus comacinorum* lists impressivesounding houses, especially in Ravenna, but “the display which is clear in these texts has not been found archaeologically, except in churches.” Zanna, P., “Descriptiones urbium and elegy in Latin and vernacular in the early Middle Ages,” *Studii medioevali* series 3 32 1991, 523–96; 529: concern in the *Versus de destructione Aquileiae* to emphasize the contrast before and after the city’s destruction.

antiquities per cubic metre (and those often of better quality, even after the degradations of Renaissance and Baroque popes) than any other city, but also because more northerly cities, prosecuting a population expansion in which Rome did not share, certainly rediscovered thereby some antiquities. However, they destroyed most of the evidence of their antique past in the process, sometimes using it to build their important monuments, especially churches. In the countryside (remember all those villas!), La Rocca characterizes the 10th century, a period when land came into the possession of local nobles, as one when intensive cultivation and ploughing brought antiquities to light.5

Sometimes an interest in antiquities is not illuminated by knowledge about them, as when the Chronicon Novaliciense records that in the 8thC the patrician Abbo “ex candidissimis marmoribus et diversis lapidum generibus mire pulchritudinis et altitudinis elevari archum in Sigusina civitate,”6 and supposedly wrote on it his local donations. But this is the Arch of Augustus at Susa, so the chronicler either did not see the inscription or, if he did, could not read it—so low marks for epigraphy as well as accurate knowledge of past monuments. Nevertheless, “the past as evident in the monuments was visible to everybody and was therefore seen as a guarantee of prestige and authenticity.”7 During the population upturn of the 11th century, the monks of Novalesa were given by Marquis Oddo II the ancient abandoned city of Pollenzo, obviously for building materials.8 Indeed, the following overview will concentrate on large monuments, but re-use is constant in smaller cities such as Susa,9 or small valleys in the Romagna.10 Thus Rome was not always the natural source of marble antiquities in the Middle Ages, because the Papacy and other lords were as jealous of such materials as Cassiodorus had been. Those other population centres interested in antiquities, as well as sometimes importing quantities from Rome and Ostia, often had them available on their doorsteps as well.11

6 Alessio, G.C., ed., Cronaca di Novalesa, (Turin 1982), II.18, 120.
7 La Rocca, “Using the Roman past,” 45.
8 Ibid., 46.
11 Jatta, Giovanni, Cenno storico sull’antichissima citta di Ruvo, (Naples 1844), 101: one