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Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: The Power Dynamics of Spolia in Early Medieval Christian

Buildings

As Christianity grew in popularity in the late antique period, Christians modified their

physical space in an attempt to find their place in a prominently pagan world. These

modifications, such as the incorporation of *spolia* in churches, and sometimes even complete

reuse of pagan temples, provide integral insight into Christianity's role in the shifting power

dynamics of the late antique period. *Spolia*, or recycled architectural materials, have been

utilized throughout history, they rose to popularity during the reign of Emperor Constantine, and

remained popular through most of late antiquity when many prominent churches were

constructed. Recent scholarship, such as that produced by Beat Brenk, Helen Saradi, and Feyo L.

Schuddeboom, has called into question the commonly held theories regarding the presence of

spolia in churches, and has opened up the opportunity for a new and more thorough analysis of

the purpose of *spolia*, especially in conversation with the literature.

Trends in scholarship concerning *spolia* have recently come to recognize the complex

social and religious connotations they can have. However, as Beat Brenk outlines in his essay,

"*Spolia* from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics Versus Ideology," the scholarship on this

topic has enjoyed a rich and complex history. One branch of scholarship, which follows the ideas

of F. W. Deichmann, argues that *spolia* were incorporated in Christian buildings due to changes

in aesthetic attitudes and economic deterioration.[1] Meanwhile, a second school of thought headed

by R. Krautheimer attributes the popularity of *spolia* to a renaissance of Classical architecture

and culture.[2] Brenk argues that neither school is completely accurate, and then proposes his own

two-fold contribution to the conversation: first, a discussion of the origins of *spolia* in reference

to the Emperor Constantine, and second, the effectiveness of utilizing *spolia* over new or local

building materials.[3] *Spolia* as a construction material became extremely popular with its

incorporation in Constantine's building plan, and can be seen as a physical embodiment of his

desire for legitimacy by curating monuments which connect him to the Classical past.[4]

Furthermore, the care and precision taken in crafting these *spolia* ladden projects illustrates that

the monuments were political power statements, and since Constantine could afford other

materials if he so desired, the use of *spolia* should be considered on a symbolic level.[5] Especially

considering it would have been much easier and less expensive to utilize local building materials

instead of importing these building materials, thus the transfer of *spolia* marks the transfer of

power.[6]

However, Brenk continues on to claim that the *spolia* in churches have no symbolic

meaning, religiously or politically, which seems unfounded. Brenk carefully argues that

Constantine used *spolia* to send a deliberate political message, then contradicts himself

concerning Constantine's religious buildings. Constantine certainly may have just enjoyed the

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[1] B. Brenk, "*Spolia* from Constantine to Charlemagne: Aesthetics Versus Ideology," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 41 (1987), 103-109.; F. W. Deichmann, *Die Spolien in der spätantiken Architektur*, SB Münch, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse(1975) 6,95.
[2] R. Krautheimer, "The Architecture of Sixtus III: A Fifth Century Renascence?" *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art* (New York, 1969) 181-198.
[3] Brenk, "*Spolia*," 103.
[4] Ibid., 105.
[5] Ibid., 105.
[6] Ibid., 107-109.

ornamental appearance of *spolia*, but if one accepts Brenk's first premise that Constantine used *spolia* deliberately in public monuments, why would he not similarly utilize *spolia* in a religious context? Brenk cites Constantine's humble upbringing as a motivator for positioning himself within a line of venerable emperors, thus establishing a connection with them and justification for his rule.[7] It makes sense that Constantine would also strive to connect Christianity to this antique tradition. Christianity was still a new religion in the Empire, and Romans disliked new things, instead preferring the *mos maiorum*. Attaching Christianity to ancient and respectable traditions would not only serve to justify Christianity's place within the empire, but it would also support Constantine's decision to convert to Christianity. Hence, Constantine would gain much by utilizing *spolia* in churches to convey a message and attach heritage to Christianity, something which Brenk completely ignores. The *spolia* are not merely building materials, they convey a distinctive message, and this message must be thoroughly explored.

Helen Saradi likewise explores the versatility of these messages, while also refuting previous perceptions concerning *spolia*, in her essay "The Use of Ancient *Spolia* in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence."[8] Saradi first points out how *spolia* are commonly interpreted, as an economic and artistic solution in an era of declining supplies and artistic skill.[9] However, incorporating *spolia* into buildings is often more expensive than utilizing new building materials and requires greater technical skill to maintain the integrity of the structure despite the different sizes and makeups of its materials.[10] Furthermore, the presence of *spolia* in churches can have profound theological meaning. *Spolia* may be interpreted as a visual

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[7] Ibid., 105.
[8] H. Saradi, "The Use of Ancient *Spolia* in Byzantine Monuments: The Archaeological and Literary Evidence," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 3(1997): 395-423.
[9] Ibid., 397-398.
[10] Ibid., 399.

way to illustrate Christianity's defeat of paganism, however *spolia* sometimes was used to insinuate that all of history was leading up to Christianity. Following this reasoning, Saradi calls attention to Christianity's propensity for adopting tradition from other, more established customs.[11] Saradi goes on to note how the popularity of *spolia* continued throughout the late Byzantine era, and included a variety of pieces such as frescos and friezes.[12] Moreover, considering the beliefs of the Byzantines is important in understanding the impact of *spolia*. In illustrating the importance of incorporating the religious beliefs into the examination of *spolia* use, Saradi adds a necessary dimension to the scholarly conversation. Saradi calls attention to some beliefs, such as the presence of demons in certain locations, which provide more insight into the actual ancient people who lived at the time. Religious, philosophical, or ethical beliefs can greatly impact the way in which people interact with and modify their physical environment. Especially in the context of a reorganization of space so linked to religious meaning and symbolism, it is imperative to confer with the religious customs of the time. Therefore, Saradi's essay skillfully rebuts common perceptions of *spolia*, while also demonstrating how important an interdisciplinary approach is when evaluating *spolia* use.

This evolution of the study of *spolia* use has created the necessity for new theories, such as Lex Bosman's thesis in his essay "*Spolia* in the Fourth Century Basilica." Bosman focuses on the idea that *spolia*, specifically the *spolia* within St. Peter's Basilica, does not convey any type

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[11] Ibid., 401- 404. Christian adoption of pagan monuments sometimes included the carving of crosses on the foreheads of statues of emperors. The symbol of the cross was not added in an attempt to neutralize the statues, but rather to indicate that those emperors were pre-Christians and their actions were God's plan all along. This appropriation of pagan tradition frequently occured to the members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, who ruled when Christ was on Earth.

[12] Ibid., 405- 410.

of Christian message.[13] The incorporation of *spolia* as a building material was common before

Constantine rose to power, and was a popular building technique. Therefore, it is difficult to tie

spolia specifically to Christian building projects.[14] Bosman goes on to illuminate the uncertainty

one has to distinguishing the impact of *spolia* on its viewer, specifically because of how

commonplace it had become.[15] Thus, the inclusion of *spolia* was an artistic choice, and the *spolia*

were selected based on their appearance alone.[16] Bosman's argument, while certainly intriguing,

evaluates *spolia* from a purely architectural viewpoint and misses certain aspects of early

Christian life, such as how the *spolia* were received, which ultimately weakens his argument.

Bosman simply assumes that the architectural splendor of St. Peter's is mutually exclusive with

the rich symbolism which *spolia* can provide. When, in fact, the grandeur of the *spolia* adds to

the impact of the message being conveyed through the *spolia*, and the feeling of awe which

Bosman concludes was the purpose of the *spolia* may be transferred over to Christianity itself.

Moreover, Bosman's earliest source from the voice of one viewing the *spolia* dates to the

sixteenth century. Much analysis and evidence is lost when early texts are excluded, as they

provide a glimpse into the minds of the people who lived during those times. Thus, while

Bosman's research is useful for studying the logistics of what *spolia* is present in the St. Peter's

Basilica, his analysis falls short of reaching a conclusion inclusive of all available evidence.

Following this idea, Saradi, in another essay, demonstrates the necessity to incorporate

literary evidence when examining *spolia*. Her essay, "Christian Attitudes Towards Pagan

Monuments in Late Antiquity," conducts a more inclusive exploration of the dynamics between

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[13] L. Bosman, "Spolia in the Fourth Century Basilica," in R. McKitterick et al. (eds.), Old Saint Peter's, Rome (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 65-80.
[14] Ibid., 76-78.
[15] Ibid., 78-79.
[16] Ibid., 80.

Christians and Pagans as seen through both archaeological and literary evidence.[17] Saradi's

ambitious thesis argues that Christians had a positive relationship with Pagans during the

Byzantine period.[18] Furthermore, Classical monuments maintained their aesthetic value and were

continually desired by both pagans and Christians alike.[19] Thus, Christians would re-use

materials from pagan temples and monuments because of their artistic value.[20] In closing, Saradi

remarks that Christians and pagans merely had different definitions of what the sacred was, and

yet they nevertheless continued to share a close and intimate relationship.[21] Despite this

interesting argument, Saradi's essay still had its flaws. One of which Saradi herself

acknowledges when she says, "it is difficult to trace the attitude of the uneducated Christians."[22]

Since Saradi does incorporate a significant amount of literary evidence, upon which most of her

argument rests, her statements only apply to those for whom the sources are adequate

representations, so elite, rich males. Furthermore, Saradi only examines hagiographical sources

as her literary evidence. While, yes, hagiographical sources provide interesting context for the

mindset of Christians and their concept of place, other literature from early christians would help

to deepen the context. Although, when studied critically, literature can be a powerful tool which

provides necessary social context to archaeological data. Written sources are the closest one can

get to conversing with these ancient people, and in reading their literature one if privy to their

actual thoughts and musings, however biased. The literature tells us how the authors wanted their

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[17] H. Saradi, "Christian Attitudes Towards Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity," *Dumbarton Oak Papers* 44(1990): 47-61.
[18] Ibid., 47.
[19] Ibid., 50-51.
[20] Ibid., 53.
[21] Ibid., 60.
[22] Ibid., 55.

building projects to be perceived and in general add a necessary dimension to analyzing the archaeological data.

These scholars have done great work in illustrating the issues with the preeminent theories regarding the incorporation of *spolia* in churches, however there is still more research to be done. None of these new arguments have fully taken into account the role that *spolia* plays in manifesting the rise of Christian prominence. Christians utilized *spolia* not just for the practical purposes, as they were limited, nor as a way to gloat triumph over the pagan cults which ruled in antiquity. Rather, the incorporation of *spolia* in early and medieval Christian churches were a way to signal the transfer of power as Christianity grew in importance and to tie Christianity to a past. An integral part of this analysis rests on a close evaluation of the *spolia* present in San Giovanni in Laterano, its Baptistry, and San Nicola in Carcere. However, as Saradi has demonstrated, incorporating literature literature is necessary to an archaeological argument and can introduce a new level of nuance to the discussion. Thus, in order to fully understand the use of *spolia* in Roman churches, both the physical and literary evidence must be considered in conversation with each other.

Contextualizing Christianity

The society, and Christianity's place within it, impacted the building of these differing Christian buildings and their subsequent employment of *spolia*. Christianity was a fairly new religion in Rome, especially compared to the ancient cults which had long traditions of familial cult practices. Christianity's position as a new religion meant that it was not readily accepted by the Romans. The Romans valued the *mos maiorum* and were suspicious of anything new, including new religions. Therefore, in order to be fully accepted in Rome, the Christians would

need to work to justify their position and later power. One way to accomplish this task is to play into the very mindset which distrusts Christianity, and that is to connect it to an antique tradition. An attachment to the Classical past attempts to tie the respect, venerability, and most importantly the legitimate power to Christianity.

Emperor Constantine especially, reportedly the first Emperor to convert to Christianity and the patron of some of the most notable Christian buildings in Rome, would have the need to establish justification for Christianity. By tying Christianity to a venerable tradition, it creates a conformity to the mos maiorum and furthermore affirms Constantine's support for Christianity. Moreover, Constantine's predecessor, Emperor Diocletian, was infamous for his persecution of Christians. Therefore, encouraging Christianity would subsequently reflect poorly on Diocletian, and further justify Constantine's right to rule. The more connection with the past and the venerable history of Rome Christianity is able to attain, the more acceptable and validity it amassed. This would allow Christianity to gain more converts and eventually become the dominant religion of Rome. This strive for legitimacy and connection to the Classical world carried over into the early middle ages.[23]

As seen in the examples discussed in the following sections, *Spolia* aid in this strive for justification by serving as a physical manifestation of the transference of power from the Classical, pagan Rome of the early imperial period to the Christian Rome of late antiquity and the early medieval period. Furthermore, *spolia* call to the viewer's mind the classical buildings and architecture from which they originated, functioning as a visual connection to the longed for reputable historical tradition.

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[23] For more information on late antique and early medieval Christianity, see J. Lynch, *The Medieval Church : A Brief History* (New York: Longman, 1992).

San Giovanni in Fonta and in Laterano

The Lateran Basilica and its accompanying Baptistry are some of the best exemplars for

the way in which *spolia* symbolizes the shift in power from pagan cults to Christianity. The

Lateran was originally commissioned by Emperor Constantine, and it is believed to be the first

official church in Rome.[24] The Lateran was also adjacent to the Lateran Palace, the main papal

residence in this area of Rome.[25] This connection with Constantine, who is believed to have been

the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity, the proximity to the Pope, and merely the

fact that it was the first official church, ensured that at the time of its creation, it was immediately

an integral part of the Christian faith. Furthermore, as time progressed, the Lateran maintained its

status as a notable basilica, and it is still to this day the Archbasilica of Rome and one of the four

most important Papal Basilicas. Pilgrims would continuously flock to the Lateran throughout the

middle ages and this tradition still continues.[26] Thus, the Lateran and its Baptistry provides the

perfect platform to employ *spolia*, especially as a way to convey the transition of power, due to

its prominence and high amount of visitors.

In particular, the Baptistry of San Giovanni's contains a plethora of *spolia* rich in

meaning and symbolism, such as the eight columns surrounding the baptistry (Figure 1).[27]These

columns are all red porphyry marble, a material commonly associated with the ruling power of

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[24] M. Webb, "San Giovanni in Laterano," in The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide (Portland: Sussex Academic Press), 40-44.

[25] Ibid., 41.

[26] M. Hansen, "San Giovanni in Laterano," in *trans*. B. Haveland, The Spolia Churches of Rome: Recycling Antiquity in the Middle Ages (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015), 224. Hanson's book is an informational guide on the spolia found within specific churches in Rome, and meant to be used as a tour book. As such, Hansen provides background information on each of the churches and the spolia which are found in them and does not present a biased view, since she has no main argument or claim. This book will serve as one of the main sources for the physical descriptions of the spolia, since it is concise and explicit in its descriptions and more thorough than other resources available which discuss spolia.

[27] M. Hansen, "San Giovanni in Fonte," in *trans*. B. Haveland, *The Spolia Churches of Rome: Recycling Antiquity in the Middle Ages (*Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015), 86-99.

the emperor.[28] Despite their shared material, these eight columns are a mix of Ionic, Corinthian,

and Composite capitals, are all various heights and widths, and constructed within different time

periods, indicating that these columns were recycled from previous projects.[29] Through the use of

capitals and bases, the uneven height of the columns were evened out, illustrating the

complexities in using *spolia* rather than new materials which could have been cut to all be the

same height. Furthermore, the doorway leading to Hilary Chapel is composed of *spolia* pieces, in

which crosses have been carved.[30] While it is unsure whether these crosses were the product of

the original building procedures or later pilgrims, they still are an interesting facet of the *spolia*.

Analyzing the *spolia* present in the San Giovanni Baptistery can provide integral insight

into the changing power dynamic in Rome, as this baptistry, along with its associated Basilica,

are deeply ingrained within the Christian tradition. The choice to utilize *spolia*, specifically red

porphyry columns, within this baptistry conveys a powerful message. The Lateran and its

Baptistry were both commissioned by Emperor Constantine, who had the means to have both of

these structures constructed with all new materials, if he had wanted. Instead, he purposely chose

to include *spolia* and the connotation associated with it. The whole concept of *spolia* is that it is

building material from one structure incorporated into another, meaning that once the *spolia* are

in the second building, they are lacking in the first building. These building materials are not able

to exist within both buildings at the same time. Therefore, part of the consideration when

analyzing *spolia* lies in the fact that it is not just present in one building, but also absent, stolen,

even, from another. Due to the connotation of red porphyry, the building from which these

columns originated must have been a building of great wealth and importance, within which the

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[28] Ibid. 96.

[29] Ibid., 92.

[30] Ibid., 98-99.

red porphyry would have been appropriate. Thus, this transference of the red porphyry from some other, prominent building into the Baptistry is a physical manifestation of the transition of power in Rome. The red porphyry itself is a sign of power, and by placing it inside the Lateran Baptistery, the architect was clearly expressing the power of importance of Christianity.

The connection between the columns adorning San Giovanni in Laterano and the Classical heritage of Rome is a further example of *spolia* marking a shift in the power dynamics of Rome. San Giovanni in Laterano was beautifully designed and decorated, incorporating magnificent and breathtaking architectural features resplendent of the splendor of Christianity and the incorporation of *spolia* is a main contributor to this awe. Though the church has been rebuilt on occasion throughout the years, with the most recent renovation having occurred in the seventeenth century, the original columns are still present.[31] These columns are some of the most clearly evident examples of ancient *spolia* present in this basilica. The marble columns themselves are comprised of various colors of marble and granite and do not present a uniform facade.[32] Despite the lack of conformity, the columns were all comprised of precious and rare materials and aided in creating the splendor of the building.[33] These columns were incorporated from various different classical buildings and monuments, and thus serve as a way to tie this first church in to the classical past. This connection would serve to lend more credibility to Christianity, as the splendor of the architecture in conjunction with the Classical columns convey the strength and power of Christianity, as a way to justify Christianity's place within Roman society. Furthermore, Since Christianity did not have an antique tradition of its own, including

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[31] Hansen, "San Giovanni in Laterano,"224.
[32] R. Krautheimer, "Pat Two: The Fourth Century," in Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 39-92.
[33] Webb, "San Giovanni," 43.

spolia which would connect this building, and subsequently Christianity, in with a more admirable tradition would have greatly benefitted Christianity.

Unlike churches constructed at a later date, when Christianity was more firmly established, the Lateran and its baptistry were built when Christianity was still a minority religion in Rome. However, according to tradition, Christianity had already spread as far as the Emperor, the most important and powerful man in Rome. Nevertheless, Christianity was still a new religion and therefore still lacking the venerability associated with antique traditions. As Christianity was still a new religion, especially in the eyes of the Romans, any connection to the past, would aid in increasing the credibility of this religion. Furthermore, up until this point, the pagan cults were deeply entrenched within Roman society and politics. It would not be incredibly difficult to attempt to separate these cult religions from the aspects of everyday life, due to how integrated these practices were.[34] Almost any important building from the Classical period would also have a connection with a pagan cult. Thus, in an attempt to tie in the Classical heritage, *spolia* from pagan structures would also be included, and may not have been the main message attempting to be conveyed.

<div align="center">San Nicola in Carcere</div>

San Nicola in Carcere's historical context also adds another dimension to the analysis of *spolia*. San Nicola was built in the late eleventh century and thus during the period when it became more common to incorporate temples in churches. By this time, Christianity was firmly established as the prevalent religion and there would be no need for Christianity to utilize *spolia*

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[34] Romans relied heavily on their religious practices and customs. The auspices are merely one example of such religious beliefs, where the Romans would consult the patterns of the bird and other heavenly signs before deciding upon a variety of decisions, from decisions about commerce to whether to wage war. For more on the dynamics between pagan cults and Christianity in Rome, as well as how deeply entrenched these cults were in Rome, see R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

as a way to assert their dominance over the pagan cults. Nevertheless, the Roman mindset, which

values the *mos maiorum*, would have still been prevalent during the building of San Nicola.

Although, by the time San Nicola in Carcere was constructed, there were also Christian buildings

and monuments which could be incorporated as *spolia*, providing these new Christian buildings

with a two-fold connection to the past: the Classical period and their own history. The

connection to both of these types of heritage can be seen in the *spolia* at San Nicola in Carcere.

San Nicola in Carcere provides a unique example of more blatantly obvious *spolia*.

Unlike other examples of *spolia*, where they were brought in as building materials, the external

spolia of San Nicola were present before the basilica was even conceptualized. Three

neighboring temples, the Temples of Spes, Juno, and Janus, were all incorporated into the

structure of San Nicola.[35] The Temples of Spes and Janus lend their columns to the exterior

southern and northern sides of the Basilica, respectively. The Temple of Juno, the middle temple,

provides its foundation as the base to San Nicola and its columns to the facade of the main

eastern entrance (Figure 2, 3, & 4).[36] The columns from these previous temples are still together

and very clearly a *spolia* feature. The *spolia* utilized in this church differs from those present in

the other examples in that this basilica was superimposed on three temples, and their actual

physical structures are still present and clearly visible. These *spolia* are not just random pieces of

spolia removed from other buildings and rearranged within a new building, they are still *in situ.*

This creates a rather different impact to the viewer than the *spolia* in the buildings such as San

Giovanni in Fonte or San Clemente. With this basilica, the message comes specifically because

the spectator knows from which temples the *spolia* are from. The northern temple in particular,

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[35] M. Hansen, "San Nicola in Carcere," in *trans.* B. Haveland, *The Spolia Churches of Rome: Recycling Antiquity in the Middle Ages* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015), 184-193.
[36] Ibid., 187.

that of Janus, provides a powerful connection to Roman history. In his *Annales*, Tacitus lists this

specific temple of Janus as one of the temples which Emperor Augustus restores.[37] By

incorporating the temple columns from a temple specifically recorded to have been restored by

Augustus, the very first emperor of Rome, a very strong and venerable connection to Roman

history is solidified. This incorporation of *spolia* is a direct and physical tie to Augustus, and

even though Augustus himself did not build this church, he did restore part of it. Furthermore,

since these columns are visible from the exterior, anyone who passes by the church would see

them, and not just those who went inside. Therefore, this *spolia* reaches a far wider audience

than the *spolia* in most other churches would reach.

Within the church itself, the colonnade expresses the unique feature of contrasting

columns, where the columns across from each other are comprised of different materials and

types and do not match as they normally do in basilicas (Figures 5).[38] The only pair of columns

that do actually match are the last two preceding the chancel. An even more intriguing piece of

spolia is included in this same colonnade: a column with a dedication for a different church

inscribed on it. This inscription reads (appendix 2):

✝ DE DONIS DI[IS] ET
S[A]C[R]E DI[E] GENETRICI MARIE
S[A]C[R]E ANNE S[A]C[RU]S SIMEON ET S[A]C[R]E
LUCIE EDGO ANASTASIUS MA
IORDOMU OFERO BOBIS PRONATA
LICIES BESTRE BINEA TABULUM
R[E]P[OSITUM] IN PORTU SEV
BOBES PARIA II IUMENTA S[UB]V[IDE] PECORA
XXX PORCI X FURMA DE RAME LIBRAS
XXVI LECTUS IT[E]RAT V IN UTILITA
TE P[RES]B[YTE]R SE VALEO LECTO SI TRA
TO AT MANSIONARIIS EQUI

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[37] Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. by M. Grant (New York: Penguin Group, 1956).
[38] Hansen, "San Nicola," 188-191.

SEQUENTIBUS[39]

✝ IC REQUIESCIT IN ANTE

✝ From the divine gifts and
Holy Divine Mother Mary
Holy Anne, Holy Simeon, and Holy
Lucia I, Anastasius, maiordomu,
Offer to you all for the birthday celebrations
Your communion table
Having been put back or in the doorway
cows, 2 equal mules, see below: 30 cattle,
10 pigs, 26 pounds from the branch form
Having been selected, having been spread in the utility
Of the priest himself, the other having been selected and spread
For the the following journeys.

✝He (Anastasius) rests below

This column is a way to exemplifies how Christians would use *spolia* to reinforce the history of Christianity within Rome. By including it within the new church, it serves as a reminder to all those present in the basilica that the tradition of Christianity had been present in Rome long before San Nicola had been built. Furthermore, by incorporating this column into the new church, the Christians of the time were asserting their belief that their heritage was worth being incorporated into other buildings. This column shows Christians accepting their narrative of importance within Rome. In this way, the column functions similarly to a relic, and a reminder of the tradition which Christianity has already worked to cultivate. Furthermore, the internal Christian spolia creates a powerful and robust message in conversation with the external spolia. The external spolia, remnants from Classical temples, associate this church with the Classical tradition to anyone who happens to pass by. Within the church, the spolia connects

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[39] Ibid., 192-193.

back to the internal tradition of Christianity, and sends a message more to other Christians. The justification of Christianity's position affirmed by the external spolia, furthermore justifies the internal, Christian spolia. Thus, spolia from both pagan and Christian buildings collaborate in creating a well-rounded perception of Christianity's authority.

<div align="center">The Benefits of a Textual Analysis</div>

While the archaeological evidence can provide a plethora of data, archaeological analysis can be strengthened through the context literature provides. The archaeological record shows us only the impacts of people's actions on their physical environment, and while yes, there are many useful theories which provide a middle-range between the physical evidence and any type of analysis, there is still very little insight into the actual feelings and motivations of these ancient peoples. However, literature and writings from the people can illuminate a whole other world of information and insights on the very same group of people. Through their writings, one can learn about what they value and care about. However, one must be very careful when studying texts with archaeology. It can be easy to fall into the trap of using the literature as a framework for the archaeology, and merely hunting for evidence to fill in the details of the pre-designed narrative. Furthermore, most writings were produced by elite males and thus it is only possible to ascertain what life was like for these groups of people. Also, every piece of writing is biased, influenced by their author, times, genre, intended audience, and so on. All of these factors must be examined when analyzing literature. Nonetheless, these texts can be helpful in providing context for archaeological data, especially when one utilizes the biases of these texts to understand how they have influenced the author and how the author is specifically intending to portray their subject.

The issues with studying texts are somewhat mitigated through the study of inscriptions, which also better merges texts with archaeology. Inscriptions and graffiti were not necessarily produced by the elites, although some were, and they also represent a myriad of different identities, including women, slaves, and foreigners.[40] Therefore, one is able to study a much more diverse group of people than from the texts alone. However, many graffiti are rather short and, while still extremely valuable, do not provide as much literary content as one would get from a letter or speech.

Designated inscriptions, on the other hand can often be longer, such as the column inscription in San Nicola in Carcere (Appendix 2). Even though this inscription itself predates San Nicola and does not necessarily provide insight into the specific people who utilized the column as spolia, it still provides a glimpse into the thinking of previous Christians. For example, the gift of various animals to the church illustrate how this one specific Christian, Anastasius, manifested his religious beliefs in a physical way. Especially considering the fact that Anastasius took measures to ensure that his donation was recorded on stone, indicating that Anastasius wanted others to know of his generous donation, indicating the social connotations around donations and how they were perceived.

Likewise, inscriptions can be used to convey legal notices and provide useful information that way. However, these inscriptions are also rife with bias. They are specifically designed for public consumption, and must be considered as such. Their publicality does mean that they reach a wider audience than most texts would, however they also are issued by a much smaller group of people, those in power and the wealthy, and should almost always be viewed as a form of

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[40] J. A. Baird and C. Taylor, "Introduction," in J. A. Baird and C. Taylor (eds.) Ancient Graffiti in Context (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-17.

propaganda or similar deliberative move related to their public image. Nonetheless, these inscriptions are still vital in contextualizing the archaeological evidence, and, especially considering they are often discovered through archaeological excavations, should be a much more central part of archaeological analysis.

Even though texts are not as connected to archaeology as inscriptions, they likewise help to strengthen and introduce a new dimension to the physical evidence. The writings of these people are the closest anyone will ever get to having a conversation with someone who was alive during that period. Writings can contain the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of these people, which we would otherwise not be able to know. Through keeping in mind the bias of these sources, they can be used to illuminate the values of the society one is studying. Learning the priorities of these people allows one to better understand their actions and motivations, and therefore create more informed syntheses and theories with what evidence is found. Furthermore strengthening the argument due to its multifaceted approach.

The value of incorporating texts into archaeological analysis can also be seen within the topic of Christian employment of *spolia*. Since this research has focused on the perceptions of *spolia* within christian buildings as a way to manipulate perceptions of Christians and Christianity, it is useful to incorporate texts written by these early medieval Christians. The first text worth discussing is the Gregorius Magister's *Narracio De Mirabilibus Urbis Romae*. The only extant copy of this work is found in a Cambridge manuscript dated to the late thirteenth century.[41] This book is a member of the popular medieval genre of Roman topography, however it offers more personal reflections on this traveler's journey through Rome.[42] In his book,

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[41] J. Osborne, "Introduction," in *The Marvels of Rome* (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), 1-15.
[42] Ibid., 8-10.

Gregorius Magister describes different memorable monuments he observed in Rome, including a

fair amount of Christian sites. At one point, Gregorius is describing some notable bronze statues

and remarks that, "blessed Gregory took down the horse and the rider, and placed the four

columns in the church of St. John Lateran."[43] This quotation is a direct comment concerning

spolia and its use within Rome and the Roman church. A line later, Gregorius describes the

golden richness of the statues and the columns.[44] While these comments do not give any explicit

information as to the impact this spoliation has on Gregorius himself, they do illuminate the

practice of incorporating *spolia* into churches more. These were beautifully adorned columns

from a well-known statue that were moved into the San Giovanni in Laterano. This action shows

the sort of *spolia* which were introduced into to this influential church, pieces which were

exceedingly beautiful and, possibly, highly recognizable. Gregorius provides more insight into

the origins of *spolia* while describing the palace of Augustus in a later section, remarking: "Built

entirely out of marble, it had supplied a great deal of precious material for the construction of

Rome's churches."[45] Yet again, the *spolia* mentioned are high quality and from a place

associated with pagan power. These are the only two places where Gregorius mentions *spolia*

were taken for churches, although he does also describe the renovation of the Pantheon into a

church.[46] The fact that the only two monuments mentioned from which *spolia* were removed

were places well decorated and with a rich history, provides some perception into which pieces

of *spolia* were chosen, and therefore the desired effect of these architectural features. The

Christians were not merely recycling from any old building, they deliberately chose pieces of

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[43] M. Gregorius, *The Marvels of Rome* in trans. J. Osborne (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987).
[44] Ibid., 4.
[45] Ibid., 17.
[46] Ibid., 21.

importance and fame within Rome. This conscious choice would have left a visitor feeling

awestruck from the beauty of the church, as well as an understanding that these pieces, and

subsequently their history, had been adapted into the Christian tradition.

Hildebert of Lavardin's poetry, specifically *Par Tibi Roma*, further aid in contextualizing

the Christian use of *spolia* by introducing more of the medieval Christian mindset. Hilidebert, a

well known poet, was inspired by a visit to Rome in around 1100 to write two poems.[47] These

poems elicit a much more emotional response from the reader than Gredorius's topography of

Rome does, and in employing more of this vivid language, Hildebert reveals how Rome was

viewed in the early twelfth century. The iconic opening line of *Par Tibi Roma,* "to you, Rome,

nothing is equal, even though you are near total ruin," reveals how wonderstruck people were to

see Rome, even in ruins.[48] From there, Hildebert continues on to describe the former splendor of

Rome, and its riches. The climax of this poem is contained in lines 19- 20 when Hildebert writes,

"Urbs cecidit, de qua si quicquam dicere dignum| moliar, hoc potero dicere 'Roma fuit.'"[49] This

one lines perfectly sums up the feel of Hildebert's poem, it is a poem of mourning for the Rome

that was lost. However, even though Rome is nowhere near its previous splendor, one can still

see that it was Rome, and even that is a compliment enough. This poem is the perfect

encapsulation for the meaning behind *spolia*. The Classical tradition, despite its connection with

pagan cults, was still highly regarded and longed for within this Christian community. Thus, the

incorporation of classical *spolia* in San Nicola in Carcere, which was built contemporaneously to

Hildebert's poetry composition, is more understandable in relation to the Christian veneration of

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[47] B. Gibson, "Hildebert Lavardin on the Monuments of Rome," in A. J. Woodman and J. Wisse (eds.) *Word and Context in Latin Poetry: Studies in Memory of David West* (Cambridge: The Cambridge Philological Society, 2017), 131-154.
[48] Hildebert Lavardin, *Par Tibi, Roma,* compiled C. Brunelle.
[49] Ibid.

Rome's past. Furthermore, if Hildebert's poem is any reflection of the consensus of feelings within the larger Christian community, which it would be fair to say they are due to their immense popularity, then the incorporation of the Classical tradition within Christian churches would further increase their prestige.[50] Thus, this one poem provides clarity into the feelings behind the action of continuing to build with *spolia* after Christianity became more firmly established in Rome.

Conclusion

Therefore, these texts reaffirm and strengthen the claim that Christians utilized *spolia* in an attempt to justify their power, through visually attaching Christianity to the Classical past. These texts serve as merely two examples of how enriching the cultural context can be for an argument, and thus illustrate the need for literature to be included, or at least consulted, in archaeological research. They aid in providing a more nuanced view of the relationship between Christians and the dynamic power structure of Rome. As *spolia* are a very visible way to tie to these new Christian buildings to the Classical past, which is where the power has predominantly resided.

However, this paper does not analyze the nuances in meaning behind the incorporation of *spolia* into a new building, as opposed to the concept of complete conversion of a previously pagan temple into a church, as is seen at the Pantheon. In order to achieve a more thorough understanding of the ways in which Christians interacted with existing architecture and how that

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[50] Gibson, "Hildebert Lavardin," 131.

contributes to their place within the power structure, these different types of material reuse should be evaluated. These two approaches to modification of physical space are very similar in their concept, however conversion of entire pagan temples into churches does create a different nuance, and therefore should be more fully explored in conversation with the shifting power dynamics and ideal perceived perception of Christianity more thoroughly.

Word count: 5810

Appendix 1

Figure 1
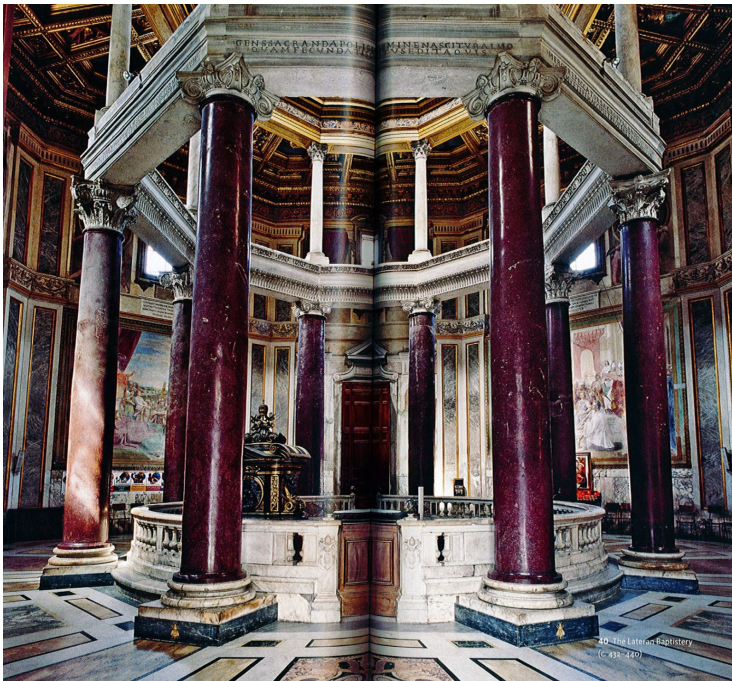
Location: San Giovanni in Fonte

Description: 8 red porphyry columns, of various heights and widths, surrounding the baptistry. Each column also has a capital, modified to make each column the same height.

Image Provided By: M. Hansen, *The Spolia Churches of Rome: Recycling Antiquity in the Middle Ages*

Figure 2

Location: San Nicola in Carcere
Description: The southern exterior walls of
San Nicola in Carcere, within which the
columns from the Temple of Spes are still
visible.
Image Provided By: Columbia University
Media Center Image Database

Figure 3

Location: San Nicola in Carcere

Description: The entrance of San Nicola

in Carcere, within which the columns

from the Temple of Juno are still visible.

Image Provided By: Columbia University

Media Center Image Database

Figure 4

Location: San Nicola in Carcere

Description: The northern exterior walls of San Nicola in Carcere, within which the columns

from the Temple of Janus are still visible.

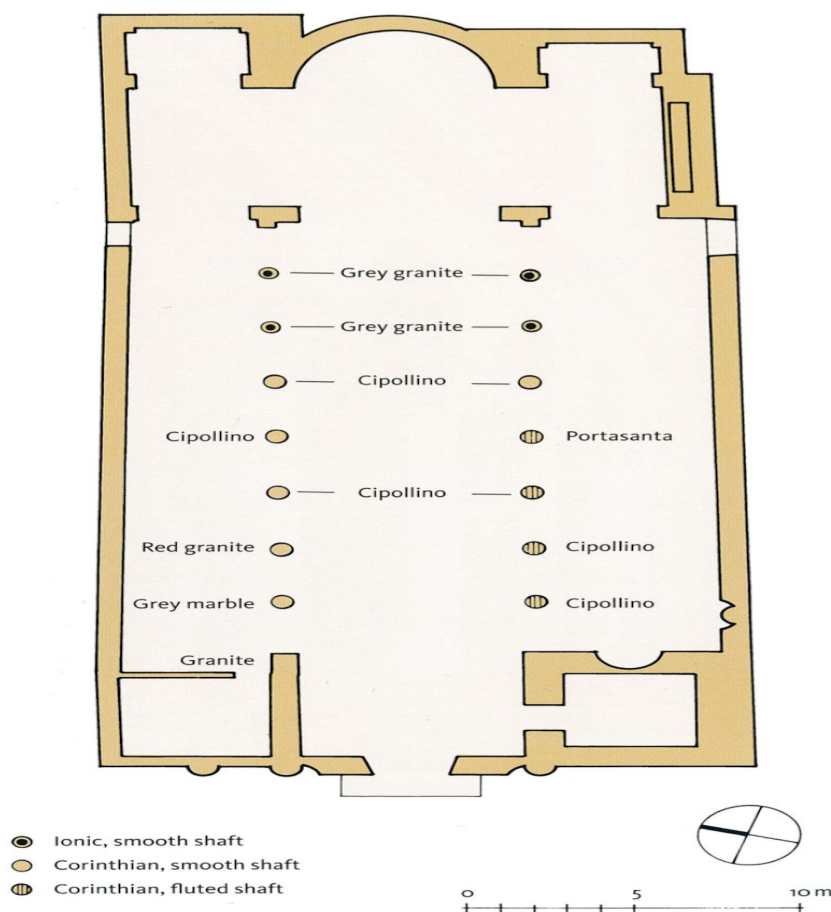Image Provided By: Columbia University Media Center Image Database

Figure 5

Location: San Nicola in

Carcere

Description: A diagram

detailing the different types of

columns within San Nicola.

Image Provided By: M.

Hansen, *The Spolia Churches*

of Rome: Recycling Antiquity

in the Middle Ages

Appendix 2

The process of transcribing this inscription lead to some abnormalities and possibilities for dispute in the translation. The abbreviations did lead to some ambiguity. The abbreviation sce, present in the second and third lines, has been understood to be the adjective "sacer, sacra, sacrum" which translates to mean "holy." This word fits in the letters provided, whereas other adjectives such as "sanctus, -a, -um" would have abbreviated more letters.

The Latin is a much later form than Classical Latin and as such, does not adhere to the standard rules of conjugation as one would expect. Within the second and third lines, the vocative case is employed to call out to Mary, Anne, Simeon, and Lucia. However, despite the

genders of the majority of these names being feminine, the second declension masculine singular ending "-e" is added. However, this improper ending may also have resulted from the changes in the way that Latin was pronounced, resulting the short -e ending to sound similar to the short -a. Furthermore, due to ambiguity resulting from the shorthand and the general unusualness of the Latin, the second line could be translated in varying ways. The first word sce has been taken as "*sacre*" in the vocative, agreeing with "*marie*" at the end of the line. In between these two words are "di" and "*genetrici.*" The "di" has a line over it, indicating that something was omitted, and due to the nature of the adjective and the context of the sentence, it has been understood to be "*die*." However, the "*genetrici*" provides more complexities, as it is very clearly the dative singular ending of "*genetrix, genetricis,*" which means that it is not agreeing with the other words in the sentence. Nonetheless, "*genetrix*" is a common epithet for Mary and has been taken as a subject predicate agreeing with "*marie.*"

Another instance of improper employment of cases can also be seen in line 3, what has been transcribed as S[A]C[RU]S. This would be incorrect in Classical Latin for a couple of reasons. First of all, the adjective is "sacer, -ra, -rum" and thus "sacrus" is not a possible form. Furthermore, the other saints are being called out to in the vocative case, so this scs should also be in the vocative. Considering the function of the scs simeon in the sentence, the option which made the most sense was to supply a masculine, nominative, and singular ending.

The words which began with the letter "b" were tricky to distinguish and required more effort to discern. In line five, the word "bobis" appears after Anastasius says that he offers (spelling incorrectly!). The word one would expect to see here is "*vobis,*" especially considering that Anastasius had just called out into people in the vocative. It is not hard to see how this

change occurred. In Classical Latin, the "v" is pronounced like "w." However, as Latin morphed through the late antique and early classical periods, "v" became pronounced more similar to the way it is currently pronounced. This different pronunciation of "v" is extremely similar to "b" and thus the two consonants might have gotten mixed up. This "v" to "b" mistake is seen in various other places throughout the inscription, notably: "*bestre*" and "*binea*" in line 6, "*bobes*" in line 8.

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