

FOREWORD

This volume is the result of a panel held in Warsaw on 8 and 9 June 2022, during the annual conference “Poles in the Near East” organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Faculty of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw. The panel, entitled “Marble Use, Trade, and Distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity”, consisted of 16 papers. Ten of them are included in the proceedings published herein as a special issue of the journal *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*.

The volume focuses on marbles from the early Byzantine period (4th–7th century CE), from a wide geographical area covering the ancient territories of Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, and Greece [Fig. 1]. Studies devoted to the use of marble in Antiquity have developed exponentially in recent times and are now a major field of research in Classical Archaeology. Notably, however, research to date has focused primarily on the Greek and Roman periods. Several important papers on marbles from later centuries have been written in recent decades for multi-authored publications focusing on more general topics, such as the ASMO-SIA Proceedings. However, collective publications devoted exclusively to marbles of the early Byzantine period are still lacking.



Fig. 1. Map of the Eastern Mediterranean showing the location of major sites mentioned throughout the volume (Processing M. Gwiazda)

The volume offers a vivid picture of the use of marble during the early Byzantine period relying on a variety of approaches and methodologies. It not only provides insights into recent discoveries from important sites, but also presents perspectives on the social function and appreciation of this material. Several papers contribute to a better understanding of the working processes of the craftsmen and the reasons underlying the selection of materials for specific objects or building projects. Others provide more detailed images, offering an opportunity to explore the diversity of marble objects in the light of various contexts and using different approaches. However, these contributions certainly do not fill all the research gaps, and much remains to be done in the investigation of early Byzantine marbles. One of the avenues to be pursued, for instance, is the study of the provenance of raw materials using archaeometric methods, which is well developed for artifacts from earlier periods.

We would, first of all, like to thank all the authors for their scientific contributions to this volume. All the papers submitted underwent a rigorous peer review process, and we would like to express our gratitude to the reviewers, who undertook this task *pro bono*, for their invaluable input and kind suggestions that have improved the articles. Special thanks go to Dorota Dzierzbicka and Agata Czamara, editors of *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, for their support at all stages of the preparation of this volume. The proofreading of the text was made possible thanks to funding from the Excellence Initiative – Research University Programme (IDUB) “Improvement of publishing capacities – increasing the international outreach of UW journals” (project No. BOB-661-46/2023). We would like to express our appreciation to Prof. Dr. hab. Zygmunt Lalak for the financial support from another IDUB project (BOB-661-664/2023), which enabled the graphic editing of the illustrations and offset the production costs. Last but not least, work on this volume was conducted as part of a project funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, dedicated to marble use in the secular and sacred space in the southern Levant during the early Byzantine period (4th–7th century AD) (grant No. 2020/37/B/HS3/00306).

Mariusz Gwiazda
Alessandro Poggio
Dagmara Wielgosz-Rondolino

July 2023