

The Marble Trade in Ancient Algeria

A lecture by Annewies van den Hoek, Lecturer on Greek at Harvard Divinity School, Harvard University, Cambridge, and John Herrmann, Curator of Classical



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Algeria's riches in stone have long been known and exploited. Its white and dark gray marbles, its red and yellow breccias, and its polychrome travertines were particularly famous in the 19th century. The sources of the abundant white and colored marble in Numidian, Mauretanian, and Roman sites in Algeria, however, have long been uncertain. The marble trade in antiquity brought prized stones from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, and no illustrated catalogues survive to sort them out. New scientific techniques and the growing knowledge of ancient materials, however, have now made it

possible to identify these materials more securely.

With the help of the Algerian Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Algerian Ministry of Culture, and the American Embassy in Algiers, the two American researchers have worked on this challenging task for several years. They explored and took samples in many Algerian museums and quarries, and, after analysis of the samples by laboratories in the United States and Europe, are reassembling the workings of this elite industry of antiquity. This collaboration between an American team and ministries of the Algerian government has provided a unique opportunity to analyze Algeria's wealth of archaeological marble, to track prestigious imports, and to identify some equally prestigious Algerian exports.