

“Standing the Test of the Centuries”

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Ancient Roman temple at Baalbeck, Syria, containing banquet hall and artistic decorations. The Saracens built a fortification on top, hence the square blocks.

STANDING THE TEST OF THE CENTURIES

THE use of marble can be traced back several thousand years before the Christian era. Its quarrying and working was numbered among the earliest of the building crafts and records abound to prove its diversified use in widely scattered parts of the then-known world.

At Canopus, before the time of King Tut-Ankh-Amen, vast numbers of vases of a special type were made of onyx. These were used to hold the ashes of the dead and had tops in the form of heads of human beings. These urns have been discovered in the early tombs of Asia Minor, and of Greece. According to Mariette, they were made as early as 4751 B.C.

In Egypt as early as 3703 B.C. we find in use the onyx at Syout. The sarcophagus of Seti I was built about 1462 B.C.

Herodotus tells us that the great Pyramid of Ghizeh was cased with polished marble. Mention is made in First Chronicles, xxix,

2 (about 1015 B.C.), that David, in his preparations for the building of the Temple of Jerusalem, included "marble stones in abundance." Josephus describes how the white marble used in the body of the temple was worked into the exact shapes at the quarry before being brought to the Temple site and there put into place without sound of hammer (Book VIII, Sec. III).

About 519 B.C. the palace of Shushan, the abode of King Ahasuerus, was built. Esther (I, 6) writes of the "hangings . . . fastened to silver rings and pillars of marble" and a "pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble."

About 563 B.C. marble was used in the ancient walls of Romulus and those of Servius Tullus. We find records of quarries on Chios as early as 660 B.C. From this famous site came the Porta Santa reds and pinks as well as the gray varieties. Among the famous structures built of this marble are

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(photo caption) "Ancient Roman temple at Baalbeck, Syria, containing banquet hall and artistic decorations. The Saracens built a fortification on top, hence the square blocks.

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The Parthenon at Athens.

included the Temple of Concord, Julian Basilica, Stadium of Palatine, and the door jambs of the four great basilicas of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John Lateran and St. Maria Maggiore.

Melas, who lived with his family on the Island of Chios, is supposed to have been the inventor of the art of sculpturing in marble and he made use of the material called then *Marmor Chium*, known now to be the marble called *Porta Santa*. According to Theophrastus these quarries were worked as early as 660 B.C. and in all probability even before that date. M. W. Porter, in her book on "What Rome was Built With," says: "From various inscriptions we learn that *Porta Santa* was extensively worked during the reign of Trajan; the earliest inscription being of Nero's time. The quarries were imperial property, and the numbers on the rough blocks found in Rome mount up to 1,005, showing what quantities that city disposed of."

Herodotus, in Book II, says: "This king (Mykerinos) also left behind him a pyramid, much smaller than that of his father, of a

square shape and measuring on each side three hundred feet lacking twenty, built moreover of Ethiopian stone up to half the height." Ethiopian stone was basalt, from "basal," the Ethiopian word for iron, because of its hardness. Pliny says of it: "A larger block of it has never been known than the one forming the group which has been dedicated by the Emperor Vespasian Augustus in the Temple of Peace. . . . It is stated, too, that in the Temple of Serapis at Thebes there is a block not unlike it, which forms the statue of Memnon there; remarkable, it is said, for emitting a sound each morning."

King says this was probably a work of the age of the Ptolemies and brought from Alexandria by the emperor named as its dedicator.

Arthur Lee, in "Marble and Marble Workers," says of the Pentelic marble in the Parthenon at Athens: "There are now standing at the entrance six columns with gateways between them, built of three or four stones, but no separation has been observed, although they have been exposed to weathering for more than two thousand years." The quarries from which they came were worked as early as 500 B.C., or perhaps earlier. An inscription at the time of Septimus Severus dated 206 was found on a block of *Grechetto Duro*.

It is a matter of record that Cicero frowned at first upon the use of marble as being too luxurious, and that when the Romans plundered the Greek treasures, Horace reproved them for adopting the customs of the Greeks.

The structures of antiquity that represent the highest artistic feeling are executed in the noblest of materials. These magnificent conceptions would have perished ages ago but for the durability of the medium employed. Marble is truly the Stone of Time!