

Rome Across Time and Space
*Cultural Transmission and the Exchange
of Ideas c. 500–1400*

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10 The discourse of columns

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¹It makes a great difference whether you use columns or piers' (Leon Battista Alberti).¹

To understand the discourse of columns one must know the difference between a column and a pier. Columns are round; piers are rectangular or square. 'Pillar' is a verbal obfuscation. Piers are built of masonry, that is, brick or stone blocks; columns in the Roman tradition are monolithic cylinders of marble, granite, or other hard stone. The distinction was a matter of vivid practical concern to the builders of medieval churches and palaces as well as to the bishops and kings who paid for them. Academic writers like Isidore of Seville were alert to it; Isidore associates *columna* with *collum*, 'neck,' and defines columns as having 'length and roundness' (*columnae pro longitudine et rotunditate uocantur*).² Isidore's authorities on columns were Pliny and Vitruvius; he passed them on to later medieval writers, some of whom also knew them first-hand.

Columna is also a metaphor for any kind of vertical support, however, and Isidore describes a fifth type of column (after Doric, Ionic, Tuscan and Corinthian) that is square or polygonal.³ Günther Binding goes so

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far as to insist that all architectural supports were called 'columns' in the Middle Ages because ecclesiastical writers had no proper word for pier until the twelfth century, but this is unlikely.⁴ On the contrary, it seems that while columns might be called 'piers' in popular parlance (*columnina est gallice piers; columnae, quae uulgo piliarum dicuntur*), literates were aware of the distinction between them.⁵ If the sources do not mention piers it is probably because piers were not of interest until architectural developments of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries valorized their versatility and made monolithic columns archaic and eventually obsolete north of the Alps.

Monolithic cylindrical columns were explicitly or latently 'Roman'. The Rome with which they were associated was not necessarily the City, however; Rome was an expansive empire, traces of which were everywhere west of the Rhine, or even the qualities associated with that empire: grandeur, dignity, opulence, and splendor.⁶ To treat the discourse of columns is therefore to confront, *in nuce*, the medieval discourse of *romanitas* and the problem of determining when notions of 'Romanness' point to the ancient imperial capital on the Tiber and when they range farther afield: materially throughout the old Roman centres of Europe and Britain or in the realm of mytho-historical imagination.⁷

The discourse of columns is not the 'language' brilliantly described by John Summerson more than forty years ago.⁸ In that view, columns, as components of the proportionally constructed ensembles of base, shaft, capital, and entablature that Vitruvius classified as 'types' (*genera*), are elements of an expressive grammar that confer character or 'personality' upon generic buildings (temples, basilicas, theatres).⁹ The designation of

¹ I am grateful to the editors of this volume and to several fellow contributors for the helpful suggestions and advice that guided the final shaping of this paper. I also benefited from the superb resources of the Bibliotheca Herziana/Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte in Rome, where this paper was written.

² L. B. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, VII, 6; ed. G. Ortlandi, Leon Battista Alberti, *L'Architettura (De re aedificatoria)* (Milan, 1966), p. 563. *Pernaxini interea, columnarum an pilas ecclesiarum, arcuarum an trabecularum aperturibus*. On the complexities of this distinction see G. Morolli, 'Le colonne di Alberti tra volubitas e necessitas: Diversità morfologiche ed etimologiche tra *columnae rotundae* e *columnae quadrangulae* nelle istituzioni del *De re aedificatoria*', in A. Calzona, F. P. Fiore, A. Tenconi, and C. Vasoli (eds.), *Leon Battista Alberti. Teorico delle arti e gli impegni civili del 'De re aedificatoria'*, Atti dei Congressi Internazionali del Comitato Nazionale VI Centenario della Nascita di Leon Battista Alberti, Mantova, 17-19 Ottobre 2002, Mantova, 23-25 Ottobre 2003 (Florence, 2007), pp. 727-86.

³ Isidore of Seville, *Etimologiae* XIX: 10.22, 24; ed. M. Rodríguez-Pantoja, Isidoro de Sevilla, *Etimologías Libro XIX de naves, edificios y vestidos* (Paris, 1995), pp. 109, 111.

⁴ Isidore, *Etimologiae* XIX: 10.22; ed. Rodríguez-Pantoja, p. 111 and n. 139.

⁴ G. Binding, 'Schwierigkeiten bei der Nutzung mittelalterlicher Schriftquellen für die Baugeschichte, dargestellt an den Begriffen *columna* - *piliars*', in A. Lezar and S. De Vito-Egerland (eds.), *Mittelalter und Renaissance in honorem Fritz Wagner* (Munich and Leipzig, 2004), pp. 27-46. Cf. the passage of Sidonius Apollinaris quoted below, n. 54.

⁵ Gervase of Canterbury, *Tractatus de combustione et reparacione Cantuariensis ecclesie* (1180), and John of Garland, *Dictionarius* (1218-29), cited in Binding, 'Schwierigkeiten', pp. 41, 44.

⁶ G. Binding, 'Vom dreifachen Wert der Säule im frühen und hohen Mittelalter', *Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig. Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 138, no. 2 (2003), pp. 6-14.

⁷ P. Binski, 'The Cosmati and *romantus* in England: an overview', in L. Grant and R. Mortimer (eds.), *Westminster Abbey. The Cosmati Pavements* (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 116-34.

⁸ J. Summerson, *The Classical Language of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA, 1963 (7th printing 1979)), p. 10; more recently: G. Clarke and P. Crossley, 'Introduction', in G. Clarke and P. Crossley (eds.), *Architecture and Language. Constructing Identity in European Architecture c. 1000-c.1650* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1-8, 16-20.

⁹ On Vitruvius's term and its translation as 'Orders' see I. D. Rowland in *Vitruvius. Ten Books on Architecture*, English trans. with commentary and illustrations by T. N. Howe (Cambridge, 1999), pp. xiii, 15, 149 n. 35.

this capacity as 'language' was questioned by Umberto Eco, who argued that unlike verbal language, codes of architecture are not generative. They cannot be used to express 'novel messages to suit unexpected situations,' but are 'codifications of already worked out solutions ... yielding standardized messages'. In Eco's terms the code of architecture is not language but 'rhetoric in the narrow sense of the word: a store of *tried and true discursive formulas*.'¹⁰

Eco's position is debatable (some would argue that *spoila* introduced 'novel messages', for example), but it usefully frames the topic of this paper. The medieval discourses of columns include an exegetical one rooted in a few key passages in the Latin Bible, and a secular one rooted in classical prose and panegyric and the material practice of building. These discourses produced, in Eco's words, 'just those messages the community of users has come to expect'. Neither was autonomous; both were more or less embedded in larger discourses (the exegesis of *Ecclēstia*, the rhetoric of marble ornament, etc.), and it is not always possible to distinguish a message of 'columns' separate from that of the larger discursive matrix.

Columnae enim sunt Apostoli et doctores Evangelii
(Hrabanus Maurus)¹¹

In a still-standard study of the allegorical meanings of columns in the Middle Ages, Bruno Reudenbach argued that the exegetical discourse represented by Hrabanus Maurus was independent of the tradition of Vitruvius and Pliny, which pertained to real architecture, as well as of architecture itself.¹² It was a strictly textual affair centred on the 'interpretative complex' (*Deutungskomplex*) of a few passages in the Latin Bible: Exodus 26:32 and 37 (in the description of the Tabernacle), 1 Kings 7:14–22 and 2 Chronicles 3:15ff. (the bronze columns of the Temple), Psalm 74:4 ('The earth is melted, and all that dwell therein: I have established the *pillars* thereof'), Proverbs 9:1 ('Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven *pillars*'), Song of Songs 3:10 ('The *pillars* thereof he made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple') and 5:15 ('His legs as *pillars* of marble, that are set upon bases of gold'),

¹⁰ U. Eco, 'Function and sign: the semiotics of architecture' (1986), repr. in N. Leach (ed.), *Reinventing Architecture. A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London and New York, 1997), pp. 181–202 (quotations on pp. 194, 195).
¹¹ Hrabanus Maurus, *De universis*, xiv, 23, *PL* 111, col. 404.
¹² B. Reudenbach, 'Säule und Apostel: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Architektur und architekturergeschichtlicher Literatur im Mittelalter', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 14 (1980), pp. 310–51.

Galatians 2:9 ('And when they had known the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be *pillars*, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship'), 1 Timothy 3:15 ('the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the *pillar* and ground of the truth'), Apocalypse 3:12 ('I will make him a *pillar* in the temple of my God').¹³ Using 'pillars' to translate the more specific Latin *columnas*, the Douay-Rheims version dilutes the concrete Roman imagery of the Vulgate, which is more accurately conveyed by the picture of Wisdom seated in the Temple in the eleventh-century manuscript of Prudentius' *Psychomachia* in Corpus Christi College (Fig. 10.1).¹⁴

The biblical Temple did not have a pedimented Roman front, of course, nor did the Tabernacle have columns. The Tabernacle was a tent-like enclosure made with boards and bars hung with skins and curtains.¹⁵ Inside, four gilded wooden poles ('pillars') supported a special curtain that hid the 'most holy place' of the Ark. A similar curtain hung from five more gilded poles at the entrance:

And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen ... And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks being of gold, upon four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the veil under the clasps ... And thou shalt make a screen for the door of the Tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen ... And thou shalt make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be of gold; and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them (Exodus 26:31–7).¹⁶

In the Septuagint translation the word for the poles is *stylos*, a general term for upright supports that can also denote columns. In Latin the pillars became unambiguously *columnas*, their curtain hooks 'heads', arguably capitals, and their sockets 'bases':

Facies et velum de hyacintho et purpura coccoque bis tincto et bysso rectoria opere plumario ... quod adpendas ante quatuor columnas de lignis setitim quae ipsae pludem deauratae erunt et habebunt capita aurea sed bases argenteas. Insetitur autem velum per circulos ... Facies et tentorium in introitu tabernaculi de hyacintho et purpura coccoque bis tincto et bysso rectoria opere plumarii et quinque columnas

¹³ All translations are from the Douay-Rheims Bible: www.dbo.org/index.htm; accessed 17 June 2009.

¹⁴ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 23, fol. 39v. H. Woodruff suggested that the composition was based originally on a Roman coin or gem type: 'The Illustrated Manuscripts of Prudentius', *Art Studies* 7 (1929), p. 70.

¹⁵ E. Reuel-Neter, 'La double page du Codex Amiatinus et ses rapports avec les plans du Tabernacle dans l'art juif et dans l'art byzantin', *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982), p. 8, fig. 2.

¹⁶ *The Hebrew Bible in English according to the JPS 1917 Edition* (Mehchon Mamre, 2002): www.mechon-mamre.org/e/e/ero.htm; accessed 17 June 2009.

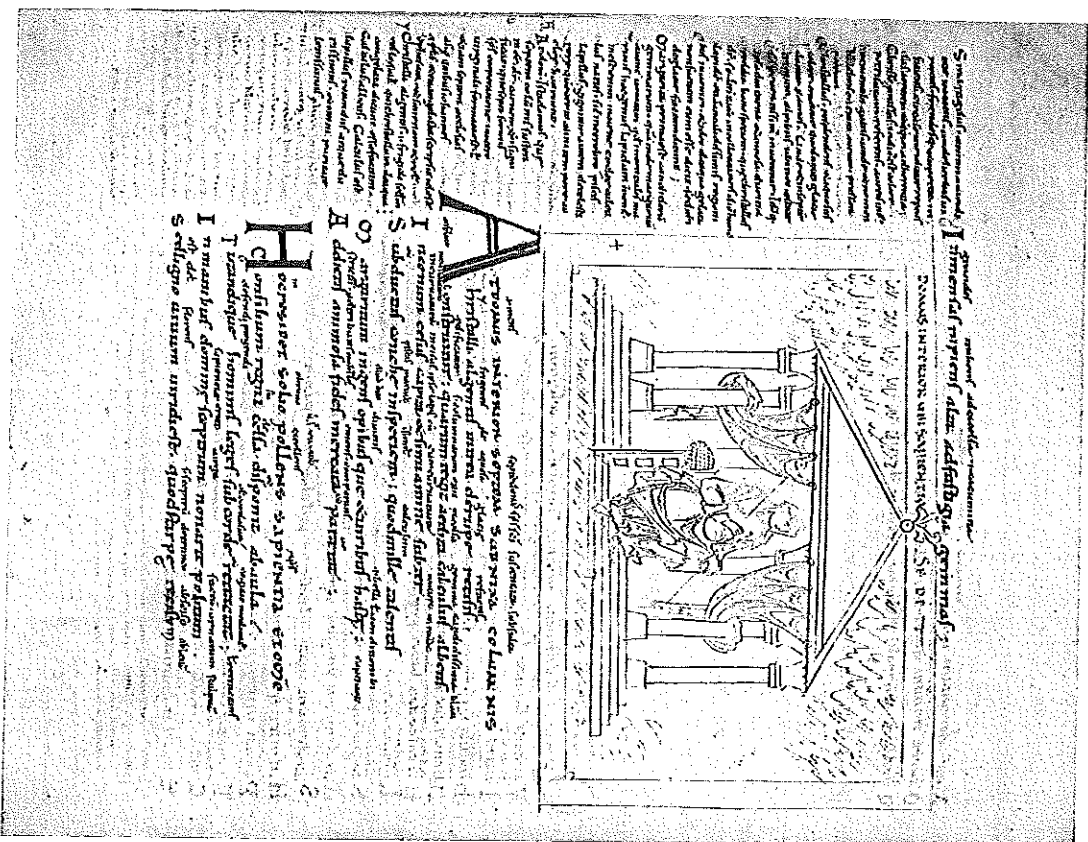


Fig. 10.1 'Wisdom seated in the Temple'; The Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, MS 23, fol. 39r, with permission of the Master and Fellows, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

*deauratis lignorum scithim ane quas ducetur tentorium quarum erant capita aurea et bases aeneae.*¹⁷

The Temple of stone and wood ('built of the forest of Lebanon') described in 1 Kings similarly had rows of cedar 'pillars' that became *columnae* in Latin. At the entrance were the two special brass 'pillars' made by Hiram of Tyre, which had something like capitals:

Thus he (Hiram of Tyre) fashioned the two pillars of brass ... And he made two capitals of molten brass, to set upon the tops of the pillars ... He also made nets of chequer-work, and wreaths of chain-work ... seven for the one capital, and seven for the other capital ... And the capitals that were upon the top of the pillars in the porch were of lily-work. And he set up the pillars at the porch of the temple, and he set up the right pillar, and called the name thereof Jachin; and he set up the left pillar, and called the name thereof Boaz. And upon the top of the pillars was lily-work (1 Kings 7:15–22).¹⁸

In Latin, despite the nets, chains, and other non-classical motifs, the combination of *columnas* and lily-like *capitella* seems to have conjured the image of the Corinthian order, to judge from the many later medieval descriptions of real capitals as 'lilies':

et fixit duas columnas aereas ... duo quoque capitella fecit quae ponerentur super capita columnarum fusile aere ... et quasi in modum reis et catenarum sibi invicem nro opere contextarum utriusque capitellum columnarum fusile erat septena versura retiacula in capitello uno et septena retiacula in capitello altero, et perfecti ... capitella autem quae erant super capita columnarum quasi opere lili fabricata erant in portica ... et stantur duas columnas in porticum templi cumque stantisset columnam dexteram vocavit eam nomine lachin similiter erant columnam secundam et vocavit nomen eius Booz. et super capita columnarum opus in modum lili posuit perfectumque est opus columnarum.

Columns thus entered the Bible – replacing variously shaped wooden posts, metal pillars and other vertical supports – through the Latin translation. This was arguably one of Rome's fundamental contributions to the medieval *imaginatione*.¹⁹ Reinscribing the model buildings of the Old Testament as colonnaded structures naturalized the Levantine architectural imagery of the Bible and allowed Christian readers to find biblical

¹⁷ www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/Vulgate/Exodus.htm#i; accessed 17 June 2009.

¹⁸ www.mechon-mamre.org/e/etov9a07.htm.

¹⁹ The Latin translations reflect a later version of the Temple, of course, which did have columns, as well as a pictorial tradition in which the Temple is represented by a colonnaded Roman temple front; see B. Kühnel, 'Jewish symbolism of the Temple and the Tabernacle and Christian symbolism of the Holy Sepulchre and the Heavenly Tabernacle: a study of their relationship in late antique and early medieval art and thought', *Jewish Art* 12/13 (1986–7), pp. 147–50.

echoes and allusions in their own colonnaded masonry basilicas. This was a contribution of 'Rome' in the larger sense, of course, since although the Vulgate translation was commissioned in the City by Pope Damasus, it was executed in the Holy Land and made use of earlier Latin versions in wide circulation.

There is a specific connection to the City, however. As Reudenbach argued, the glossing of the 'interpretative complex' of Old and New Testament passages mentioning columns was governed by a single idea (*Denurungskonzept*), namely that the textual building (whether historical, like the Temple, or figurative, like the palace of Wisdom) is an allegory of the spiritual community (the *Ecclesia*). The *columnae* of these allegorical buildings were the 'pillars' of the spiritual community: the apostles, as explicitly in Galatians 2:9, but also possibly prophets, evangelists, doctors of the Church, preachers, or all Christians who are solid and unshakable in faith. It is generally agreed that this line of exegesis is heavily indebted to Bede, who devoted two entire treatises to the allegorical significance of the Tabernacle and the Temple, working out line by line, component by component the ways in which the buildings figure the heavenly and earthly *Ecclesiae*.²⁰ Bede's method necessitated a precise literal understanding of the Bible, for which he relied on the first-century *Antiquities* of the Jewish historian Josephus and on 'pictures' of the Tabernacle and the Temple made for Cassiodorus, founder of the scriptorium at Vivarium.²¹ The pictures must have been in the Codex Grandior, which was made at Vivarium and sent to Rome after the monastery broke up. Ceolfriht, prior of Wearmouth Abbey, purchased this great book in the City in 679–80. He carried it home to Britain, where it served as the model for three new pandects, of which one, the Codex Amiatinus, was on its way back to Rome with Ceolfriht when he died en route in 716.²² The copy of Josephus' *Antiquitates Judaicae* that Bede knew also came from Cassiodorus' library and also was acquired in Rome. In other words, without the City and its repository of books, Bede's understanding of the Tabernacle and the Temple, even his method of interpretation might have been different.²³

A version of Cassiodorus' picture of the Tabernacle survives in the Codex Amiatinus.²⁴ It shows the Tabernacle in its surrounding courtyard, which is described in Exodus 27 as defined by 'pillars' with brass sockets and silver hooks and fillers for hanging curtains.²⁵ The thoroughly Romanized image in the Codex Amiatinus shows, instead, columns with carefully differentiated bases and capitals with the curtains stretched between them.²⁶ Bede interpreted the columns as prefiguring 'holy teachers', with silver capitals (*capitula*) to signify their dedication to the word of God.²⁷ The five gilded columns at the entrance to the Tabernacle were also interpreted as 'holy teachers' 'on account of their indestructible strength of heart and the attention which they are always lifting up to heavenly things', while the four gilded columns that held up the curtain demarcating the Holy of Holies were construed as the angelic powers and their principal virtues: justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance.²⁸

In the exegetical discourse columns, as human artifacts, were not themselves imbued with divine significance; their meaning lay in God-given properties – number and material – and in virtues or capacities, like the ability to support.²⁹ Column exegesis typically appealed to the virtues of height, solidity and strength:

How else do we take the bases of this earth than as the doctors of the holy Church? For on the bases the columns, and on the columns the weight of the entire structure is erected. Not without reason are the holy doctors designated by the name of 'bases', because as they preach uprightly... they sustain the whole weight of the Church by the immovable gravity of their precepts (Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 578–95).³⁰

²⁴ If the Amiatinus image is not a direct copy it is a close variant; see K. Corsano, 'The First Quire of the Codex Amiatinus and the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus', *Scriptorium* 41 (1987), pp. 3–34.

²⁵ www.mebon-mamre.org/et/etoz27.htm; accessed 18 June 2009.

²⁶ L. Alford, L. Benassati, L. Castaldi, M. Cecconi, E. Fusi, E. Martin, and S. Nencioni (eds.), *Bibbia miniate della Biblioteca Medicea Laurentiana di Firenze* (Florence, 2003), Tav. I; Kühnel, 'Jewish symbolism of the Temple', p. 166; Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus', p. 846, fig. 1; pp. 851–2.

²⁷ Bede, *De Tabernaculo* II.1686–1728, ed. Hurst, pp. 84–6; English trans. Holder, pp. 96–7.

²⁸ Bede, *De Tabernaculo* II.1157–90, 1269–1300, ed. Hurst, pp. 71–2, 74–5; English trans. Holder, pp. 79–80, 83–4.

²⁹ Reudenbach, 'Saule und Apostel', pp. 310–13.

³⁰ Gregory the Great *Moralia in Iob*, vi.xxviii.17, ed. M. Adriaen, S. Gregorii Magni *Moralia in Iob Libri xxiii–xxv*, CCSL 143B (Turnhout, 1985), p. 1408; Reudenbach, 'Saule und Apostel', p. 332 n. 88. 'Super quo bases illius [scil. terra] soliditate sunt?' [Job 38.6] *Quid alius iustus terrae bases quam sanctae Ecclesiae doctores accipimus? In basibus quippe columnarum in columnis autem coelis fabricatae pontans erigunt. Non ergo iumentis doctores sancti basium nominis designantur, quia dum vicia praedicant, et praedicationi suae vitando concordant, omne pondus Ecclesiae fixa morum suorum granitate sustentant.*

²⁰ *Bede Venarabilis opera*, II. 2A, *De Tabernaculo. De Templo. In Erratum et Neomiam*, ed. D. Hurst OSB, CCSL 119A (Turnhout, 1969). English trans. A. G. Holder, *Bede. On the Tabernacle* (Liverpool, 1994); S. Connolly, *Bede. On the Temple* (Liverpool, 1995).

²¹ J. O'Reilly in Connolly, *Bede. On the Temple*, pp. III–IV.

²² P. Meyvaert, 'Bede, Cassiodorus, and the Codex Amiatinus', *Speculum* 71 (1996), pp. 831–9, 844–60.

²³ For Rome as a source of books in this period, see the chapter by Michael Reeve in this volume.

These columns are the four holy evangelists, founded firmly in faith... The bases of these columns are the prophets, who carry the structure of the Church with their support; for the evangelists set the Church on the foundation of the prophets... and the gold head of the columns is the one of whom the apostle says the head of man is Christ (Isidore of Seville, d. 656; *On Exodus*).³¹

What is stronger than marble or straighter than a column? For the legs, that is the paths of God, are both strong and straight, and stand in the house, that is the Church (John of Mantua, *Treatise on the Song of Songs*, 1081-3).³²

For by 'legs' we understand ways and paths... his ways and paths are not bent. They are not reeds swayed by the wind; neither are columns. But what columns? They are specifically marble columns, because they can be broken, but they cannot be bent (Bruno of Segni, *Exposition of the Song of Songs*, 1080s?).³³

Here we find another contribution of Rome (construed broadly) to the medieval exegetical imagination. The qualities from which the allegories of *columnna* were deduced – strong, straight, unbendable – are particularly properties of the *monolithic* column, which was Roman. It was not the Greek column of cracked drums to which these exegetes appealed for their analogies. Similarly the image of the columns holding up the building – though not untrue of a variety of classical building types – is most powerfully suggested by the great interior colonnades of the Roman basilica, and even more so by the church basilica, in which the colonnades support a solid superstructure, the clerestory wall. In a giant basilica like Old St Peter's, in which the wall standing upon the columns was about twice as tall as the columns and rose to a height of over 100 feet, the impression of the load-bearing power of the columns must have been overwhelming.³⁴

³¹ Isidore of Seville, *Quaestiones in Veteris Testamentum*. In *Exodum*, II, PL 83, col. 313; Reudenbach, 'Säule und Apostel', p. 332 n. 88. *Columnnae istae quantum Evangelisticae sancti scripturae portant Ecclesiae; supra fundamentum bassis prophetae sunt, qui suo gestamine Ecclesiam... Caput autem columnarum arcum ille est, de quo dicit Apostolus caput viri Christi.*

³² John of Mantua, *In Cantica canticorum ad semper felicem Matildam*, fol. 99r, ed. B. Bischoff and B. Taeger, *Lohannis Mantuani in Cantica Canticorum et De Sancta Maria Tractatus ad Commissionem Matildam* (Freiburg, 1973), pp. 118-19; Reudenbach, 'Säule und Apostel', pp. 325-6 n. 68. *Quid marmore foris et columnna reclusa? Crux enim illas tenebra Dei et foras sunt et recta et domum, quae est ecclesia, substantia.*

³³ Bruno of Segni, *Expositio in Cantica Canticorum* 623 D, PL 164, col. 1268; Reudenbach, 'Säule und Apostel', p. 326 n. 68 br. *Crux illius columnae marmorae? Per crux namque vias et tenebra intelligimus, et est causa pro effusa. Crux, inquit, vias et tenebra illius non debilia frangi quidem, flecti autem non possunt. Christus namque occidit potius, a propostia vero vivitate derogari non fuit facturas.*

³⁴ J. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1988), p. 75. On St Peter's: D. Kinney, 'Spolia', in W. Tronzo (ed.), *St Peter's in the Vatican* (Cambridge, New York, 2005), pp. 18-19.

Quantum columnarum est nihil sustinentium (Seneca)³⁵

The Roman philosopher Seneca lamented that in his day (60s AD) the buildings of the rich were full of columns 'supporting nothing'. They were useless decoration, present only 'for the sake of spending the money'. In fact, Roman architects emancipated columns from the structural post-and-lintel function described by Vitruvius; in that respect, paradoxically, the load-bearing columns of Early Christian basilicas marked a return to pre-Roman functional principles, even while their placement under a wall was unacceptable from any classical perspective. Roman uses of columns ranged from the subtlest form of aesthetic regulation, as on the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine, to the blatant displays of wealth and status that Seneca decried. The aesthetic 'language' of columns imposed the grammar described by Summerson; it instilled proportion and harmonious interrelationships and was geometric.³⁶ The discourse of display, or *magnificentia*, was arithmetic, based on the addition or multiplication of single columns, units of size, and quantities of colours. Much studied in recent decades, the material discourse of *magnificentia* was inseparable from a verbal discourse that interpreted it for a viewing public. This was an ideological, value-laden discourse that spoke the power and internationalization of Rome at the expense of its plain Italic past. One of its principal themes was coloured stones: marbles, granites, porphyry, and gemstones.³⁷

³⁵ Seneca, *Epistulae* LXXXV.73, ed. L. D. Reynolds, *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucillum Epistulae morales* (Oxford, 1965), p. 299. *Quantum sanctorum, quantum columnarum est nihil sustinentium sed in ornamento postarum impensae causae!*

³⁶ M. Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2000).

³⁷ T. Wügel, 'Spolien und Baumarmor im Urteil mittelalterlicher Autoren', in J. Poeschke (ed.), *Anlike Spolien in der Architektur des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Münich, 1996), pp. 117-53; D. Kinney, 'Roman architectural Spolia', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 145, no. 2 (2001), pp. 138-50; www.aaps-pub.com/proceedings/1452/Rome; *Apollo* 154 (July 2001), pp. 3-10; C. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the Poetics of Empire* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 96-9; P. Binski, *Becket's Crown. Art and Imagination in Gothic England 1170-1300* (New Haven and London, 2004), pp. 3-6; H. Brandenburg, 'Die 58. no. 3 (2005), pp. 250-70 (with brilliant colour illustrations); *Das Münster A. C. Felici*, G. Frontorotta, M. Piacentini, C. Nicolais, D. Saccaietelli, S. Santu, and P. Vardelli, 'Charlamagne's black marble: the origin of the epigraph of Pope Hadrian Meaning', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 50 (2007), pp. 139-53. For the material discourse see, in addition to the literature cited by Schneider, W. L. MacDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, vol. II, *An Urban Appraisal* (New Haven, 1986); Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, pp. 41-58.

Colour represented geography:

We think ourselves poor and mean ... if our marbles from Alexandria [porphyry] are not set off by mosaics of Numidian [yellow] stone ... if our swimming-pools are not lined with Thasian [white] marble, once a rare and wonderful sight in any temple.³⁸

To Seneca this showy mix of Egyptian, North African, and Aegean imports signified moral laxity. Pliny's *Natural History* (AD 77) also dwells on the change in *mores* entailed in the flaunting of marble. In Pliny's account marble columns were first used on temples, not as embellishment but 'because there was no way of erecting stronger columns'.³⁹ Since then, however, marble columns had become a form of *luxuria*, employed purely for ostentation. Mammura (fl. 50s BC), a notorious profigate, was the first to have exclusively marble columns in his house. Pliny specifies that they were of two different marbles (Carystian [*cipollino*] and Lunese), assuming that his readers would know that these were light-coloured marbles (green-veined in the case of *cipollino*), and partly foreign (*cipollino* was quarried in Euboea; Luna marble in Carrara).⁴⁰ Around the same time Marcus Scaurus had 38-foot long shafts of Lucullan marble (from Turkey) hauled from a temporary theatre to his house; this was a scandal for both the size and showiness of the shafts, and Pliny regretted that there were no laws against it.⁴¹

Pliny acknowledged that coloured marbles – all of which came from countries outside Italy – represented the destiny of Rome to control the world. *Luxuria* was a negative consequence of Rome's success, and possibly the seed of its decline.⁴² It pitted man against Earth, his mother, and against nature.⁴³

Headlands are laid open to the sea, and nature is flattened. We remove the barriers created to serve as the boundaries of nations, and ships are built especially for marble. And so ... mountain ranges are transported to and fro ... When we see the masses of marble that are being conveyed or hauled, we should each of us reflect ... how much more happily many people live without them.⁴⁴

³⁸ Seneca, *Epistulae* LXXXVI.6, English trans. R.M. Gummere, Seneca ad *Lucillum epistulae morales*, vol. II, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, MA, 1965), p. 313.

³⁹ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XXXVI.5; ed. J. André, *Plin. l'Antique Histoire naturelle*, Livre XXXVI (Paris, 1981), p. 64; English trans. D.E. Eicholz, *Pliny*, vol. X, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, MA, 1962), p. 35.

⁴⁰ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XXXVI.7; ed. André, p. 65.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* XXXVI.2, ed. André, pp. 49–50.

⁴² S. Carey, *Pliny's Catalogue of Culture. Art and Empire in the Natural History* (Oxford, 2003), esp. pp. 91–9.

⁴³ J. Jaeger, *Pliny on Art and Society. The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art* (London and New York, 1991), esp. pp. 52–5.

⁴⁴ Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XXXVI.1, ed. André, pp. 48–9; English trans. Eicholz, pp. 3–5.

The discourse of columns

Few other authors cared to express such scruples, and marble was solidly established as a theme of architectural panegyric in the first century. Seneca's notion of decorum was turned upside down: it was considered inappropriate *not* to decorate a building as luxuriously as the patron's means allowed, if not more so. Statius, probably the most influential master of marble panegyric, praised the Baths of Claudius Etruscus, finance minister under Nero (54–68), for disdaining Carystian marble and even alabaster as not good enough: only porphyry and purple-veined *poronaz-zero* would do.⁴⁵

The City of Rome was the crux of this discourse, since the over-riding message was that mountains were moved to Rome. The repertoire of coloured marbles on display in the City constituted, in Rolf Schneider's phrase, a material 'map' of her dominions, symbolizing the infinite power of Rome over virtually everything.⁴⁶ When exotic marbles made their way to other colonies, as far away as Britain, they signified participation in the culture of the capital and made those places Rome-like. The far-flung and technologically demanding infrastructure of quarrying, carving, and transport required to satisfy the appetite for coloured stones reached its apex in the second century and collapsed in the third. In the City it was still possible to bedeck new constructions with coloured marble ornaments by drawing on accumulated stockpiles that may have lasted well into the fourth century, but after around 400, builders increasingly reused columns and revetments from decayed or damaged structures that were becoming literally dilapidated.⁴⁷

Dilexi decorem domus tuae (Psalm 25)⁴⁸

The first Christian emperor extended the discourse of *magnificencia* to the church. The basilicas built all over the Christian world by Constantine (306–37) were outfitted with the same costly panoply of marbles as secular basilicas, palaces, and baths. In a Christian context the message of

⁴⁵ Statius, *Silvae* 1.5; ed. D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Silvae*, Statius, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 2003), pp. 84–6. R. Gnoli, *Marmorata romana*, 2nd edn (Rome, 1988), pp. 35–40.

⁴⁶ Schneider, 'Coloured marble', p. 7.

⁴⁷ Hugo Brandenburg is particularly insistent on the depth and long life of the stockpiles (*Marmorlager*): H. Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms vom 4. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert. Der Beginn der abendländischen Kirchenbaukunst* (Wilmán and Regensburg, 2004), pp. 34, 97, 154–5, 162, etc.

⁴⁸ Psalm 25.8: *Domine dilexi decorem domus tuae et locum habitationis gloriae tuae* (I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house; and the place where thy glory dwelleth); www.dabo.org/chapter/21025.htm.

these displays took on an added dimension, as splendid columns and marble ornament advertised not only the builder's power to amass such riches but his respect for the deity to whom the building was offered. The lord emperor could do no less for the Lord God; at least, this is how Eusebius rationalized the grandiosity of Constantine's foundations in the Holy Land, where Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem was ordered to make a basilica at the tomb of Christ 'out of the ordinary, huge, and rich', constructed with 'imperial munificence' so that it would be 'worthy of God'.⁴⁹ The emperor himself took responsibility for supplying the columns, of whatever quantity, and all of the marble Bishop Makarios might need. Although we have no such documentation for Rome, the vast and colourful colonnades of the Lateran cathedral (c. 315) and St Peter's presumably conveyed the same mixed message of the donor's magnificence (the cathedral was called the Basilica Constantiniana) and the honour he conspicuously paid to an even higher power.⁵⁰ As with any public benefaction, moreover, magnificence was also magnanimity, for the basilicas were created not for the emperor's own purposes but on behalf of the Christian community.

The secular discourse of *magnificentia* continued to flourish among the fabulously wealthy Roman aristocracy, whose own evergetism led to the construction of imposing church basilicas that shared the marble rhetoric of private mansions and villas.⁵¹ Gaul was no different from Rome in this respect, and the direct connection between them is exemplified by Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont from c. 470 and urban prefect of Rome in 468–70. His metric inscription for the basilica erected by Bishop Patiens in Lyon mentions among its splendid features the multicoloured marble vault and pavement and the 'splendid forest' of columns in the nave.⁵² For Sidonius the marble discourse of Statius was still alive. He employed ironic echoes of it in the description of his father-in-law's villa at Avitacum to say that, after all, it was decorated with local marble:

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If you ask what I have to show in the way of marble, it is true that Paros, Carraros and Proconnesos, Phrygians, Numidians, and Spartans have not deposited here slabs from hill-faces in many colours.⁵³

This is not mere word play. As urban prefect Sidonius would have had oversight of Rome's stock of reusable marbles, so he would have been well informed about their origins and relative values. His description continues with the arcaded entrance to the swimming pool:

The middle supports [of the arches] are not pillars (*pilae*) but columns, of the kind that high-class architects have called 'purples' (*purpuras*)...

On the east a portico overlooks the lake; it is supported on round piers (?) (*columnis*) rather than by a pretentious array of monolithic columns.⁵⁴

Sidonius knew the etiquette of columns, including the relative value of columns and piers.

After the break-up of the Roman empire the direct influence of the City becomes harder to trace and probably declined, although it never disappeared. Bishops and monks like Ceolfrih continued to travel to Rome, returning with mental impressions as well as books, paintings, and other objects; and from the sixth century onward they could keep up with the popes' building activities through the *Liber pontificalis*. Nevertheless, the discourse of columns seems to diverge, with northern sources stressing number while the *Liber pontificalis* tended to highlight colour and material. The 'dry enumeration' of columns and windows in a pattern noted by Lindy Grant in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when, according to her, clerical writers focused on columns because they lacked the specialized vocabulary to describe other aspects of complex masonry structures.⁵⁵ For Gregory, enumeration was perhaps still a trope of the discourse of *magnificentia*:

Awesome and vast is the edifice, distinguished not by a hundred columns but by as many as could shoulder the gods and the sky if Atlas were let off.⁵⁶

Large numbers of columns, and better yet inexpressibly large numbers of columns, were the sign of a truly noble building. At the same time

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, English trans. A. Cameron and S. G. Hall (Oxford, 1999), pp. 134–5.
⁵⁰ For the Roman basilicas see Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms*, pp. 16–108 and L. Botsman, *The Power of Tradition, Spolia in the Architecture of St Peter's in the Vatican* (Hilversum, 2004).

⁵¹ These are the so-called *trium*. See Brandenburg, *Die frühchristlichen Kirchen Roms*, pp. 134–76.

⁵² Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* II.10; English trans. W. B. Anderson, Sidonius *Poems and Letters*, vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1956), pp. 465–7. M. Viellard-Troiekourov, *Les Monuments religieux de la Gaule d'après les œuvres de Grégoire de Tours* (Paris, 1976), p. 139. Sidonius used the same image, *sexata silva columnis*, for a palatial dining room: *Carmina* XXII.206, English trans. Anderson, p. 279.

⁵³ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* II.2; English trans. Anderson, p. 423; Weigel, 'Spolien und Baumaterial', p. 125.

⁵⁴ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* II.2; English trans. Anderson, p. 425; *Nec pilae sunt mediae sed columnae, quas architecti portiones aedificiorum purpuras nuncupantur*.

⁵⁵ Viellard-Troiekourov, *Les Monuments religieux de la Gaule*, p. 16; L. Grant, 'Naming of parts: describing architecture in the High Middle Ages', in Clarke and Crossley (eds.), *Architecture and Language*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Statius, *Silvae* IV.2, cited by Schneider, 'Coloured marble', p. 8 and n. 47; cf. Binns, *Becker's Crown*, pp. 3–4.

counting was a practical means of demonstrating grandeur and scale, and even a means of perceiving them. With twenty columns per side in the nave, the basilica of St Martin of Tours was in some sense as large as St Paul's basilica in Rome, even though it covered a smaller area. But it was not as grand as St Peter's, which Gregory noted had ninety-six columns in four rows and four more 'in altare', altogether 100.⁵⁷

The number of columns in St Peter's is ignored in the *Liber pontificalis*, which does mention porphyry columns over the Apostle's tomb and the unique helical columns 'from Greece', believed to have been gifts of Constantine.⁵⁸ In general, the *Liber pontificalis* passes over structural columns and concentrates on those that were in some way special, whether for their location (at an altar or holy tomb), workmanship, size and/or material, usually porphyry.⁵⁹ Sible de Blaauw's important study of the occurrence of porphyry in the *Liber pontificalis* revealed that it is very unevenly distributed.⁶⁰ After the Emperor Constantine, porphyry appears in the *gesta* of two fifth-century popes, Sixtus III (432-40) and Hilarius (461-8), and not again until the Carolingian popes beginning with Leo III (795-816).⁶¹ De Blaauw concluded that this gap was not accidental, but part of a deliberate strategy to associate papal donors with Constantine, and thereby to legitimate the popes' claims to imperial, or quasi-imperial rights and attributes. In the case of Pope Leo III, de Blaauw noted that the pope's extravagant purple mantling of St Peter's tomb, including new porphyry columns, chancels, steps, and pavement, was carried out just before the coronation of Charlemagne, in which porphyry was again a significant motif.⁶²

Although there must have been some porphyry – witness the two columns in the bath at Avitacum – on the aristocratic estates that passed to the Roman church before the Gothic War (535-54), for large columns and reworkings builders would have had to remove materials from the

thermae, temples, porticoes, palaces, and other state buildings under the emperor's jurisdiction. Pope Leo III's orgy of porphyry reflects the fundamental change in state organization that occurred in the eighth century, the replacement of the emperor's rule in Italy by a patchwork of zones under papal, Frankish, and Lombard control. The division of Italy was worked out in a series of treaties between popes and Carolingian rulers, including Pope Hadrian (772-95) and Charlemagne.⁶³ As head of the papal state with Rome at its centre, the pope could dispose of the City's porphyry and other public ornamenta as he liked. This had implications for all future reuse of Roman marble until the papal state ceded to Italy in 1870.

*Tribuit sua marmorora Roma*⁶⁴

Einhard's statement that 'because [Charles] was unable to find columns and marbles for the construction [of his 'basilica' at Aachen] anywhere else, he took care to have them brought from Rome and Ravenna' was interpreted for much of the twentieth century as a statement of Charlemagne's aspirations to imperial status.⁶⁵ As *spolia* from Rome, the columns were thought to be *Beduinungsträger* ('bearers of meaning'), relic-like bits of pieces' to a new site, endowing that site with their 'talismanic' power.⁶⁶ This formulation has been so often repeated that there is now a backlash against it. Thomas Weigel and, with greater vehemence, Günther Binding have insisted that Charlemagne's only interest in acquiring ancient column shafts was their aesthetic value. Reprising Bandmann, Weigel defined the shafts as 'transferable components', not of Rome but of beauty (*transferierbare Schönheitslemente*).⁶⁷ Binding categorically denied political or ideological significance to all reused columns, arguing

⁵⁷ Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum* II.14, PL 71, col. 213A; *De Gloria beatorum marcyri* I.28, PL 71, col. 728B; Viellard-Troiekouff, *Les Monuments religieux de la Gaule*, pp. 316, 397.

⁵⁸ *Liber pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, *Le Liber pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, vol. 1 ((1886) repr. Paris, 1981), p. 176. For the 'corkscrew' columns: Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, p. 130.

⁵⁹ See the extracts in Weigel, 'Spolien und Buntmarmor', pp. 128-35.

⁶⁰ S. de Blaauw, 'Papst und Purpur. Porphyry in frühen Kirchenausstattungen in Rom', in *Tessera. Festschrift für Josef Engemann*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband, 18 (Münster-Westfalen, 1991), pp. 36-50.

⁶¹ As is well known, the first *vitae* in the *Liber pontificalis* were not composed until the early sixth century, so the fourth- and fifth-century lives are reconstructions; but it is generally believed that the donation lists were based on authentic documents. The biography of Pope Leo III was written while he was alive.

⁶² De Blaauw, 'Papst und Purpur', pp. 41-2, 49-50.

⁶³ T.F.X. Noble, *The Republic of St Peter. The Birth of the Papal State, 680-825* (Philadelphia, 1984).

⁶⁴ *Carmen in laudem Desiderii abbas Casinensis: tribuit sua marmorora Romaliquibus est domus sua deora* (Rome paid tribute with her marbles, with which this house is adorned); quoted by G. Binding, *Antike Säulen als Spolien in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Kirchen und Paläen – Materialspolien oder Beduinungsträger? Sitzungsberichte der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main* 45, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 2007), p. 35 n. 119.

⁶⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Imperatoris* 26, ed. G. Bianchi, *Eginardo Vita di Carlo Magno* (Rome, 1980), p. 101: *Ad causis structuram cum columnas et marmorora altitudie habere non posses, Roma argue Ravenna desolebenda carere. Bindings, Antike Säulen als Spolien*, pp. 18-26.

⁶⁶ G. Bandmann, *Mittelalterliche Architekturalien als Beduinungsträger* (Berlin, 1951), p. 145: 'der heilige Ort wird ... in Teilrücken transferiert'; Granit, 'Naming of parts', p. 52.

⁶⁷ Weigel, 'Spolien und Buntmarmor', p. 124; Binding, *Antike Säulen als Spolien*, pp. 18-28.

that they could not have effected a *translatio Romae* because so many of them were, in fact, not from the City but from Roman sites closer to the point of their reuse; further, the origin of reused elements is almost never legible to viewers once they have been installed in their new context.⁶⁸

D. S. Peacock's petrographic analysis of the column shafts reused at Aachen confirmed that some were ancient. The dismantling of the octagon under Napoleon has muddled the evidence, however, and most of the nineteen shafts Peacock deemed 'certainly' or 'almost certainly' ancient are no longer in the chapel.⁶⁹ Some of them, especially the four shafts of red Egyptian (Aswan) granite and two of rare 'black porphyry', are more likely to have come from the City than from the provinces.⁷⁰ Einhard's point about their origin, however, was probably not to invoke 'spolia magica' (*Spolienmagie*) but to say something about Charlemagne.⁷¹ The extraordinary, almost unimaginable effort of bringing columns to Aachen from Rome demonstrates the king's care for his new church and thereby his piety, as Binding maintains; at the same time, it proves his might and political stature.⁷² In his ability to acquire 'whatever quantity and kind of materials we may learn ... to be needful ... from all sources', Charlemagne was indeed a new Constantine, not necessarily self-consciously so, but because he was living out the tradition Constantine established.⁷³

As in so many other areas, the Carolingian period was a watershed in the discourse of columns and marble. Coloured marbles ceased to 'map' the extent of the old Roman empire. Their geographic names had

been largely forgotten, and the few that survived pointed to colour rather than place of origin; so *porphyreus* denoted 'purple' and *parius* (Parian) 'white'.⁷⁴ The effective point of origin of all special marbles was Rome, or the City itself. After the ninth century the production of columns became increasingly difficult and costly, and monolithic marble columns large enough to be used structurally were increasingly antiquated.⁷⁵ The best of such columns – the tallest, strongest, shiniest, and most unusual – were to be found in the city of Rome. Thus from Einhard's trope of the all-powerful builder came a new *topos*, that of the patron in the 'heroic mode', often an abbot or other monastic, who went from France, Britain, Seneca to the later Middle Ages, Cistercians would castigate such efforts, and all columnar architecture as *luxuria*.⁷⁶ Like all *topoi*, the patron in fact have transported marble columns from Rome to Montecassino, it is unlikely that Abbot Suger thought seriously about shipping columns from the Baths of Diocletian to Saint-Denis. Like Einhard's mention of Rome and Ravenna, the purpose of Suger's 'imaginary Odyssey' was to demonstrate his piety and *bona fides*.⁷⁸

The exegetical discourse of columns was much less changed by the Carolingian era. Eventually, it would take on real-world applications, as commentators employed the Old Testament 'interpretative complex' of column imagery to the material church, 'ecclesia ... *Ecclesiam designat*' (the church signifies the Church), in the words of Bruno of Segni.⁷⁹ But Rome remained absorbed in her marbles, and had little to bring to this development.

⁶⁸ Binding, *Anhite Säulen als Spolien*, pp. 45–7.

⁶⁹ D. S. Peacock, 'Charlemagne's black stones: the re-use [of] Roman columns in early medieval Europe', *Antiquity* 71 (September 1997), online at proquest.umi.com, accessed 1 July 2009. The eight certainly antique shafts are mostly in the Louvre. Others are in the Museum of the Cathedral Chapter (Domkapitel) in Aachen, including the two of 'black porphyry': C. Meckseper, in C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), 799. *Kanzel und Kalkar der Karolingerringen: Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn*, vol. 1: *Katalog der Ausstellung Paderborn 799* (Münz, 1999), p. 110, no. II 69, photograph on p. 111. The statement that 'nineteen antique columns survive in the building' is a misunderstanding (Story et al., 'Charlemagne's black marble', p. 187). Binding, *Anhite Säulen als Spolien*, p. 19 claims that there are twenty-five ancient shafts, on what grounds I cannot determine.

⁷⁰ According to Untermann, the 'black porphyry' shafts were never part of the structure and their original role in the Chapel is unknown: M. Untermann, "'opere mirabili structura'". Die Aachener "Residenz" Karls des Großen', in C. Stiegemann and M. Wemhoff (eds.), 799. *Kanzel und Kalkar der Karolingerringen: Karl der Große und Papst Leo III. in Paderborn. Beiträge zum Katalog der Ausstellung Paderborn 1999* (Münz, 1999), p. 157.

⁷¹ 'Spolienmagie' is traced by Weigel to A. Ertler, *1499. Lehr und Reiterstandbild im mittelalterlichen Rom. Eine rechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Wiesbaden, 1972), p. 140: 'einen Bedürfnis, das man als "Spolienmagie" bezeichnet hat'.

⁷² Binding, *Anhite Säulen als Spolien*, pp. 22–3.

⁷³ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, English trans. Cameron and Hall, pp. 134–5.

⁷⁴ De Blaauw, 'Papst und Purpur', p. 37; Weigel, 'Spolien und Bunnmarmor', pp. 121–2.

⁷⁵ Binding, *Anhite Säulen als Spolien*, pp. 11–13.

⁷⁶ Binski, 'The Cosmati and romanitas in England', pp. 120–1.

⁷⁷ Helinand of Froimont, 'Quec ibi aut picture, aut sculpture, aut nihil sustinentes columnae?' cited by Binding, 'Vom dreifachen Wert der Säule', p. 4.

⁷⁸ Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St-Denis and its Art Treasures, ed. and English trans. E. Panofsky (2nd edn Gerd Panošsky Soergel; Princeton, 1979), p. 91 and n. 90, cited by Binski, 'The Cosmati and romanitas in England', p. 120.

⁷⁹ Bruno of Segni (d. 1133), *De sacramentis Ecclesiae, mysteriis aequae ecclesiasticis ritibus* 596, PL 165, col. 1092, cited by Binding, 'Vom dreifachen Wert der Säule', p. 15.