

ARMIN F. BERGMEIER (ed.), *The Spoliated Past: Heritage, Antiquarianism, and Byzantine Material Culture Across Time and Space* (Mitteilungen zur spätantiken Archäologie und byzantinischen Kunstgeschichte 9). Wiesbaden: Reichert 2025. 242 pp., 136 ill. – ISBN 978-3-7520-0772-5, eISBN 978-3-7520-0280-5

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Following FRIEDRICH WILHELM DEICHMANN's 1975 publication on spolia in late antique architecture, the reuse of sculptural and architectural elements in new settings has been one of the most popular subjects in archaeology and medieval art history.¹ With hundreds of articles, chapters, and monographs on various aspects of the phenomenon, one might wonder whether there is room left for further publications on the subject.² However, new finds and new approaches prove that much is still to be explored. An additional factor is the extension of the spolia concept to encompass not only actual physical remains but also the appropriation of ideas and influences.

The current year 2025 saw the publication of two important collective volumes, of which *The Spoliated Past* is particularly relevant for Byzantine studies.³ Its editor ARMIN BERGMEIER has already made several contributions to *Spolienforschung*.⁴ The main emphasis here is on late Byzantine and Islamic monuments, although one contribution deals with the classical

1. F. W. DEICHMANN, *Die Spolien in der spätantiken Architektur*. Munich 1975.

2. For an annotated select bibliography on spolia from antiquity to the present, see BENTE KIILERICH, *Spolia*. In: KEVIN MURPHY (ed.), *Oxford Bibliography on Architecture, Planning and Preservation* (*Oxford Bibliographies Online*).

3. LORENZO CIGAINA – MARCO ESPOSITO – JULIAN ZIMMERMANN (eds), *Using Spolia, (Re)building Cities: Metropolitan Perspectives on Forms and Meanings of the Antique from the Hellenistic period to the Middle Ages*. Regensburg 2025, is concerned with the West.

4. A. F. BERGMEIER, *Antiquarian Displays of Spolia and Roman Identity: San Marco, Merbaka, and the Seljuk Caravanserais*. In: IVANA JEVTIĆ – INGELA NILSSON (eds), *Spoliation as Translation: Medieval Worlds of the Eastern Mediterranean* (*Convivium 7*). Turnhout 2021, pp. 76–97; IDEM, *Der Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini und die Fragmente der antiken Vergangenheit im 15. Jahrhundert*. In: JULIA DELLITH – JOHANNES GEBHARDT – DANIELA ROBERTS (eds), *Recycle – (Re)invent: Rezeptionswege von Byzanz bis in die Moderne*. Leipzig 2021, pp. 12–21.

period. The book is divided into two parts of four chapters each, of which only the papers in the second part are directly concerned with Byzantine spolia, whereas the first part is more heterogeneous, employing the concept of the ‘spoliated past’ in a wider sense.

In a brief introduction on ‘Spolia and Heritage in Byzantium’ (pp. 7–16), BERGMEIER presents the volume’s *raison d’être* and the content of its individual contributions. The stated purpose of the book is ‘to shed new light on overlooked archaisms and acts of spoliation’ (p. 10). He further holds that it is ‘about ideas, style, and material objects, their reuse and repurposing in the Eastern Roman Empire and after its end in 1453’ (*ibid.*). BERGMEIER also draws attention to a problematic aspect, namely the question of whether a given piece is reused or made in an archaizing style, citing S. Caterina d’Alessandria, Galatina, where the main portal and the right-side entrance contain some enigmatic reliefs and Greek inscriptions that may, or may not, be spolia. Most likely, a ‘Romanesque’ relief over the main portal was made to look old, thus belonging to the category of pseudospolia, works given the appearance of being ancient pieces.

Section one, titled *Visual Heritage: Reusing Styles and Ideas from the Past*, does not concern spolia in the sense of material reuse but examines stylistic and formal quotations. Here, RICHARD BRILLIANT’s categories spolia *in re* versus spolia *in se* may be pertinent: he distinguished between physical spolia (*in se*) and conceptual spolia (*in re*), that is, the reuse of forms and ideas.⁵ In terms of this distinction, JULIAN SCHREYER’s ‘Zerlegung der Form: eine antike Lösung für das Problem, wie mit der Vergangenheit umzugehen ist’ (pp. 19–34) can be perceived as dealing with spolia *in re*, the taking over of forms. SCHREYER compares the façade of the choragic Thrasyllos monument in Athens, 320–319 BC and the façade of the south-western wing of the Propylaia, suggesting that the architect made a conscious quotation of Mnesikles’ design, which may or may not have been the case. His second example, marble statues of Sophokles and Aischines, shows a common practice of quotation in the Graeco-Roman world, that a specific statuary type could be ‘reused’ in several contexts. The chapter thus raises questions of originality and the transmissions of ideas, rather than targeting spolia in the strict sense.

ANDREW GRIEBELER’s ‘The Trouble with Statues in the Paris Gregory’ (pp. 35–55) examines the late ninth-century illustrated manuscript BnF grec

5. RICHARD BRILLIANT, I piedestalli del giardino di Boboli: Spolia in se, spolia in re. *Prospettiva* 31 (1982) pp. 2–17.

510, discussing first a rare example of a magician at work, Cyprian, depicted in fol. 332v, before taking a closer look at the Emperor Julian in fol. 374v. GRIEBELER compares the pagan cult of images with the Christian one, elaborating on the differences between holy and demonic mimesis: ‘Iconic relations differ from sympathetic ones in that the latter affects its referent and must be contiguous to it in both name and substance. The icon, by contrast, cannot affect its referent and is only contiguous through shared name’ (p. 52). It is a densely written text and given that it is not only a question of pagan versus Christian but also of the discrepant attitudes to images in the Byzantine world, it may prove difficult to follow all the subtle distinctions.

ANDREA MATTIELLO’s ‘Grounding the Present, Quoting the Past: Notes on Visual Antiquarianism in the Depiction of the Life and Cult of Saint Demetrios in Palaiologan Mystras’ (pp. 57–84) focuses on painting styles and iconography. Mystras on the southern Peloponnese was founded in 1249 under Frankish rule but soon after became the administrative seat of the Byzantine province of Morea. With its many churches, it is now one of the most important sites for studying Palaiologan architecture and painting. The local episcopal church dating from 1291/1292 and dedicated to St Demetrios of Thessaloniki contains a profusion of narrative cycles and images of individual figures. Markedly different stylistic features have been ascribed to different workshops and to different periods of execution, but a unitary program seems likely despite the stylistic variations.⁶ MATTIELLO considers the murals’ ‘antiquarianism’ and cites other Mystras churches that reference ancient motifs. He pays special attention to the importance of establishing a link to the Demetrios cult in the saint’s home-city of Thessaloniki.

In ‘Stilpluralismus als bewusste Entscheidung. Stilspolien, Neuschöpfungen und Eklektismus in der spätbyzantinischen Malerei einer nordmazedonischen Region’ (pp. 85–101), JON C. CUBAS DÍAZ discusses late Byzantine paintings from Northern Macedonian churches. Sv. Nikola at Prilep, near Ohrid, ca. 1285–1298, is lavishly decorated with well-preserved murals. CUBAS DÍAZ points to the large variety of styles within the monument and argues that the artists made deliberate use of eclectic manners, resulting in a *Stilpluralismus*. Another church to St Nicholas, Sv. Nikola

6. To the bibliography should be added HJALMAR TORP, A Consideration of the Wall-Paintings of the Metropolis at Mistra. In: JAN OLOF ROSENQVIST (ed.), *Interaction and Isolation in Late Byzantine Culture* (Transactions of the Swedish Research Institute at Istanbul 13). Stockholm 2004, pp. 70–88.

at Mariovo, similarly displays various trends, including archaising features harking back to before 1204. The somewhat problematic concept of *Stil-spolien* is roughly equivalent to spolia *in re*. As in MATTIELLO's contribution, this chapter is about the reuse not of material elements but of stylistic formulas. Both authors convincingly show that many different styles could be employed for different ends within a single phase of a monument.

The second part of the book, *Material Heritage: Displaying, Preserving, and Excavating Objects from the Past*, is concerned with material reuse and thus closer to the spolia concept.

BERGMEIER's 'Reuse and Reconfiguration in the Churches of Mani: Evidence for the Closing of Chancel Screens after the End of the Byzantine Era' (pp. 105–149) takes a closer look at the rich material from the Mani peninsula in southern Greece. Documented by ample photographic evidence, taken by the author himself, BERGMEIER presents several churches that incorporate spolia as entrance door-frames or as tie-beams in the interior. A prime instance is Ag. Theodoroi at Vambaka. BERGMEIER makes a case for Byzantine chancel screens being normally open *templa* and becoming closed iconostases only after 1453 (p. 106). He argues that, although Ag. Petros at Kastanis was remodelled in the fourteenth century, the current configuration may well be considerably later, stemming from a remodelling in 1612. Spoliation was a recurrent phenomenon in the Mani area across the centuries, but the chronology of the Mani churches is uncertain, so in many instances it proves difficult to establish when a given item was put to secondary use.

IVANA JEVTIĆ discusses in 'The Spolia Floor of Vefa Kilise Camii in Istanbul' (pp. 151–172) a monument that was known from nineteenth-century drawings and re-emerged during restoration works carried out in 2018–2021. The Vefa Kilise, whose Byzantine name is unattested, dates from the 1000s or 1100s and may have been preceded by an early Byzantine church on the same site. It was rebuilt in the Palaiologan period ca. 1320 and converted into a mosque in 1480. The spolia in the floor of the south portico comprise three slabs with floral and geometric decoration, as well as fragments of plain marble. Carefully arranged, the design accentuated the passage from the portico into the nave. JEVTIĆ notes that the date of the spolia floor is uncertain; it could be from the 1320 rebuilding, from later in the Byzantine period, or from Ottoman times (p. 165). Given the chronological uncertainty, it is hard to tell whether the spolia floor served a practical, aesthetic, or prophylactic function. The south side of the building

includes some marble spolia and three *bacini*, possible Iranian imports of ca. 1250–1300/1350. The minaret contains spolia with their ornament facing inwards, undoubtedly employed as mere building material. Ultimately, the interpretation of the floor thus depends on whether it dates from the Byzantine or the post-Byzantine period.⁷

Whereas JEVTIĆ focuses on a single case study, the paper by BEATE BÖHLENDORF ARSLAN and MARTIN DENNERT on ‘Moscheen, Brunnen und Friedhöfe in der südlichen Troas: Vom Umgang mit Spolien in osmanischer Zeit’ (pp. 173–222) takes a broader view. The authors address the use of spolia in the Ottoman era, citing examples from mosques, wells, and graveyards in the southern Troas. Built shortly after 1365, the Murat Cami at Assos is one of the earliest mosques in the region. It is constructed entirely of spolia: stone blocks of dark grey andesite, taken from the archaic Athena temple, enhanced with accents of white marble from Skepsis, meaning that the door frames had to be transported 80 km by road. At Tuzla, the mosque erected in 1366 similarly incorporates material from a nearby temple, the Hellenistic Smintheion. This mosque also contains a score of early Byzantine relief slabs and some middle Byzantine pieces with obliterated crosses. The second part of the paper concerns spolia in fountains and wells. The use is interpreted as purely pragmatic; at times random fragments are assembled in a patchwork manner, e.g. at Uluköy (fig. 30). The final part addresses the prolific reuse in graveyards of a wide variety of ancient and medieval pieces. This authoritative contribution is very well illustrated with no less than 47 photos, mostly in colour.

Finally, with ‘Middle Byzantine Sculpture of the Eastern Aegean Islands’ (pp. 223–242) GEORGIOS PALLIS moves from Troas to the eastern Aegean islands of Samothrace, Imvros, Lemnos, Lesbos, Chios, and Samos, presenting a survey of Middle Byzantine reliefs. On most islands, no Middle Byzantine church remains standing and the slabs, generally of fine workmanship, have been found out of context, with many unprovenanced pieces now being kept in museums. A rare instance of a spoliated relief in a secondary (or tertiary) setting occurs at Ag. Marina, Castro, Imvros where a closure slab is imbedded in the floor; no date is suggested for this reuse. Whereas evidence of spoliation in the Byzantine period is scarce, PALLIS points to extended reuse of spolia from the eighteenth century onwards (p.

7. Compare the Little Metropolis in Athens, which may be as late as the fifteenth century: BENTE KIILERICH, Making Sense of the Spolia in the Little Metropolis in Athens. *Arte Medievale* II.4 (2005) pp. 95–114.

223). For instance, two relief slabs were built into Ag. Marina at Lesbos in 1797, and two sarcophagus slabs were embedded in a fountain as late as in 1882. PALLIS employs the term ‘spolia’ in a general sense for pieces no longer *in situ*. Given the nature of the evidence consisting of scattered fragments, it is difficult to conclude much about the history of the reliefs over the centuries. One may wonder whether these Middle Byzantine sculptures ever functioned as spolia in the Byzantine era, or whether the spoliation dates primarily from the post-Byzantine period.

The Spoliated Past thus presents a conglomerate of various themes. One must stretch the spolia concept to see the first part of the studies as dealing with spolia in the sense of recycled physical remains; this does not mean that these contributions on ‘stylistic antiquarianism’ are not worthy of interest. Indeed, all the chapters offer something of interest both to spolia-scholars and to scholars of Byzantine art and archaeology. The book also addresses important issues concerning problematic concepts such as period style, retrospection, influence, and tradition.

Keywords

spolia; antiquarianism; style; Byzantine sculpture; Byzantine painting