



Africano

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Africano is one of the most distinctive, although one of the most variable, of the ornamental stones commonly used by the Romans. It is a breccia composed by multicolored marble fragments – pink, white, yellow, blue-gray – in which the crystals vary from minute to very large, the largest usually occurring in veins or well defined chromatic patches. These fragments of marble are embedded in a black, dark green or grayish matrix, that is usually harder than the marble itself.

Africano was the first colored marble to be introduced in Rome in the form of semifinished blocks and columns. The *Edictum de Pretiis Rerum Venalium*, an act published by Diocletian in 331 to regulate the maximum prices of goods, includes Africano as one of the most expensive marbles. Its origins have been unclear for long time. It probably derives its modern name, Africano, from its general dark color, rather than from some speculation on its origins.

Until 1971 it was identified with the marble that Romans called *Marmor Chium*, but currently it is identified with the *Luculleum*. *Marmor Luculleum* derives the name from its introduction in Rome by the latin consul Lucio Licinio Lucullo (106 – 57 BC). Plinius the Older, in his *Naturalis Historia*, wrote about the conflict between Lucullo and the King of the Ponto, Mitridate. Lucullo – the winner – sent in Rome many treasures, collected as spoil, among them, there were tons of Africano marble. The consul used this marble to decorate his luxury villa. Since then, Africano spread it rapidly, especially during the period between Augustus and Antonini's.

During an archaeological exploration around Teos in Turkey, in 1966, four interesting quarry-areas were distinguished. One of them was identified as an ancient mine of Africano marble. It is located along and under the surface of a small lake, Kara Göl, 45 kilometers south-west of the city of Izmir. Archaeological evidences and the suspension of the quarry-mark, suggest that this mine was abandoned rather suddenly in 166 AD, either due to the increasing of water level of the lake, or because of the depletion of the mine itself. A short distance north-west of Kara Göl another quarry was found. Smaller in size, it seems to have produced an inferior form of Africano.

Roman villas in Italy – Lazio and Campania – in North Africa and in Asia Minor witness the use of Africano for columns, slabs for wall ornaments, thresholds. Among other locations, it can be found in the columns of the central nave of the Basilica Paulli, in the Forum of August, in the lost scene of the Theatre of Marcellus, in the Forum of Trajan and in the wall decoration of the Pantheon as reconstructed by the emperor Hadrian. It appears in the threshold of the Antonine *Capitolium* or in late houses at Ostia, such as *Casa della Fortuna Annonaria*. It has been also reused amply up to modern period, mainly for columns and slabs.

DCCAC would like to stimulate artistic projects centered on the use of Africano marble, for its symbolic and historical values and for its quality and its characteristic look. DCCAC is pleased to make available its important stock of ancient Africano marble to artists interested in projects related to this marvelous material, contributing to develop fruitful relationships with high skill craftsmen specialized in marble works.

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