

Cunning Greeks: the Christian reinterpretation of Greek and Roman spolia in Greek churches and geographical trends of spoliation in Greece.

My research began with the mapping portion of this project, where I was essentially an armchair archaeologist. I scoured Google Earth in an attempt to find any church in Greece which contained spolia, and ended up amassing 220 such examples. Afterwards, I got into contact with a GIS specialist at the MacOdrum library, Rebecca Bartlet, who introduced me to arcGIS. I then made an excel spreadsheet to put in some data, like the composition of the spolia, manually. From there, I uploaded settlement and elevation data among other attributes which would have been nearly impossible to do manually into arcGIS and undertook the tedious process of trying to merge and associate this data with each individual church. Despite many failed attempts, and many meetings with Rebecca Bartlet, it finally worked to my amazement. Learning arcGIS was both important for this project and for my future in classical archaeology where I will no doubt encounter it again. It is nice to be somewhat familiar with this technology.

The research of spolia itself began with amassing and annotating many papers which would prove to be helpful during the writing process. The three churches I wrote case studies about were carefully chosen to be different from each other and in different areas of Greece, reflecting the potential for study that spolia presents. Some articles were general introductions to spolia, while others were far more niche and discussed the particular church in question. I tried to find churches which had little written about them, or at least little analyzing the spolia. As a result, my research is intended to be as original as possible. I experienced many “eureka!” moments throughout the summer as I connected what is depicted in the Greek and Roman spolia to how a Byzantine Greek would have re-interpreted it in a way that reflects the teachings and customs of the Orthodox church.

Aside from my regular meetings with my supervisor for this project, Dr. Laura Banducci, whose advice and edits were the most helpful, I found myself messaging other members of faculty at Carleton University and other academic institutions to ask questions about their research or questions they may have known the answer to. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Guy Sanders in Corinth who gave me advice on my paper and pursuing classical archaeology in the future, as a career.

I spent August in Greece, traveling around the Peloponnese and Epirus. I visited all three churches I wrote about, and some other important churches with spolia as well. The importance of going to a place which one is researching should not be underestimated. I did all of the mapping and most of the writing for this project at my house in Ottawa, and while that would have perfectly suited the requirements for this internship, there is no substitute for seeing in person what you have poured a summer's worth of research into. I also ended up discovering two inscriptions, one in the church of Saint John the Baptist in the Mani peninsula, and the other in

the church of Saint John Chrysostom in Geraki, I would not have been aware of these without paying a visit to these churches since no source I read discussed these inscriptions.

Ultimately, this research internship has fostered my passion for the classics and Byzantine studies and desire to continue my academic career in these topics. In my research particularly, I came to the important realization that the use of spolia in churches was done to connect the past Greek and Roman world to the contemporary world in which the church was built. Inscriptions were re-read by the upper class who were literate to refer to ecclesiastical practices and canon, and seen as religiously sacred by the majority of people who could not read, while sometimes being able to make out single, basic words. The Greek and Roman depictions of humans or deities (though none of the churches I studied included deities) were reassigned to be Orthodox saints, Jesus himself, or regular people, in some cases a far cry from their original symbology and often funerary setting.

The study of spolia is not entirely part of classical archaeology, because spolia is usually incorporated into Byzantine or later churches, but not entirely Byzantine either since the spolia itself is commonly Greek or Roman. In that way it is multidisciplinary, and allows many questions to be answered concerning how the Greeks after antiquity viewed their past and how ancient material was reused. It also has preserved many examples of inscriptions, blocks, and artistic sculpture because the inclination to destroy and loot classical temples and structures was higher than the inclination to do the same to a church in an Christian Orthodox land.