

# Utilization of APAT Collection stones in architectural monuments of Rome

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper wishes to further deepen the historical and artistic aspects of the subject discussed by Dr. Di Pace<sup>1</sup> in his research of one year ago. The research studied Cottanello marble, starting from the physical, lithological and geological characteristics of the stone and analyzing its utilization in the Baroque Rome providing a first basic map of the city.

The extraordinary success that the Sabine stone met in the capital city, in a relatively short time that coincided with the flourishing of the Baroque period, has attracted great interest hence the need to approach the subject in a more detailed way.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this study is therefore to reconstruct the events that introduced Cottanello in Rome in order to understand its later developments and capture the actual essence of this marble's utilization.

This introduction will only provide the historical and geographical details required to understand the objectives of this research, that will be discussed in the chapters below.

### 1.1. SUBJECT AND PURPOSE

Cottanello marble owes its name to the Sabine town where it was extracted from. It was known since the ancient times, although it was only used for pavements due to its unique compactness and resistance as witnessed by fragmental examples found in Anguillara Sabazia, Ostia, Lucus Feroniae, Albano Laziale and Ercolano<sup>3</sup>.

Apart from the stone's extensive utilization near its extraction point, particularly in Cottanello and in the nearby town of Contigliano<sup>4</sup>, between 1640 and 1690 this stone met an extraordinary success outside its local boundaries. Its distribution then continued with less emphasis for the following decade.

Indeed, Cottanello owes its fame to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome. In this period Rome was an extraordinary breeding ground for art and a privileged place for meetings between great artists and

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<sup>1</sup> Ref. Di Pace A., 2006, *Un esempio di contributo della litologia alla cultura ambientale: la "via del Cottanello" dal sito di estrazione a Roma e i suoi dintorni*, Roma, APAT.

<sup>2</sup> For more a more general and wider view reference is made to the above mentioned research by Di Pace.

<sup>3</sup> Ref. De Nuccio, Ungano L., 2002 *I Marmi colorati della Roma imperiale*, catalogue of the exhibition, Padova, p. 285; also ref. Gnoli R., 1988, *Marmora Romana*, Roma, p. 188.

powerful commissioners. To this purpose it is worth referring to what the historian Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza wrote on Cottanello in 1703 “(...) *cavato dalla sua oscurità (...) e reso celebre con essersi quivi trovata una cava di marmo o pietra persichina*”<sup>5</sup>.

In the past, the success that Cottanello marble met in Rome was often (at times even incorrectly) associated with the artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680). He was an extraordinary director and interpreter of the Roman Baroque style. But the theory that ascribes the marble’s success to this famous sculptor and architect (because he used it in an extensive and exclusive way) should be reconsidered even if it sounds fascinating. All the artist’s collaborators, who embraced some of his fundamental poetical principles, should actually be taken into due consideration.

In actual fact, sources and documents relate the Cottanello’s fortune to the personal life of a stone-cutter from Carrara named Sante Ghetti (1589-1656). He was a stone trader and collaborated with Bernini several times. Following Ghetti’s artistic and commercial endeavours made it possible to find specific references on the use of Cottanello in Rome. It was also possible to reconstruct (at least partially) the intricate network of artists, traders, stone-cutters and commissioners who are the supporting structure of the artistic events of the time. This is a less famous but decisive aspect that enables us to understand some of the most significant expressions of the Roman Baroque culture.

We must therefore analyze the phenomenon not only from a purely historical/artistical point of view but also from an economical and, more generally, a cultural one. The choice of Cottanello marble, as well as of other stones coming from quarries more or less close to the capital city, was both practical, economical and aesthetical. Indeed, it responded to a taste that was developing in Rome under Pope Urbano VIII Barberini (1623-1644) and which then continued in the following years under Innocenzo X Pamphili (1644-1655) and Alessandro VII Chigi (1655-1667).

According to current records, Cottanello marble seems to have been used for the first time in the most important Roman building yard of the time: Saint Peter’s. The modalities and periods of the stone’s utilization are therefore a starting point for researches aimed at reconstructing the complicated history of Cottanello marble in Baroque Rome.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This research’s starting point is the above mentioned contribution by Dr. Di Pace. His research was followed by the bibliographical researches that are fully featured in chapter V. In particular, the

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<sup>4</sup> Ref. Montagni C., Ricci R., 2003, *Il marmo di Cottanello* in Arkos, anno IV, n. 2, pp. 47-51.

<sup>5</sup> Piazza C. B., 1703, *La gerarchia cardinalizia*, Roma

researches were carried out in libraries specialized in history and art (library of the *Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte*, National Library, *Alessandrina* University Library).

This first documentary part of the research was followed by a more specific approach of the subject's historical aspects. Archives were consulted with particular reference to the funds related to Cottanello in the historical period of reference (about 1650-1700). These are preserved in the State Archives of Rome. At the same time, studies on the artistic and entrepreneurial activities of Sante Ghetti were also carried out. This biographical research aimed at reconstructing Ghetti's personal life, by consulting the State Archives of Rome and the Archive of the Reverend Saint Peter's Basilica.

Precious researches have been conducted in the past by specialists of the sector to collect documentation on the most important building yards of Rome in which Sante Ghetti and his son Giovan Francesco operated. These are indicated in the footnotes contained in this study.

Finally, the last stage consisted in a direct territorial survey to specifically identify the building yards where Cottanello marble was widely used. The historical and artistic analysis was accompanied by a lithological key prepared in collaboration with Dr. Capitano and Dr. Di Pace.

This multidisciplinary approach was necessary due to the nature of the research and to extend the scope of the subject.

### **3. THE UTILIZATION OF COTTANELLO IN 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ROME**

The utilization of Cottanello marble in Rome was documented for the first time in the Saint Peter's building yard in 1648. This was the most important building yard in Rome as artists like Bramante, Michelangelo and Bernini contributed to its construction. As the centuries passed, every Pope made sure his name was related to the Basilica, commissioning works aimed at making this Christian temple as magnificent and splendid as it could be. In 1645, one year before he was elected Pope, Innocenzo X Pamphili started decorating the internal part of Saint Peter's to prepare for the Jubilee of 1650. He appointed Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the Architect of the building yard since 1629, to

direct the works. Enormous quantities of marbles were used to decorate the Church's naves and pillars involving considerable expenses and difficulties in supplies. To overcome this inconvenience a lot of material, that was found in nearby excavations, was reutilized. The stones originated mainly from the Roman plain, from Colli Albani and from Sabina.

It was Sante Ghetti (1589-1656) who proposed to use Cottanello marble. The stone-cutter from Carrara was a marble trader and had worked with Bernini several times, supplying and processing material for the works planned by Gian Lorenzo<sup>6</sup>.

The new discovery of Cottanello marble and its utilization at the Vatican are minutely described in a series of documents preserved in the Archive of the Reverend Saint Peter's Basilica. The event is also described by Sante and his son Giovan Francesco, in two complaints presented in 1656 and the following year to Pope Alessandro VII Chigi<sup>7</sup>.

The considerable use of the "*pietra mischia persichina*" (mixed peach-coloured stone), as well as other material extracted in the surroundings of the capital city during the Baroque period, responded to two different needs. The first one was practical and the other stylistic. On one hand the low availability of material to be reused (originating from ancient monuments) created the need to source for new stones extracted near the city. On the other hand the Cottanello's fortune, as that of other marbles, was determined by a purely aesthetical choice. In that period, in fact, the utilization of different stones meant following the new style introduced by Bernini. It consisted in an ideal merging of the three arts in a *unicum* that had a spectacular effect<sup>8</sup>.

To this purpose, Bernini's biographer Baldinucci writes: *è concetto molto universale ch'egli sia stato il primo c'abbia tentato di unire l'architettura colla scultura e pittura in tal modo, che di tutte si facesse un bel composto; il che egli fece con togliere alcune uniformità odiose di attitudini, rompendole talora senza violare le buone regole, ma senza obbligarsi a regola*<sup>9</sup>.

According to Bernini, art was an imitation of nature brought to perfection. It was based on proportions and contrasts, in other words on the optical and perceptive relationships that established between objects in a natural way. This principle can help us capture the extraordinary creations of his genius, supported by his collaborators. Among his works, the most famous examples are the Fonseca Chapel in the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina and the funeral monument of Alessandro VII Chigi at the Vatican. These two works have been used as examples even because they are both realized in Cottanello, as well as other marbles. They underline the relationship between the various

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<sup>6</sup> Ghetti's artistic and entrepreneurial activity and his relationship with Bernini are described in the following chapter.

<sup>7</sup> For the complaint presented by Sante Ghetti ref. AFSP, ARM,12, B, 66, c. 180; the second one of 1657 was published for the first time in Fea C., 1826, *Descrizione di Roma e suoi contorni* .... And then again in Federici P.,1937, *Notizie inedite sulle colonne di San Pietro*, «Roma. Rivista di studi e di vita romana» anno XV, p. 100. The text of both of them is contained in the appendix.

<sup>8</sup> Ref. Lavin I., 1980, *Bernini and...* with particular reference to pp. 6-16.

parts (architectural, decorative and ornamental) creating in the whole work a synthesis that has an immediate visible impact. The spectacular effect is created by the use of different, coloured stones. Bernini was therefore the father of inventions. He designed and planned many works realized in Cottanello. In the building yards where the two men worked together, Ghetti was in charge of the whole project's realization, from the stone's supply to the management of the workers. The roles and single duties inside the main Roman building yards where Cottanello was utilized will be discussed specifically in the last chapter of this research.

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<sup>9</sup> Baldinucci F., 1682, *Vita del Cavalier* .... p. 140