FOREWORD

This volume is the result of a panel held in Warsaw on 8 and 9 June 2022, during the annual conference "Poles in the Near East" organized by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Faculty of Archaeology at the University of Warsaw. The panel, entitled "Marble Use, Trade, and Distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean during Late Antiquity", consisted of 16 papers. Ten of them are included in the proceedings published herein as a special issue of the journal *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*.

The volume focuses on marbles from the early Byzantine period (4th–7th century CE), from a wide geographical area covering the ancient territories of Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, and Greece [Fig. 1]. Studies devoted to the use of marble in Antiquity have developed exponentially in recent times and are now a major field of research in Classical Archaeology. Notably, however, research to date has focused primarily on the Greek and Roman periods. Several important papers on marbles from later centuries have been written in recent decades for multi-authored publications focusing on more general topics, such as the ASMO-SIA Proceedings. However, collective publications devoted exclusively to marbles of the early Byzantine period are still lacking.



Fig. 1. Map of the Eastern Mediterranean showing the location of major sites mentioned throughout the volume (Processing M. Gwiazda)

The volume offers a vivid picture of the use of marble during the early Byzantine period relying on a variety of approaches and methodologies. It not only provides insights into recent discoveries from important sites, but also presents perspectives on the social function and appreciation of this material. Several papers contribute to a better understanding of the working processes of the craftsmen and the reasons underlying the selection of materials for specific objects or building projects. Others provide more detailed images, offering an opportunity to explore the diversity of marble objects in the light of various contexts and using different approaches. However, these contributions certainly do not fill all the research gaps, and much remains to be done in the investigation of early Byzantine marbles. One of the avenues to be pursued, for instance, is the study of the provenance of raw materials using archaeometric methods, which is well developed for artifacts from earlier periods.

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