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**Michael GREENHALGH, *Constantinople to Córdoba. Dismantling Ancient Architecture in the East, North Africa and Islamic Spain***

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## RÉFÉRENCE

Michael GREENHALGH, *Constantinople to Córdoba. Dismantling Ancient Architecture in the East, North Africa and Islamic Spain*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012, 576 p.

182 euros /ISBN 9789004212466

- 1 M. Greenhalgh has again written an interesting book about the reception and final fate of the ancient architecture during the Middle Ages. It puts an end to a series of valuable and useful books (*The Survival of Roman Antiquities*, 1989 ; *Islam and Marble*, 2005 ; *Marble Past, Monumental Present*, 2009) in which he had explored the role of antiquities and ancient marble in the Mediterranean, comparing and contrasting how ancient buildings and its material (marble in particular) were dismantled, destroyed, recycled or ignored over nearly ten centuries in western Christendom, Byzantium and Islam.
- 2 Many of the evidences and arguments stresses in this new book repeat or continue previous ones, but in this case the author goes further and takes a widely view, adding the descriptions and references to the ancient buildings of late centuries travellers and focusing on regions as Greece, Turkey and Medieval Islam where nowadays it is possible to find more classical ruins. This remarkable broad survey, both chronological and geographical, is covered in considerable detail. Proof of this is the impressive bibliography collected (p. 425-495, divided by region or monuments) and the references to the traveller's works at the end of each chapter.

- 3 As M. Greenhalgh explains at the beginning, the aim of the book is to offer a coherent account of how the classical landscape was changed. Earthquakes or transformations in the seashore can explain the loss of ancient architecture, but the main is of course due to human actions. There is a relation between growing towns and diminishing antiquities or between the quality and luxury of the material and how quickly it disappears. Statues and white marble were easily sent to the kilns to be transformed in mortar, iron and lead were hunted in temples and palaces, and columns and capitals were selected to be reused in mosques. Indeed, it could be added more examples, some of them very relevant and surprisingly not considered by Greenhalgh, as the fabulous collection of ancient marble sarcophagus re-used in the Umayyad Palace of Madinat al-Zahra, near Córdoba (Greenhalgh also forgets remarkable articles such as A. Caiozzo « Images des vestiges préislamiques de l'Ifrîqiya chez les géographes arabes », in *Anabases*, 2009, 9. p. 127-145). In any case, references to Alexandria, Damascus, Baalbek, Kairouan or Mérida appear along the chapters, each one dedicated to a specific topic : Roads and Ports (chap. 3), Fountains and Waterways (chap. 4), Tombs (chap. 5), Palaces and Villas (chap. 6), Inscriptions (chap. 7), Quarries (chap. 8) or Temples (chap. 9).
- 4 One of the main conclusions of his work states that, until XIX and XX centuries it had been a landscape with plentiful ancient building : « It was Westerners who were responsible for the degradation of large quantities of antiquities [...] Irony of ironies, monuments left to the tender mercies of "savages" and "barbarians" stood largely intact until Western civilization waded in, bribing, destroying and carrying off antiquities » (p. 313).
- 5 As he rightly points out, the case of the French invasion of Algeria is a very explicit example. Chapters 13 and 14 are dedicated to these periods and the « predatory extraction » of antiquities by westerners and travellers.
- 6 The great number of buildings of the Islamic world that he discusses is not only interesting in its own right, it also points out new lines of arguments that consider how the ruins were conceived by Muslims or why they selected and re-used that material. He merely states that Muslims rulers were interested in classical antiquities, just like Christians ones. He considers rightly that the re-used marble material had a purely pragmatic and not ideological charge and he accepts « triumphalism » or other messages in a few cases, like the impressive collections of relief and statues disposed in Turkey, in the walls of Konya. Chapter 10 is precisely dedicated to these aspects. M. Greenhalgh shows how antiquities were related to treasures, popular beliefs and superstitions with figures as Salomon. Even, it is worth pursuing his argument, taking into account other aspects such as the collections of sarcophagi in Madinat al-Zahra, restoration of aqueducts in Córdoba and interesting pre-Islamic notices about ancient history and ruins of Al-Andalus or Egypt to which Muslims historians gave more attention than what we could expect by reading Greenhalgh's work.
- 7 Along the chapters, he discusses a great number of buildings (theatres, aqueducts, city walls, statues, palaces and mosques). Therefore scholars of History, Archaeology or Art should take into account this new work. Unfortunately, there are some aspects that deserve remarks. For example, there is not a map or a list of dates and therefore, geographical and chronological changes can be difficult to follow (three index - subjects, sites and people - solve only partly this difficulty). Text boxes with commentaries and excursions appear in many pages and may disturb a continuous reading. Finally, there is no previous study about the travellers mentioned and the

differences between them are clearly very important. Al-Masudi or Ibn Hawqal are Muslims of the x century and their contexts and work's purposes differ in weight and value from western travellers of the xviii and xix centuries. On the veracity of the information that authors provide us, he only mentions briefly the problems found and prefer to « keep interpretation in the text to a reasonable minimum » (p. xxiii). All these remarks may see the book as « a catalogue inter-weaved with a running commentary » as Greenhalgh states himself (p. xxiv). Nevertheless, these problems are just the common difficulties when assembling this wealth of information. Greenhagh's work deserves to be widely read and discussed. It shows the great success that reception studies are getting. *Roma quanta fuit, ipsa ruina docet*, reminds he us in his concluding lines.

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