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Martial, Statius, and the Poetics of Marble

Statius' *Silvae* 2.2 and Martial's *Epigrams* 6.42 & 9.75 share "catalogs" of marbles that adorn various Roman edifices. This paper examines the role of these "catalogs" in these poems. Drawing upon the work of Connors ("Imperial Space and Time: The literature of leisure" in *Literature in the Roman World*) and Hinds ("Cinna, Statius, and 'Immanent Literary History' in the Cultural Economy" in *L'histoire littÉraire immanente dans la poÈsie latine*) on literary representations of geographic spoils, I consider the dynamics through which the periphery of the empire was incorporated within Roman Italy and Rome itself in both the buildings and poetry of the period.

In an imperial context that limited access to traditional prestige, luxury goods from distant cultures offered *ersatz* claims to power. Marble was a luxury item that especially evoked power. Indeed, Pliny the Elder states that under Nero, marble replaced painting as a means of decorating walls. Moreover, Pliny records specific moments in Roman history when various marbles were brought back to Rome by conquering Republican military leaders. Pliny thus marks the correlation between marble and power.

Epigram 9.75 mocks Tucca's attempt to impress through the exotic marbles in his bath because he fails to provide enough wood for heated water. Tucca, then, is no powerful figure. Martial's depiction of Etruscus in 6.42, however, is more interesting. Etruscus imports marbles from distant lands to display prestige pieces. His marbles do evoke power and authority. At the same time, however, Etruscus' imports inversely recall Martial's claims that his epigrams go out into the world and conquer. But there is a difference between Etruscus' baths and Martial's poem. *Epigram* 8.3 and 10.2 illustrate that while marbles and monuments will eventually lie in ruins, Martial's epigrams will flourish. The epigrammatist thus assigns lasting power to his tiny poems.

Silvae 2.2 consistently indicates that the construction of Pollius' villa was an act of conquering and that the marbles in it represent *spolia*. Pollius' victory is presented in a Hellenized atmosphere that suggests that through his absorption of Greece's cultural heritage, Pollius understood how to live as well as to conquer and rule (Zanker, *Pompeii*, p.19). Statius' use of the Greek east to underscore Pollius' "victory" mirrors the start of the poem where Statius informs us that he stopped at Pollius' during his return from the Greek Games held at Naples, games at which he had earlier achieved an impressive victory. Like Pollius, Statius uses the Greek world as a backdrop to underscore a victory.

The Èlites whom Statius and Martial praise seek power through their luxury goods that merge traditional Roman values (power) with untraditional ones (luxury). However, while Statius and Martial establish the varying degrees of power and control of men like Etruscus and Pollius, each poet also exalts his own poetic accomplishments by using other peoples and lands to construct his own authority.