“Petit Granit”: a Belgian limestone used in heritage, construction and sculpture.

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“Petit Granit” is a Lower Carboniferous (Tournaisian) grey-bluish crinoidal limestone that becomes shiny black when polished. The rock is known under several other names like Pierre Bleue (Blue Stone), but at the same time it should not be confused with other natural stones having a similar commercial name (e.g. Chinese Bluestone or Irish Bluestone) which are superficially similar limestones. It consists of around 96% microcrystalline calcite and a high proportion of fossils, mainly crinoids. In addition some dolomite, quartz, pyrite, marcasite and fluorite are present. Around fifteen quarries are active these days, employing almost one thousand people and thus is an important part of the natural stone economy in Belgium. “Petit Granit” has an Appellation d’Origine Locale (Local Appellation of Origin) designation since 1999. It has been extracted in several regions of South Belgium since the Middle Ages. In a sense the name is misleading because it is not an igneous rock and therefore not a true granite, but it derives from the profusion of numerous white fossil fragments in a dark carbonaceous matrix which look similar to feldspar crystals in a granitic background. The stone characterizes many façades of the urban architecture of Brussels and other Belgian cities, and since the second half of the 19th century it has been used in various countries in Europe and overseas. Its high density and uniformity mean that it takes an excellent polish and thus has versatile use as a dimension stone. “Petit Granit” has also been used widely in sculpture and architecture by several well known artists (e.g. Mateo Hernández, Michel Smolders, Tom Blatt, Elise Delbrassinne, Benoît Luyckx, Santiago Calatrava, among others). However, deterioration has been observed when it has been used for exterior purposes, and appropriate measures need to be taken to prevent this. This stone can be considered as Global Heritage Stone Resource in Europe, for both its use in construction and for artistic purposes.

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