

## **“Belgian black and red marbles” as potential candidates for Global Heritage Stone Resource**

Francis Tourneur (2) and Dolores Pereira (1)

(2) (francis.tourneur@pierresetmarbres.be), (1) mdp@usal.es

The Paleozoic substrate of South Belgium is rich in compact limestones, able to take a good polished finishing and to be used as “marbles”. Among them, the black and red varieties were and still are of special importance, intensively exploited and largely exported, almost worldwide. The pure black marbles were extracted mostly from Frasnian (Upper Devonian) and Viséan (Lower Carboniferous) strata, in many localities like Namur, Dinant, Theux and Basècles. Today only the Frasnian variety is still exploited in a spectacular underground quarry in Golzinne, close to the town of Gembloux. These black marbles, already known in Antiquity, were exported since the Middle Age, first in Western Europe, then, from the 19th c., at a larger scale, almost worldwide. Among their most frequent uses figured of course funeral objects, like the epitaph of the Pope Adrian the 1st, offered by Charlemagne and preserved in the St-Pieter basilica in Rom. Another famous reference is the tombs of the Dukes of Burgundy in Dijon, with white crystalline marble and alabaster. The red marbles are limestones from reefal origin, forming mudmounds more or less rich in fossils of Late Frasnian (Late Devonian) age. They show a strong variability in colors, from dark red to light pinkish grey, and in texture, with many sedimentary structures and/or tectonic veins. The outcrops are non-stratified, which allows extraction of large blocks, for example for high columns. Known in the Roman time, they were intensively exploited since at least the 16th c. During the 19th and beginning of 20th c., more than hundred quarries were active in South Belgium, from Rance at West to Chaudfontaine at East, around Philippeville and Rochefort. They were largely used both in civil and religious buildings, mostly for inside decoration, for examples as altars or fireplaces. Among the most symbolic places, the Belgian red marbles were massively employed in Versailles, like in the famous “Galerie des Glaces”. But many examples of historical buildings are known around the world, for examples the decoration of the harem of Topkapi in Istanbul in the 19th c. or in the floors of the St-Pieter basilica in Rom. Today, only one quarry is active, in Vodelée, a village close to Philippeville but all the varieties of colors and textures can be obtained from this unique source. Both referred materials present the characteristics needed to be candidates to the Global Heritage Stone Resource designation.