

# **The Materiality of the Trace<sup>1</sup>**

## **Upcycled Marble and the Memorial Functions of Athenian Fortification Walls**

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Among the principal characteristics of stone is its relative durability as a material, and by extension its suitability for reuse. This is especially true for marble, which was widely regarded as a high-status material for architecture, sculpture, and monuments in Greco-Roman antiquity. Due in part to this durability and desirability, the choice to reuse marble was sometimes driven by motivations far beyond ordinary pragmatism and thriftiness. Such instances of reuse can usefully be seen as "upcycling." Whereas "recycling" connotes a return to the essential material, "upcycling" refers more specifically to an act of reuse that shows attention to both the materiality and the previous biography of the object being reused. This meaningful reuse could affect the social memory of a community--collectively held ideas about events, persons, monuments, etc.--in a myriad of ways.

In ancient Athens, so rich in monuments and history, the upcycling of marble with the intention to influence social memory can be seen in cases as diverse as re-inscribing statue bases on the Acropolis and re-locating entire temples into the Agora. In this paper, I compare two complementary examples of the reuse of marble in Athens: the North Acropolis wall (470s BCE) and the Post-Herulian wall (270s CE). In both cases--over seven centuries apart--the Athenians used material thrown down by attacking enemies to construct defensive fortifications. The careful arrangement of the reused marble in the outer faces of both walls indicates that they were not desperate measures, but rather were thoughtfully imbued with memorial significance. By enhancing the visibility of the elements reused in the wall and highlighting their prior functions, the Athenians encouraged collective remembrance of the traumatic attacks and the subsequent recovery and revival of their city and its culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Nora, a prime instigator of the burgeoning field of memory studies, conceived memory as relying on "the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image." (1989, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26:7-24, at 13.) Though he was concerned specifically with modern memory in the late 20th century, Nora's conceptualization applies equally well to the workings and practices of memory in classical antiquity.