

When Faustino Corsi's collection was taken out of its storage cabinet for imaging in 1998, it was discovered that eighty samples had a black number painted on the reverse. Corsi used agents in towns and cities to obtain his 'modern' stones, and this was a batch of samples supplied by one such agent. A bit of detective work has revealed that he gave Corsi full details of where the stones were quarried.

More about Corsi's marbles from Verona

Yet more detective work was needed to find those places on a modern map. Some names had changed, some had typographic errors, and others seem to be spelt phonetically. It seems that writing a place name in a consistent way did not matter so much in Corsi's time. The town of Malcesine on the coast of Lake Garda, a source of three specimens, illustrates this point. It is printed 'Malfesine', 'Malsosina', and 'Malsesine' for different specimens in Corsi's *Catalogo ragionato*.

It turns out that nearly all the 'black number' specimens are from towns, villages and settlements in the Val Pantena, Valpolicella, the Lessini Hills and the area east of Lake Garda, where many small quarries cut into the valleys and hillsides just north of Verona. They are mainly limestones of the Scaglia Rossa and Rosso Ammonitico Formations, deposited from Jurassic to Tertiary times at the bottom of the ancient Tethys Ocean. These colourful rocks, termed 'marble' in the trade, were employed extensively in vernacular architecture and were polished for ornamental purposes. An industry that was operating in ancient Roman times still exports Verona stones around the world today.



The back of a specimen with black painted number '70' and Corsi's paper label '82.16'.

Errors and confusion...

Curiously, Corsi writes in his catalogue that these marbles came from the Euganean Hills. He used the terms *colli Euganei* (Euganean Hills) and *Veronese* (of Verona) interchangeably in his descriptions of the stones. In fact none of the stones could have come from the Euganean Hills, where the rocks are mainly of volcanic origin. It seems that Corsi genuinely did not know the geography of the Venetian state, which

Examples of decorative stones from the province of Verona in *Faustino Corsi's* collection, from top to bottom:

giallo di Verona (giallo reale); corso gentile; rosa corallo; rosso di Verona; lumachella di San Vitale; lumachella di Verona (astracane di Verona). For more information about these stones, see the *Corsi collection website*.

in his time was part of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy, and then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, only becoming part of modern 'Italy' in 1866.

... and a bit more detective work

Three of the samples with black numbers are listed by Corsi as coming from places outside the province of Verona. However, two closely match other Verona specimens in the collection indicating that Corsi had made a mistake in his catalogue. The third is probably also from Verona. Corsi wrote his catalogue only after he had collected the first 900 specimens, and so he had ample opportunity to muddle up labels before all his specimens were numbered.

More puzzling are two ancient Roman stones that have black painted numbers, a *fior di Persico* from Greece and a *breccia traccagnina* from an unknown source. Perhaps that agent, trying to find as many different stones as possible, picked up blocks derived from a Roman excavation in the Verona area thinking they were rather unusual local stones.



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