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“Giallo Siena” marble (Italy): a nomination for “Global Heritage Stone Resource”

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The Montagnola Senese (Sienese Hills), a series of low hills, not exceeding 600 m a.s.l., located near Siena, Tuscany Region, Central Italy, has been an important quarrying site over the centuries. In this area the precious, and internationally renowned, Giallo Siena (yellow marble from Siena), is extracted, together with small amounts of other quite rare marbles, such as Ivory Siena, Yellow Nuvolato Etrusco and Broccatello.

The Montagnola Senese marbles are carbonate rocks, originally marine limestones formed in a carbonate platform in the early Jurassic, and subsequently metamorphosed during the genesis of the Apennines chain.

Of particular importance is the genesis of the yellow color, to be put into relation to the diffused and pervasive presence of goethite, and to the complex pre-, sin- and post-metamorphic processes. Such color completely dominates the aspect, the classification into distinct commercial varieties, and, as a consequence, the economic values related to each of them.

Probably quarried since Imperial Roman Age, the importance of the Giallo Siena significantly grew during the Middle Ages (1225 – 1327), when the quarrying activities were stimulated by the necessity of ornamental materials for the construction of Siena cathedral. Since then, the demand of this marble has continuously grown. Its dissemination had another impressive growth during the 17th and 18th centuries, and also later, thanks to the large uses and applications in noble palaces, courts, cathedrals and, in general, in every refined and prestigious environment.

Nowadays, the Giallo Siena, whose intrinsic aesthetic, textural and chromatic characteristics are not easily repeatable, has become a sort of worldwide reference in the chromatic category of the yellow marbles. This is why we find it almost everywhere, irrespective of the geography, the cultural landmarks, or the local cultural and architectural styles.

In this sense, Giallo Siena is one of the marbles which, comparing the exiguity of its extraction figures - its production is very limited, highly selected, and takes place only in three small quarries - has probably the broadest worldwide geographical distribution with respect to many other dimension stones.

For its history, the worldwide distribution, the role played as a worldwide reference dimension stone within a specific chromatic category, and also for the great importance in the local productive, social and cultural aspects, the Giallo Siena marble is proposed for the nomination as *“Global Heritage Stone Resource”*.

