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## The significance of Macael region (SE of Spain) in the use of the natural stone in Spain

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The quarrying activity in the Macael region (SE of Spain) is probably one of the most important at national level, both at present and in the past. The first evidences of the use of the Macael marble date back to 4000 years ago. Since then, there was a steady production of raw material used for ornamental elements, highlighting the mining activity of civilizations such as the Phoenicians, Romans and Arabs. Planned and methodical quarrying in the region began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, being practically uninterrupted since then.

Some of the best known examples of marble from Macael used in Spain can be observed in the Roman amphitheatre in Mérida (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.), the city of Itálica in Seville (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), the Mosque of Córdoba (8<sup>th</sup> century), the Medina-Azahara palace in Córdoba (10<sup>th</sup> century), the Lions Court in the Alhambra palace (14<sup>th</sup> century), El Escorial monastery (16<sup>th</sup> century) and the Royal Palace in Madrid (18<sup>th</sup> century), apart from many other recent buildings all over the world.

While the most important material according to its historical use is the variety known as *Blanco Macael* (and varieties thereof), there are other types of Macael marble, although they have less historical importance. Apart from its use in cultural heritage, it also has great importance in today's commercial activity in the region. These are called *Amarillo Macael* (and its varieties), *Gris Macael*, and *Anasol*. Based on their mineralogy, all these marbles are grouped in calcitic (*Blanco Macael*, *Gris Macael* and *Anasol*) or dolomitic (*Amarillo Macael*). Along with these, serpentinite (*Verde Macael* or *Verde Almería*) is also extracted in the region for ornamental purposes.

The relevance in the past and in the present of this region is more than proven, because the materials extracted in Macael region enjoy an international reputation. The future significance goes through the development of policies for trade expansion and enhancement of a product of proven quality, which is estimated with vital importance, the designation of the region of Marble of Macael as *Global Heritage Stone Province*. This designation would also contribute to the conservation of the most historic quarries from the point of view of mining heritage because of the rich mining history of the whole region and its mining landscapes.

