



Mineralogy and Lithology. History of the collections: the collectors

Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti

The mineralogical collection of Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti (upon his death inherited by his son Ottaviano) represents a classic example of an eighteenth-century naturalistic collection. The considerable number of specimens is fully described in the 12 manuscript catalogue volumes of great historical and scientific interest, as they testify to the state of sciences (and their progress) in a period of great historical changes.

From an early age, Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti began collecting naturalistic finds, minerals, rocks, plants, animals, following the example of his master P. A. Micheli, whose collection he purchased after his death. The mineralogical collection consists of about 7500 specimens, among which are --curiosities for us, but perhaps normal in an eighteenth-century collection -- some samples that today would not find a place in a naturalistic collection, such as an Etruscan head coming from a cinerary urn from Volterra (inserted as Tiburtinus) or a ceramic pipe. The provenance is mainly Tuscan or at least Italian, with a few specimens donated to Targioni by foreign correspondents. The 12 volumes of the catalogue, compiled on the occasion of the publication of the second edition of the "Relazioni d'alcuni viaggi fatti in diverse parti della Toscana" (Reports of some journeys made in different parts of Tuscany), provide much information on the dense network of relationships that Targioni kept with naturalists, scientists, scholars and high-profile personalities, who passing through Florence never failed to visit the Targioni Museum, housed in the family home. Each specimen is described in detail, setting it perfectly in the place of retrieval, making assumptions about its genesis and indicating who supplied it and when.

In the second half of the 1700s there was still no universally accepted classification and each scientist had his own criterion, sometimes created by modifying systems designed by others; Targioni was inspired by the classification of Wallerius with the Latin nomenclature, expanding it to obtain 121 different classes. After the death of Giovanni Targioni, the collection was inherited by his son Ottaviano, who increased it and rearranged it, according to the most recent criteria and made numerous tables of drawings of some specimens. For the mineralogical part, Ottaviano's interventions were rather heavy and, above all, unfinished. Thus, we find some specimens with different attributions, due to both father and son. Of particular interest is a fragment of "soldanite", meteorite which fell in the Sieneese in 1794 and donated by Father A. Soldani added by Ottaviano to the collection.



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After Ottaviano's death, the essentially mineralogical part of the collection was sold by the heirs to Bettino Ricasoli, who gave to the Museum in 1838. For many years the collection was exhibited at the Museum of the History of Sciences in Florence (now Museo Galileo), from to which it returned together with the catalogues; a transcription of the 12 volumes was made and is now visible online on the Museo Galileo website.