



Mineralogy and Lithology. History of the collections: the collectors

Déodat de Dolomieu

The role played by the Museum within the European scientific panorama, since the first years of its foundation, is highlighted by the presence among its numerous Italian and foreign visitors, of prominent scientific personalities who maintained scientific and exchange contacts over time with the structure.

Among these characters, Déodat de Dolomieu, a great naturalist with an adventurous life and discoverer of the limestone rock widespread in the homonymous alpine region, which he took the name of "dolomite". During his many trips to Italy, Dolomieu did not miss the opportunity to stop in Florence, frequently attending the Museum from as early as 1784. During his visits he had the opportunity to admire the collections on display, praising the rich mineralogical section, and entertaining scientific exchanges and friendships, for example with the deputy director G. Fabbroni. The "Catalogue des objets contenus dans la cassette lavorée A Monsieur Fontana pour le Cabinet d'Histoire Naturelle de S.A.R. par le Commeur Dolomieu" (the catalogue of the objects contained in the carved box to M. Fontana for the Cabinet of Natural History of HRH from Commander Dolomieu), included in the manuscripts belonging to the Museum, testify his contacts with the Florentine Institution together with the exchange of mineral specimen. This involved the shipment of a number of specimens, 38 samples, significant not only for the collector figure, but also because their description denotes a modern scientific vision because it is very detailed in the origin. These are native sulfur, heavy spar (or baryte), Sicilian alum and bituminous stone from the mines of S. Cataldo, Capo d'Arso, Sciacca, Taormina, the result of the journey made in 1781 across Sicily, but also various manganese minerals from the mine of Sem, in the county of Foix in the French Pyrenees. After more than two hundred years, thanks to the study of the eighteenth-century catalogs and historical documents, it was possible to identify, among the Museum collection; some of these samples, collected by the famous geologist both during his travels in France (siderites and axinites), and in Sicily in 1781 (alunogen). The museum reciprocates with its specimens: in October 1788, in fact, the same Dolomieu, who was in Florence, chose 19 natural productions, many of which were rocks. Among the samples chosen by the Frenchman, some were related to his studies, such as a specimen from Tyrol or a piece of Siberian granite that served to build the base of the equestrian statue of Peter the Great (a similar fragment is still preserved in the Museum).