



Mineralogy and Lithology. History of the collections: the collectors

Raffaello Foresi

The Foresi collection of minerals from the Island of Elba exemplifies the island's mineralogical richness, especially when it comes to iron minerals, not to mention the pegmatitic mineralizations, splendidly testified by the "four Evangelists".

Of the original over 5000 specimens that made up the collection according to the archival documents, only 2553 can be found today in the Elban collection. These are mainly samples of hematite (over 350), pyrite (250), "limonite" (today goethite), represented by more than 150 specimens, together with numerous orthoclases (320), calcites (250), tourmalines (200). Particularly noteworthy is the large block of ilvaite (whose name derives from Ilva, the Latin name for Elba), perhaps the largest sample extracted in Torre di Rio. But the most impactful specimens are four huge portions of geode studded with tourmaline, quartz, orthoclase, stilbite crystals, with cavities containing aggregates of pollucite, a rare cesium mineral. During his visit to the Foresi Museum of Portoferraio, a friar very keen on Mineralogy was so amazed by what he saw that he baptized them "Four Evangelists". Smaller, but truly splendid, are the specimens of iron minerals, such as the oligist hematite with its shiny crystals or the micaceous hematite in the thinnest sheets, together with the colorful specimens of iridescent limonite, characteristic of the Elban environment.

The "Foresi Museum" was inaugurated in Portoferraio in 1873. It collected minerals, fossils, archaeological finds, passionately sought by R. Foresi, one of the most prominent characters of the 19th century Elba island. With the collaboration of local quarrymen, among whom L. Celleri, Foresi put together a collection that reached a remarkable fame even outside the island, becoming a destination for Italian and foreign visitors. After Foresi's death in 1876, the heirs decided to sell the collection and negotiations began with the Museum of Florence, in which G. Roster was also involved. The purchase was made the following year, when the numerous crates containing the Elban material arrived via Livorno. Unfortunately, there are only schematic lists of the original collection, without descriptions, nor details of locations and methods of collection. Indeed, Roster's intervention was necessary to attribute the location to certain specimens.

From the arrival of the collection to the Museum in 1877 to 1915, numerous studies were carried out on the combinations of crystallographic forms and optical and chemical characterizations of some specimens of the Elban collection by mineralogists such as E. Artini, U. Panichi, E. Grill and P. Comucci.



**SISTEMA MUSEALE
DI ATENEO**
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI
STUDI DI FIRENZE

Historical research has been carried out in recent times, retrieving in the archives of the Museum and University documents and letters relating to the acquisition of the collection.