

Documentation and usage of lithological samples: a possible retrieval

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Within the framework of the diverse institutional aims, already assigned to the ex-National Geological Service by DPR (Decree of the President of the Republic) 306/87, the acquisition of basic documentation and geological information constitutes a matter of primary importance for a public service that, in the field, places itself as a reference point in the study of national territory, aiming at a better utilisation of public works and the protection of the environment.

The projects started in the past on the cataloguing and inventorying of major collections and museum collections, and recently finished, allow a step forward in the retrieval of documental data and its full usage in a cultural sphere as well. It is particularly desirable, to not only preserve the geological patrimony, but to also contribute to an effective retrieval of the learning of the materials. Moreover, the participation of the National Geological Service (now merged into APAT) in recently concluded exhibitions and displays, such as the one in Trajan's Forum (1), has contributed, not only to the best use of the pieces, in extremely evocative exhibitions, of considerable culture interest, but has also registered the progress of scientific studies, which have been particularly significant in the

last twenty years. In such a way, the collections of "ancient marbles" (2), have won a place in the foreground, not only for the dimensions and variety of individual samples represented, but above all for their artistic and archaeometric interest notably enriched by historical studies and scientific research still in progress (3).

Nevertheless, the lithological collections of marbles n.p. of the provinces created by the formation of the Kingdom of Italy (fig. 1a) hold no less importance, and have provided materials, above all decorative stones, originating from different quarries, opened or already active at the end of the nineteenth century.

The attention given to these latter collections is motivated by the need to recover the actual materials which, due to particular circumstances and a lack of interest on the part of researchers, in the past, had not been adequately catalogued or conserved (4). It is also important to aim at overcoming simple museum operations, leaving aside the role assumed by documentation, in the area of restoration and conservation, that cannot be separated from a characterisation which pays particular attention to the nature and properties of the stones materials. Thus arises a need to formulate a kind of "pilot scheme" (fig. 2a) for the retrieval of knowledge with the aim of

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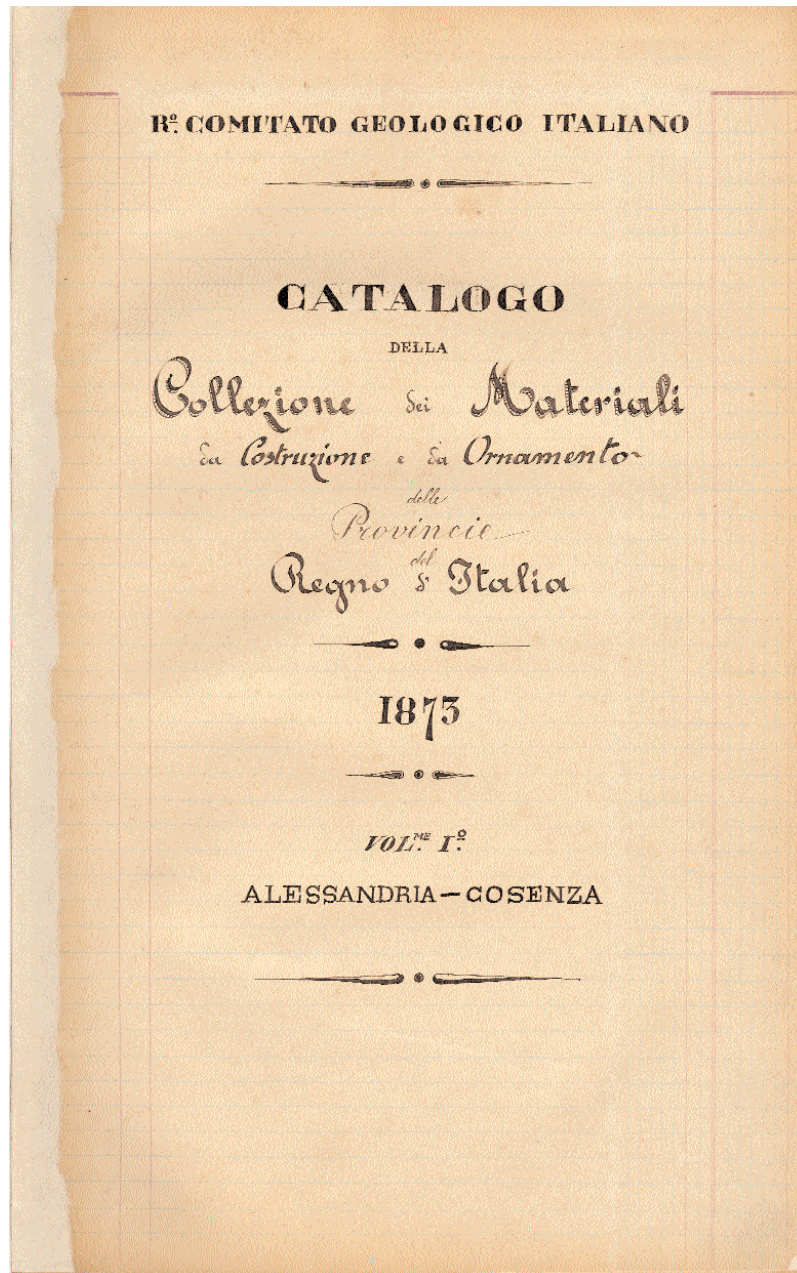


Fig. 1a – Frontispiece of the handwritten catalogue of the “Collection of Ornamental and Building Materials” of the provinces of the Kingdom of Italy (Lithomineralogical Museum, Italian Geological Service, APAT).

implementing a “logical” cataloguing, not only of the individual pieces collected and conserved in the collections, but also of all stone materials representative of the Italian lithological patrimony. Regarding this, the actual archiving phase, into a computer database, has nevertheless highlighted the limits of the records of individual museum collections, where the formal identification of the material alone can be done just for its own sake or be completely misleading if there is no recognition of problems linked to production, exploitation of the resources,

trade, workmanship, use and reuse, type of deterioration, conservation and basically to the typical aspects of the lithological and technical characteristics, as well as the historical and artistic context.

On the other hand stone materials have always accompanied the appearance of man in diverse cultures in different historical, political and economic contexts, which are so complex as to not allow a simple and effective retrieval of basic information. A possible key to “decoding” of materials used in historical-artistic

A PROJECT ON THE ORNAMENTAL AND BUILDING STONES COLLECTED IN ITALY BY THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN THE 19th CENTURY



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Fig. 2a – Proposal for an extraordinary project for the recovery of knowledge related to the Italian lithological heritage, based on the provincial configuration of the national territory derived from the Unification of Italy (32nd International Geological Congress).



Fig. 3a – A brass and enamel medal that attests to the participation of the then Italian Geological Office in the “2nd International Geological Congress” of 1881 in Bologna, the first time that the Congress was held in Italy (Lithomineralogical Museum of APAT).

manufactured articles is feasible in the sphere of decorative stones and buildings. Therefore, beyond the objective of studying and documenting individual pieces, already held and preserved in the museum collections, the project should aim to recover a wide spectrum of knowledge missing until now and frequently confined to very specialist and relatively inaccessible fields.

The main aim of the research is to recover the materials’ scientific and technical documentation, through a project able to constitute an initial cataloguing, in a kind of “*reductio ad unitatem*”, of what is currently known and has been investigated concerning ornamental and building stones mainly used in monumental architecture. On the other hand the conservation of the cultural heritage and buildings, requires an

ever larger and easier access to information about a subject as vast and complex as the whole gamut Italian lithology.

The contribution tested here, to be extended to the all the provinces, is now also presented in its actual artistic context, after more than a century since the last International Geological Congress held in Italy (fig. 3a), and constitutes only a potential outline of a more exhaustive work for the whole Florentine territory, for, as AGOSTINO DEL RICCIO observed in his manuscript on the *History of Stones*: “*There are so many different stones in the city... that it is no wonder that the temples and churches, towers, palaces, houses, loggias amaze all the foreigners*”.

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