



Digitalization of the exceptional building and decorative stones collection of the Natural History Museum Vienna

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The Natural History Museum Vienna (NHMV) owns one of the largest building, decorative, and ornamental stones collections in Europe. This important collection dates back to the 19th century and was initiated by curator Felix Karrer after a donation of the "Union-Baugesellschaft" (Karrer, 1892). It contains rock samples used for the construction of most of the famous buildings and monuments in Vienna and in the entire Austria and surrounding countries, as well as from other famous constructions and antique (Egyptian, Greek, Roman, etc.) monuments in the world. Decorative stones that were used for the inside parts of buildings as well as artificial materials, such as stucco, tiles, and building-materials like gravel, are also part of this collection.

Unfortunately, most specimens of this collection cannot be displayed at the NHMV (i.e. only 500 specimens are visible in the display Hall I) and are therefore preserved in storage rooms, and not accessible to the public.

The main objective of our project of digitalization is to share our rock collection and all treasures it contains with the large majority of interested persons, and especially to provide knowledge on these rocks for people who need this information, such as people who work in cultural, architectural, scientific, and commercial fields.

So far 4,500 samples from our collection have been processed with the support of the Open Up! project (Opening up the Natural History Heritage for Europeana). Our database contains all information available on these samples (including e.g., the name of the rock, locality, historic use, heritage utilization, etc.), high-quality digital photographs (with both top and bottom sides of the samples), and scanned labels (both "old" NHMV labels and other (original) labels attached to the samples).

We plan to achieve the full digitalization of our unique collection within the next two years and to develop a website to provide access to the content of our database (if adequate funding is obtained), – a unique way to show the public these thousands of objects, and also to facilitate the work of architects and stone/building conservation workers who need information about these (historical) stones.

This website would be a bridge between our "museum and scientific expertise" and people from the "culture, renovation, and architecture" fields.

We see our database & website as a crossover media between "geology" and the numerous fields in which rocks are used, knowing that we will provide information on where these stones were/are excavated as well as the place where they were/are used. Such type of information is also of interest for historians and archaeologists.

References:

Karrer F. 1892. Führer durch die Baumaterial-Sammlung des k. k. naturhistorischen Hofmuseums in Wien. Verlag von R. Lechner's k. u. k. Hof- und Univ.-Buchhandlung, Wien. 304p.