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From collecting to the public museum

It is difficult to determine a precise profile of collecting: it has a multifaceted character defined by its protagonists, spirit, tastes and by the society at that time. It is often involuntarily shaped by public museums.

However, the positive value which this anthropological approach brought in the past has nowadays lost its meaning, especially in the field of archaeology, where the advances made in studies have recognised the vital link between discoveries and their context of origin. State laws currently restrict the establishment of archaeological collections that are only assembled based on aesthetic criteria. These laws are enforced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and by special police operational units.

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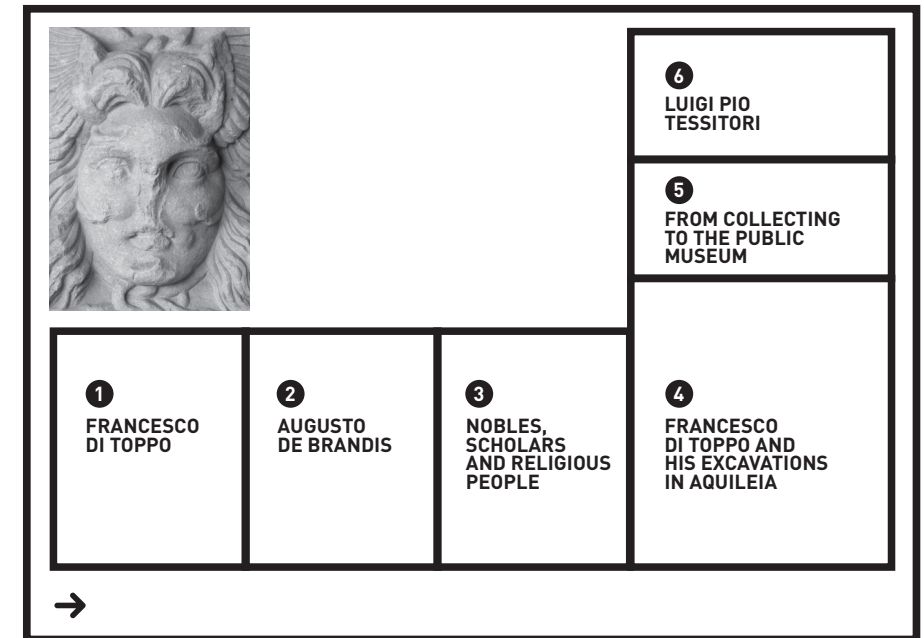
Luigi Pio Tessitori

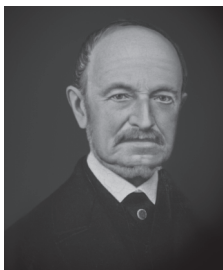
In 1914, Luigi Pio Tessitori (1887-1919) went to India at the request of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Following a brief stay in Calcutta, he moved on to Rajasthan, where he carried out historical and epigraphic research. His meeting with Sir John Marshall, the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, also allowed him to turn his scholarly attention to archaeology, dedicating his work to a wide survey of the antiquities found in Rajasthan. Towards the end of 1918, while he was exploring along the dry bed of the Ghaggar River, he made some very ancient discoveries of several seals featuring indecipherable characters that proved for the first time the presence of a prehistoric site in the region. The success of these explorations posed a problem with the custody of many of the discoveries, for which Tessitori wanted to establish an archaeological museum in Bikaner. His work was interrupted when he died on 22 November 1919.

Archaeological Museum

UDINE

On 13 May 1866, back when Friuli was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Museum of Friuli was unveiled at the Bartolini Palace so that "scholars could have a space to learn and grow and visitors could gain a better idea of Friulian civilisation". This institution brought together many different items: historical, archaeological and numismatic collections, paintings, drawings, prints and photographs, as well as nature exhibits and a library. Now as then, these halls contain discoveries from collectors who founded the initial core of the Archaeological Museum. This fascination with the past and intellectual curiosity stimulated archaeological activities among many Friulian nobles, such as Asquini, de Brandis, Frangipane, Gorgo, Gropplero, di Prampero and di Toppo, but also many illustrious scholars, such as Antonio and Vincenzo Joppi, Giovanni Marinelli, Valentino Ostermann, Jacopo and Giulio Andrea Pirona, Pietro and Carlo Someda de Marco, Alexander Wolf and many others.





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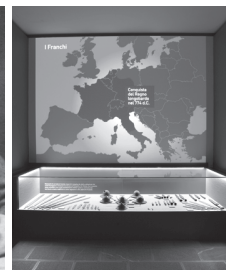
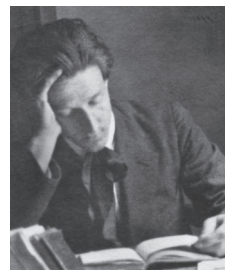
Francesco di Toppo

An eminent citizen and city administrator, a landowner and philanthropist, a leading figure of the nineteenth century enlightened bourgeoisie, Francesco di Toppo (1797-1883) also made a name for himself as an archaeological collector and an academic. He was an honorary inspector for Aquileia and Friuli's only correspondent of a highly prestigious archaeological journal: 'Notes on Archaeological Excavations' which had been circulating over the entire Kingdom of Italy since 1876. Francesco di Toppo inherited the archaeological collection gathered by his father "while farming his land in Aquileia". It was only in 1858, when he met Heller, a Prussian Marshal, that he was persuaded to take up his family's passion. Thus began his research around landholdings in Aquileia, where he discovered "tombstones, stone urns, sarcophaguses [...] and a large number of terra cotta ollas". These objects formed the main core of Udine's archaeological collections.

2

Augusto De Brandis

In 1924, Augusto de Brandis (1870-1928), a descendant from an ancient Friulian lineage, left the objects he had gathered during his years of collecting to the Museum of Udine in his will. He was a Navy official of the Kingdom of Italy and during his many journeys he landed at several of the most important centres in southern Italy, which had been colonised by the Greeks from the 8th century B.C. onwards, such as Taranto, Syracuse and Naples. These visits had an influence on the formation of his collection, which mainly consisted of archaeological discoveries from Magna Graecia that he acquired in Taranto at the end of the nineteenth century, when the trade of archaeological artefacts was not yet regulated by state laws. Collecting was one of his family's passions, which put him in regular contact with art and antiques dealers from all over Europe; he made his choices based on his own personal tastes and an ambition "to own rarer and rarer objects".



3

Nobles, scholars and religious people

Friuli's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 stimulated a fervent cultural environment which characterised the last few decades of the nineteenth century in the Friulian capital. The birth of the City Museum dates back to this period, as do a few Committees requested by Quintino Sella, the Minister of Finance, including the Archaeological Committee. The objective was to take part in the 1867 Paris International Exhibition, where Sella wanted Friuli to have a clear profile. During this period of history, many Friulian intellectuals, including nobles, scholars and religious people, selected the objects that would fittingly represent this new Italian province at the Exhibition. In the wake of this cultural excitement, the Museum of Friuli received many donations of archaeological objects with considerable aesthetic and historical value.

4

Francesco di Toppo and his excavations in Aquileia

In 1859, Francesco di Toppo began his archaeological research in Aquileia in a town called "Colombara", which had been known since the 1700s for having revealed many discoveries and was already the site of his father Niccolò's excavations. The work was entrusted to farmers, who probably worked during the winter and spring and then sent the objects they found to Villa Florio, the di Toppo's family home in Buttrio. Given the high number of sarcophaguses and funeral urns preserved in the gardens at the Buttrio Villa and then stored at the Museum of Udine, it is believed that the di Toppo's excavations involved huge burial grounds. However, the types of items acquired make it difficult to reconstruct the inventories represented by various categories of objects, which unfortunately often show generic indications of origin.