

The mineral collection of the Royal Ajuda Museum, Lisbon, Portugal

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The origin, development and vicissitudes of the mineral collection of the Museu Real da Ajuda (Royal Ajuda Museum) in Lisbon are described, as well as its relationships with the collection of gems and jewellery that belonged to the Portuguese crown, deposited in the royal Ajuda Palace. The Museum was created around 1775 for the instruction of the royal prince Dom José. Domingos Vandelli, an Italian naturalist and professor at the University of Coimbra, was in charge of its creation and development (Carvalho, 1987). Specimens of rocks and minerals were received mostly from the Portuguese colonies (mainly from Brazil), the most beautiful gems and gold nuggets being intended for the crown collection. A precious inventory was made in 1794 by Alexander R. Ferreira.

Vicissitudes in the 18th and 19th centuries affecting the Museum collections (Godinho, 1991; Almaca, 1996) included those derived from the invasions of Portugal by the Napoleonic armies (Ferreira, 1911), resulting in the transfer to France of many specimens; the removal of many sets to other Portuguese collections for scientific purposes, viz. to the Lisbon Academy of Sciences and to the Lisbon Polytechnics (Canêlhas, 1983); and, very recently, the robbery in Holland of some rich specimens from the crown collection that were in a public exhibition.

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