

Rijksmuseum van Geologie en Mineralogie 1878 - 1978

Presentation and Education

Elizabeth van der Wilk

Presentation and education form one of the basic functions of a museum. In the National Museum of Geology and Mineralogy it was realised from the beginning that it was important to have part of the collections on display. In 1878 Professor Martin, the first director of 's Rijks Museum van Geologie en Mineralogie (National Museum of Geology and Mineralogy), stated that the collection should be installed in such a way that it was easily accessible for visitors and arranged scientifically for professionals. To make this possible without damage to the objects new showcases were made in 1879 and following years. In the annual report 1880/1881 Martin wrote that the Geological National Museum was separated from the Natural History Museum and open for the public on Wednesday and Saturday afternoon, though in the small building the galleries could not be illuminated and a proof with light-reflectors was unsuccessful.

Even in those early years Martin did not restrict presentation to the exhibition within the museum, but incidentally small collections of minerals, rocks and fossils were lent for special exhibitions like the International Colonial and Export Exhibition (1884) in Amsterdam, where the museum collection was awarded a golden medal. In the same year the Minister of the Interior visited the museum, where Martin showed him the crammed galleries and told the Minister that a large number of the prehistoric animals could never be shown in the existing galleries. By purchase and donation collections and the number of exhibition objects increased and another building had to be hired for storage. Now that the galleries no longer had to be used for storage the showcases could be arranged in a different way allowing the daylight to illuminate the objects properly.

In 1890 the building of a new museum started. It was ready for use in 1892, but it took some time to get the permanent exhibition adjusted. In the meantime new purchases were done. Skeletons of *Ursus spelaeus*, *Cervus euryceros* and *Pterodactylus elegans* were bought from a special subvention. In 1894 the first visitors were welcomed in the new exhibition, where galleries were opened for Mineralogy, Palaeontology, Geology of The Netherlands and Geology of The Netherlands' Indies (present-day Indonesia, Surinam and Netherlands Antilles). On the 19th of September 1895 the Queens Emma and Wilhelmina visited together with Princess Pauline von Württemberg the new galleries, which

were officially opened for interested people from that time on. Visitors were invited to sign a reception-book and the records of this book give an impression of the history of the museum as far as public interest is concerned (Fig. 1). In the first years not more than a hundred visitors a year entered. Among them were several school classes and after some years other groups found their way to the galleries as well. The increase in visitors was used as an argument to ask for more personnel, because the collections could no longer be adequately safeguarded.

Teaching at university level became more important after 1920. Students in geology visited the museum, because it was needed for their study. Professor Escher, director from 1922 till 1955, decided that practically all funds had to be used for teaching and purchases for the museum were almost impossible. Much space was needed for students and collections but in 1933 a new wing of the building, especially designed for teaching, could be opened officially. The older part of the museum could be rebuilt and in the following years presentation was adjusted, according to modern insights and with more space in the galleries. A showcase with luminescent minerals was added. Reporters drew attention to this new part of the mineral gallery and the number of visitors grew. This was caused also by the foundation of the laboratory of the NIWOEP (Nederlands Instituut voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek van Edelstenen en Paarlen —

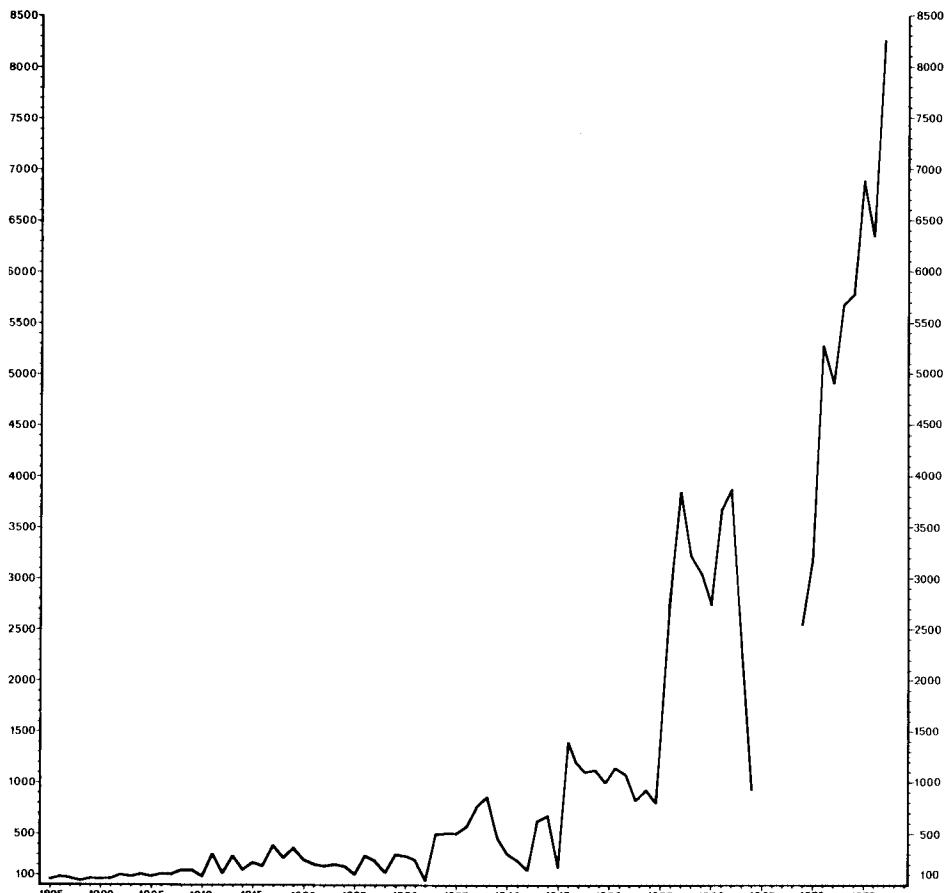


Fig. 1. The number of visitors to the National Museum of Geology and Mineralogy (1878 - 1977).

Netherlands' Institute for Scientific Research on Gems and Pearls) in 1937. Luminous minerals and gems were the most attractive objects to visitors, who could visit the museum every day since 1926. Most visitors came during summer holidays.

During the Second World War the museum was closed some time and in the cellars people could find a hiding-place during air-raids.

After the war guided tours for school classes became more popular. Galleries proved too small, especially because modern ideas about presentation needed more space for explanations, designs and photos (see de Groot, this volume, fig. 4). Renewal of the exhibitions was a constant concern and besides that, contacts were laid with musea in the region and with several national institutions. In 1955 fossils and rocks were lent for display at an international manifestation in Rotterdam (E 55), but it was 1956 when the museum got a new start with the opening of a new gallery 'History of life on earth' and a renewal of the gem gallery (Fig. 2), at which event a press conference was given by the new director, Professor van der Vlerk. There were guided tours for groups of visitors and individual visitors could guide themselves by texts on a recorder. The museum assisted in making films, a poster was distributed and other musea were helped by loans and the making of casts, while amateur geologists could have fossils and rocks identified. A year later the NIWOEP, dissolved after the 2nd World War, was founded anew. From that winter on evening lectures and films for interested people could be attended regularly. These events drew a lot of attention and the number of visitors increased enormously after 1955. Temporarily a decrease in this number was seen in the years in which the museum did not get special publicity by circulating posters.



Fig. 2. Gem gallery after renewal in 1956.

Educational services went on, for instance by lecturing for groups outside the museum, guiding excursions, a course in gemmology, and assisting in making films on geological subjects. Again more space was needed for collections and working rooms and from 1960 onwards part of the galleries were closed for this purpose. Though renewed publicity by circulation of posters and a TV-broadcast about dredging fossil bones caused a temporal growth in interest for the museum, the amount of visitors diminished in the last few years before the galleries were closed for the public on the 3rd of July 1964. Work to prepare the removal to another building, an old orphanage, started.

In the beginning of 1969, three galleries in the new museum building were opened; six galleries followed in 1970. Presentation and educational work began anew. The old orphanage was obviously not adjusted to house such an enormous weight of rocks and some galleries had to be closed within five years. At first this seemed a disadvantage, but in fact it was the start of a programme for renewal of all the permanent exhibition. Instead of the rather provisional setting of the first galleries a complete project was made to organize the permanent exhibition according to modern ideas in museum-design and adaptation to behaviour of museum visitors. This resulted in drawing up guidelines that will be followed in the course of the coming years. Starting with the purpose of presentation and education in the museum: to make geology known to all people entering the museum, the first guide line had to be: a presentation that is attractive, even for visitors who know nothing about geology. In an attractive presentation people will get interested and curious about the meaning of the galleries and their objects. In 1975 the first renewed gallery was opened. It is called 'showzaal' (show-gallery) and in this gallery exquisite minerals and beautiful crystal groups are shown. The name of the gallery is an expression of the meaning. It does not want to learn anything special, but to show how beautiful crystals and minerals can be. Amateur geologists and others, who are interested in the subject, can buy a booklet that gives more information than the simple mineral names in the showcases. The 'schatkamer' ('treasure-chamber'; Plate 1, fig. 1) was officially opened during the International Gemmological Congress in 1977. A magnificent collection of gems is shown, classified according to mineralogical principles. In a separate corner related subjects like synthetic stones and imitations are shown.

The second guideline: more information about the collection on a level that can be understood by everyone who got through the 'basis-school' (primary school for children from 6 to 12 years old) is illustrated in this gallery by means of a special arrangement of the exposed mineral groups and by simple texts explaining this arrangement. The same guidelines are followed in the galleries that were opened to the public in July 1978, 'Processen aan de oppervlakte van de aarde' ('Processes at the surface of the earth'). In these galleries demolition of rocks (weathering and erosion), transport and sedimentation are shown as a continuing story, easy to follow for people, who take the preferential direction. A diorama (Plate 1, fig. 2) gives a general view on all kinds of landscapes, and the results of erosional and depositional processes that can be seen there. Within the next few years a gallery with displays on systematic mineralogy and petrology will be opened and in the meantime a gallery that will illustrate processes in the interior of the earth will be prepared. Palaeontological galleries, still more or less provisionally framed, will follow. Though in general outline they will not be changed in the near future, presentation is as far as possible adjusted to modern ideas. Results of a museum project on the palaeontology of Tiglian

deposits near Tegelen (southern part of The Netherlands) are shown in a painted reconstruction of the landscape with its vegetation and fauna at that time (Plate 2).

A third guideline says that information must be available on different levels. Apart from an attractive presentation and an explanation within or near showcases there must be a possibility for secondary schools and visitors, who want to spend more time and energy in the galleries, to get knowledge of more basic facts, geological hypotheses and theories, and results of current research in geology. This 'second level information' will be given in leaflets, which in future will be available for each gallery separately. A 'third level information' suited for teachers in primary and secondary schools, amateur geologists and students shall be a book with chapters on different disciplines in geology, especially those with which the museum galleries are dealing. As is the case with the renewal of all galleries, it will take some years to prepare this information on all three levels.

It lasted till 1973 before evening-lectures in wintertime were given again. At first unrelated subjects were chosen and explained by different curators. In the last years a lecture cycle is presented, based on a special subject (Fig. 3). The theme used for the evening lectures is developed quite differently in the afternoons, arranged for children from primary schools. After a short introduction with some slides or with a film, the children get the opportunity for creative activities. What kind of work is done depends on the subject. It can be the simple determination of rocks; the making of a cast of an ammonite or trilobite, 'building' of a volcano in clay or making a mammoth (Fig. 4). While the children are at work, small groups go to one of the galleries, where a further explanation of the subject



Fig. 3. Evening lecture on palaeontology for a general public.

is given with the museum-objects at hand. On the occasion of the Museum's centenary children have the opportunity to make their own book on the development of life on earth in this winterprogramme. It is called 'Ontdekkingsreis door de tijd' ('Expedition through time') and consists of loose pages that can be coloured by the children (Fig. 5). After the winterprogramme the children can bring all their loose papers, arranged by themselves, to get a binding. A self-coloured strip-book with a simple text is made in that way. School classes from primary schools can apply for guided tours, but most teachers prefer a working visit of the same kind as described above. Teachers in secondary schools mostly ask for treatment of a specific subject that corresponds with their programme. An introduction and guided tours are possible, but sometimes a lecture with slides, a film, a trail (self-guiding walk with instructions), work-sheets, or a combination of some of these possibilities are a better way to reach the aim of the visit. A combination of one or more lessons in school followed by museum visits prove a good way to assimilate geological knowledge, especially because geology as such is not taught in Dutch schools and a more or less systematic handling must be introduced from the very start. Supplementary to this programme a special exhibition can be made in the school, for which the museum can make a set-up and lend the material. Depending on the subject, information- or work-sheets can be prepared to be used in combination with this exhibition.

Loans for exhibitions in other musea and other institutions are granted, just as it was already done by Martin in 1884. Normally this kind of exhibition is temporarily and aims to give a survey on geology as a whole or to give more



Fig. 4. Children at work, making a mammoth after introduction to the Ice Ages.

details on a specific subject. Within the National Museum of Geology and Mineralogy temporary exhibitions are made on certain occasions. In 1977 the centenary of Staring's death was commemorated by an exhibition in which material from his collection, correspondence and other particularities on his geological work were shown. As W. C. H. Staring was the first to make a detailed geological map of The Netherlands and all the collections he gathered are in the museum, this centenary was a good chance to show more of his work than can be done in the permanent exhibition. The temporary exhibition on the occasion of the Museum's centenary gives a view of the oldest collections and a look at the work that is done in the museum, but normally not seen by visitors; it also shows part of the collections that belonged to King William I and Queen Wilhelmina.

After a hundred years we cannot say all work is done, but in accordance with modern insights we continue to renew and adopt the presentation of and education in geology.

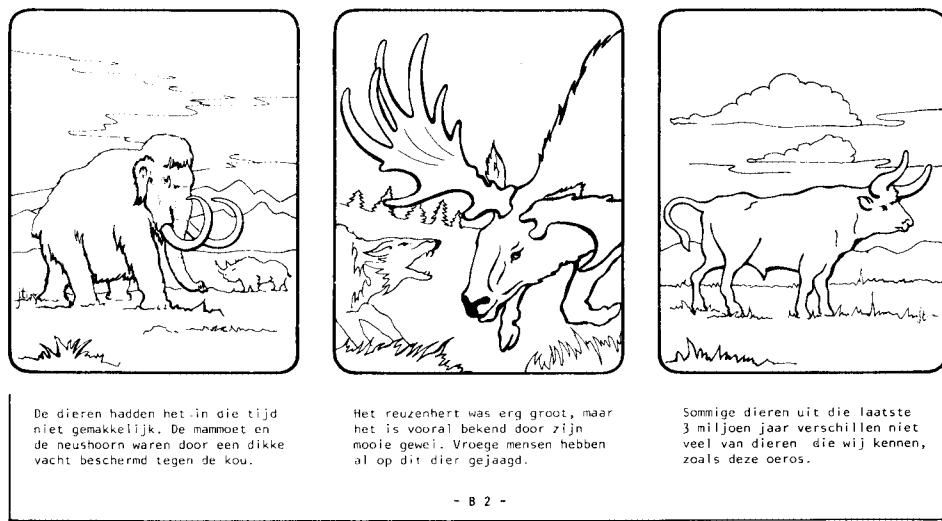


Fig. 5. One of the papers that will form the book 'Ontdekkingstreis door de tijd' ('Expedition through time').

Plate 1

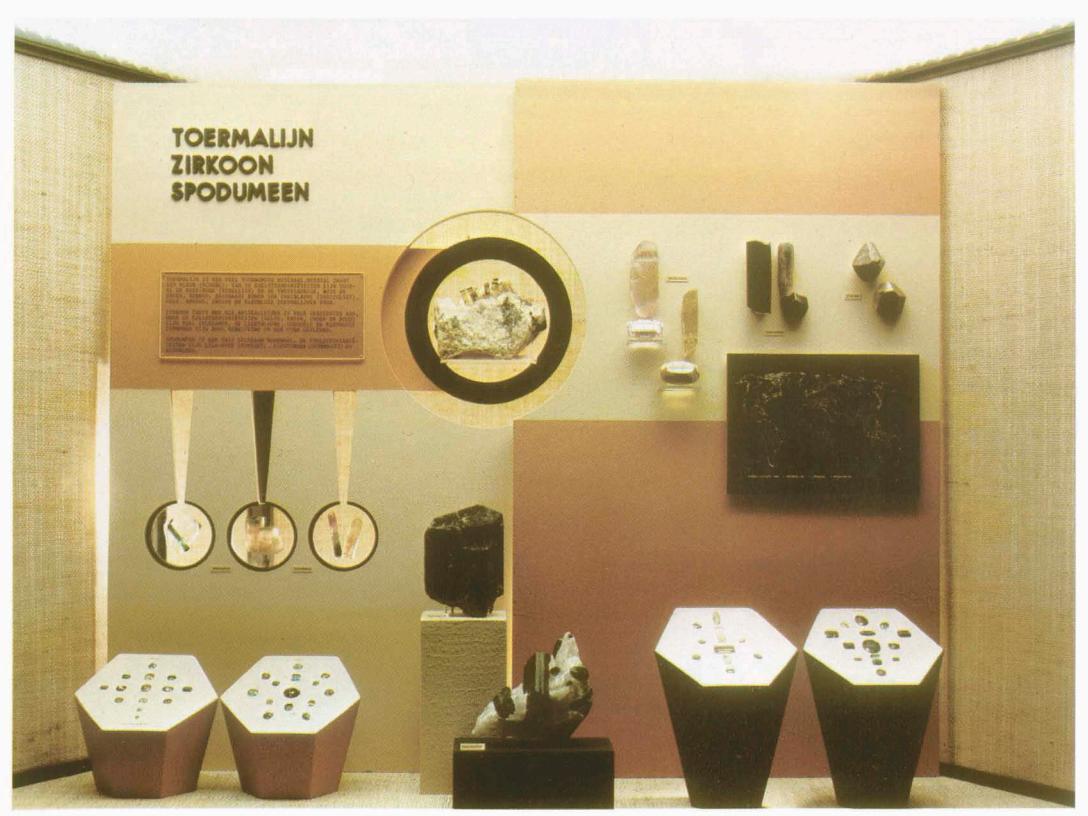


Fig. 1. Modernized exhibition: a showcase with gemstones in the 'schatkamer' ('treasure-chamber').

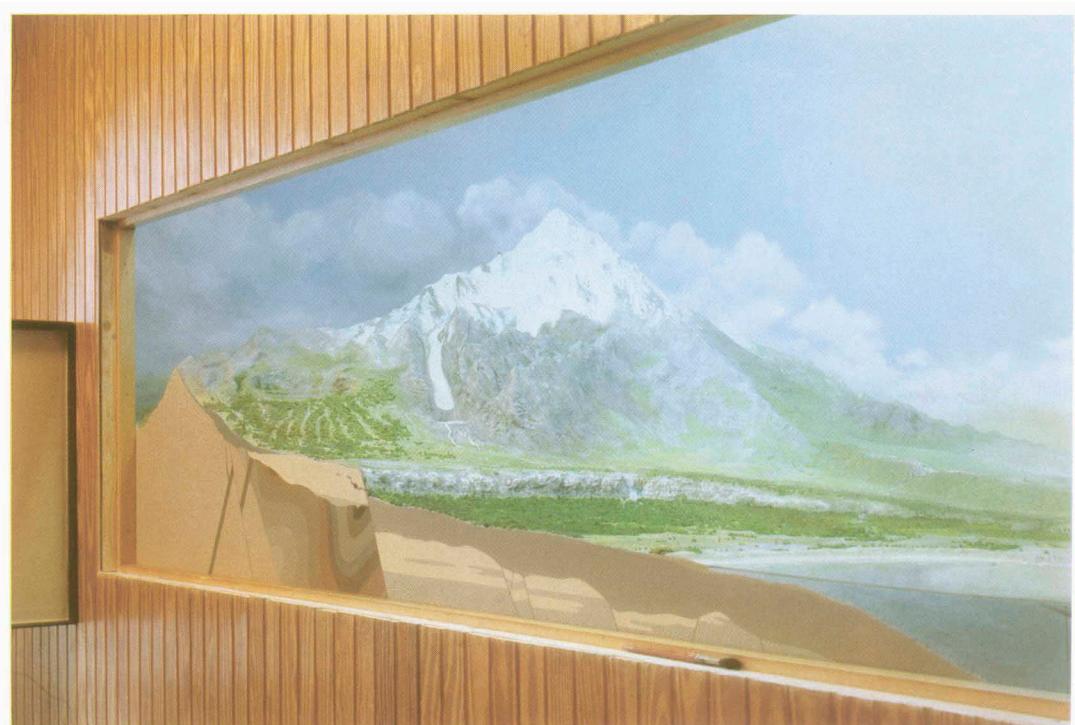
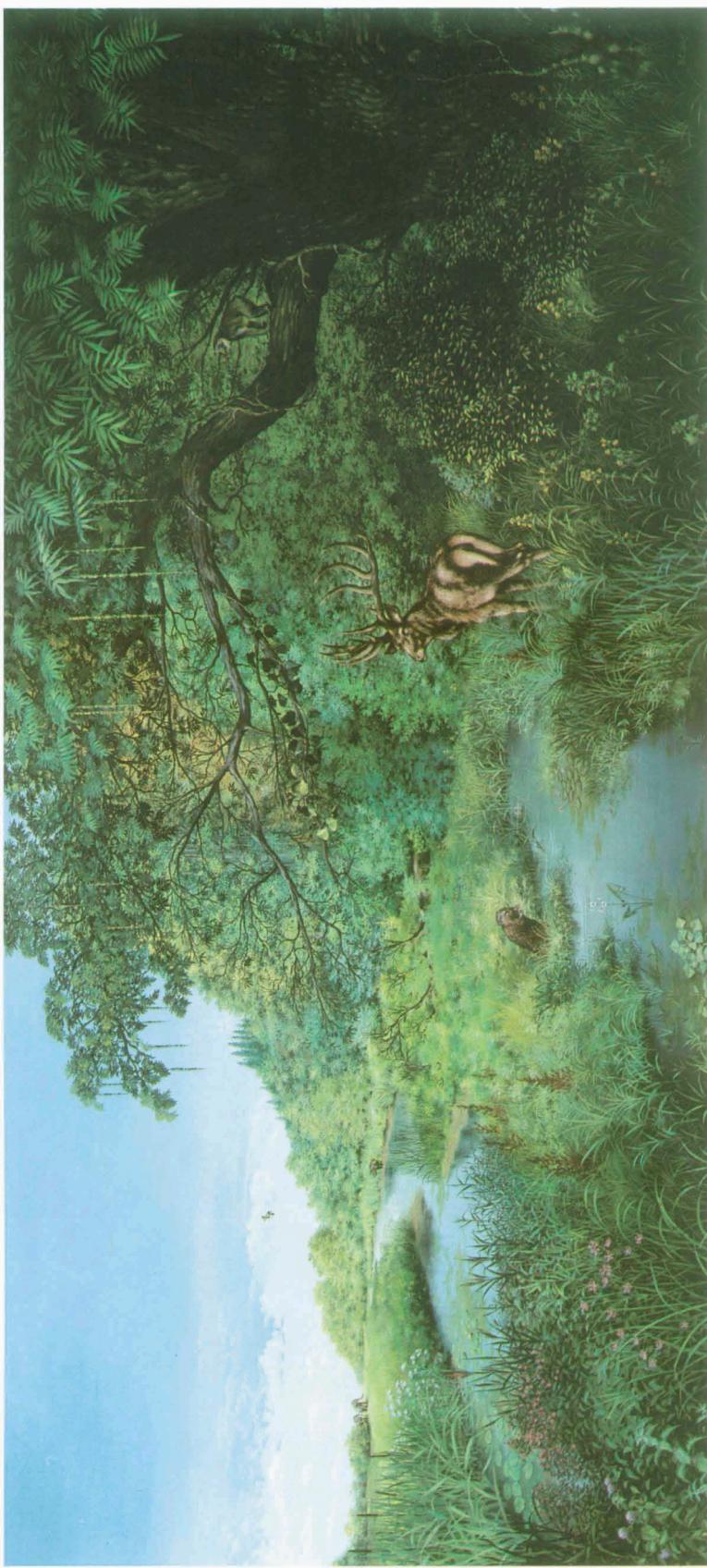


Fig. 2. Diorama designed by J. Timmers.

Plate 2



Reconstruction of a Tigilian landscape, painted by B. F. M. Collet.