



MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

*Display cabinets in Museum of Anthropology*





## HISTORY

The *Museo di Antropologia* (the Museum of Anthropology) was founded in 1881 on the initiative of Francesco De Sanctis, the Kingdom of Italy's Education Minister. It began as a series of Collections, sometimes on display but more often than not in storage, acquired through purchases or constituted by the specimens connected to the research carried out by the eminent anthropologist Giustiniano Nicolucci, the Museum's first Director. Between 1890 and 1921 the Museum became widely known thanks in part to the efforts of Abele De Blasio and Vincenzo Giuffrida Ruggeri, the latter succeeding Nicolucci as Professor of Anthropology at the University of Naples. Between the 1930s and the 1990s the Museum went through an extremely difficult period due to the University's loss of its Anthropology

Chair and, not least, the vicissitudes of the Second World War which resulted in severe damage to the premises housing the exhibits; these were saved thanks to the eminent biologist Mario Galgano, who managed to recover and store them away in packing cases. At the end of the 1990s, thanks to historical and archival investigations and the recovery of the Collections, the museum's anthropological heritage was finally housed in the exhibition spaces obtained within the ex-Jesuit *Collegio Massimo* premises marking the moment when the Museum of Anthropology fully regained its role and prestige. The exhibition space of around 180 square metres occupies two large rooms equipped with substantial display cabinets.



**Pictured:**  
Giustiniano Nicolucci (1819-1904)

The Anthropological Collection has been subdivided into Osteological, Archaeological and Ethnographic Collections. There are around 26,000 items – a physical testimony of human biological variability and evolution. The Archaeological collections documenting the Prehistorical populations of Southern Italy, Europe, West Asia, North Africa and the Americas are particularly striking. Of considerable interest are the Archaeological Pre- and Proto-Historical materials from the *Grotta delle Felci* and *Le Parate* sites in Capri and the *Grotta Nicolucci* in Sorrento, together with Giustiniano Nicolucci's collection of polished stone axes originating from various Calabrian provinces, as well as the Palaeolithic bifacials from the Venosa site in Basilicata, acquired by Vincenzo Giuffrida Ruggeri in 1914. The Human Osteological collections represent an irreplaceable biological archive. There are an estimated 3,000 items, including Nicolucci's prestigious *Cranioteca* (Skull collection); among the specimens of particular value, the *Australopithecus africanus* Taung cast, reconstructed in the form of a bust in 1925, and the cast of the cranial vault of a *Homo erectus pekinensis* found in 1936. The Museum also has Animal Osteological collections coming for the most part from pre-historic sites such as the Palaeolithic deposits of the *Grotta Romanelli* in Salento in Puglia. The 25 examples of mammalian skulls and skeletons acquired between 1928 and 1931 by the anthropologist Giocchino Leo Sera are of particular interest. The primates are represented by an orang-utan, three macaques, a capuchin monkey and two prosimians. The four South American

**Pictured:**  
Artificially deformed skull  
Pre-Incaic Era  
(Bolivia)



## COLLECTIONS





mummies present are both touching and of great scientific interest. One of these, contained in a sack of woven vegetable fibres is thought to come from the Tiwanaku area, a great ceremonial centre in the Bolivian Andes in the First Millennium AD. Of equal interest are the five heads of Egyptian mummies acquired by the Neapolitan zoologist Paolo Panceri.

The exhibits also include Ethnographic materials, such as the highly prized Maori ceremonial poles from New Zealand, the shields made of animal hide from Eastern and Equatorial Africa and the collections of objects from Palawan Island in the Philippines and from Andamane Island, a small island in the Indian Ocean. In this context, the Collection donated to Nicolucci by the eminent German archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann is of very considerable

value. It consists of stone artefacts such as hand-held tools for grinding cereals, hammers, hatchets and polishing tools found in the deepest layers of the excavations made in the archaeological site of Troy, humble objects bearing witness to everyday life in a small Anatolian-Aegean town in 3000 BC.

There is also a separate specific exhibition displaying some 120 painted plaster facial casts with African and Arabian somatic features, not only as documentation of the research carried out between 1927 and 1930 by the anthropologist and ethnologist Lidio Cipriani, but also to illustrate the historical development of scientific research.

Also of considerable interest, finally, are the casts of the victims of the pre-historic and historical volcanic eruptions of Somma-Vesuvius, found in S. Paolo Belsito and at the site of the ancient beach of Herculaneum.



*Pictured:  
Skull cast from Taung  
Australopithecus africanus  
(Johannesburg)*



- 1) *Mummy in a sack of woven vegetable fibres  
Probably from Tiwanaku  
(Bolivian Andes) 1 century a. C.*
- 2) *Quiver made of bamboo  
Palawan Island  
(Philippines)*
- 3) *Shield made of Elephant Hide with raised central boss  
(Sub-Saharan Africa)*
- 4) *Facial casts of human somatic types  
of sub-Saharan Africa*

