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Tyrolian Cultural Heritage

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Fathi Habashi offers an historical perspective from the 12th Cultural Heritage Symposium, which took place between 30 September and 4 October at the Museum of Nature, Bolzano, in Italy's South Tyrol.

The symposium was organised by Christopher Hauser of the Austrian Geological Department in Vienna in collaboration with Benno Baumgarten and Evelyn Kutatscher of the Museum of Nature. There were about 60 participants, mainly from Eastern and Western Europe, North America, Australia and Canada. Two excursions were planned during and after the symposium: one was to the Pfundererberg mine and the other to the Schneeberg mine in the heart of the Alps where silver, lead and zinc were produced. Both mines were closed down in 1985 and turned into museums.

The symposium covered a variety of subjects ranging from biographies of famous geologists and mineralogists to postage stamps showing cultural heritage in mining and metallurgy. Papers also included descriptions of archives located in different countries. There were a number of presentations of interest to iron and steel. For example:

- The Sava ironworks in Slovenia, which dates from the 16th century
- The Ravne ironworks in Koroška, in Slovenia
- The archives and iron making in Slovenia
- The historic iron ore mining in the eastern Erzgebirge in Saxony

South Tyrol is an autonomous province in northern Italy (Fig 1). It pays only 10% of its taxes to the Government of Italy and can manage its own affairs. The province has a total population of 511,750 inhabitants (2011). About 70% is of Austro-Bavarian heritage and speaks German, around 26% speaks Italian, and 4% have Ladin as their mother language. Ladin is a dialect mainly spoken in the Dolomites Mountains and is closely related to the Swiss Romansh. The name derives from Latin and is the oldest language spoken in South Tyrol.

Following the defeat of the Austrians by Napoleon in 1805, the northern part of Tyrol was ceded to the Kingdom of Bavaria. Andreas Hofer (1767-1810) was the leader of a rebellion against Napoleon's forces. He was subsequently captured and executed. Tyrol was returned to Austria by the Congress of Vienna in 1814. The Austrian Empire repressed the growing nationalist sentiment among Italians who struggled for unification. In March 1848, the city of Milan rose against

During World War I many people in Italy wanted the country to join the conflict on the side of the Triple Entente (Great Britain, France, and Russia). Italy declared war against the Central Powers on May 24, 1915. In 1918, the Italian Army occupied Tyrol and annexed the southern part of it. 'Italianisation' was started by Benito Mussolini. The arrival of new Italian-speaking immigrants, led to strong dissatisfaction among South Tyroleans, which led to terrorist acts. In 1946 autonomy for South Tyrol was granted and in 1972 Ladin became a partially official language.

The Dolomites

South Tyrol is entirely located in the Alps. The landscape is dominated by the Dolomite Mountains; the highest peak is 3,905m in the far west. The mountains were so named after Déodat de Dolomieu (1750-1801) (Fig 2) the French scientist who was the first to report that the mountains are composed of a new, mineral magnesium-calcium carbonate, (Ca,Mg)CO₃, which was named Dolomite after him many years later. It was granted World Natural Heritage status by UNESCO.

The Romans settled in Bolzano but with the end of the Roman Empire a Bavarian immigration began. Bolzano became an important trading point owing to its location between the two major cities of Venice and Augsburg. Four times a year a market was held and traders came from the south and the north. The mercantile magistrature was, therefore, founded in 1635.

Bolzano is completely closed on Sundays - no shops and restaurants are open, which is very strange for the great number of tourists visiting the city daily. On weekdays everything is open, the streets are full bicycles, motorcycles, and motorcars and tourists.

Museum of Nature

The Museum of Nature occupies the 16th century building of the then tax collector in Bozen from the time of Emperor Maximilian. The building was renovated in 1973 and the Museum, which was opened in 1997, displays animals, minerals and insects, among other things, and also houses an aquarium. The Ant Kingdom, where a colony of ants is kept alive in a large glass structure, is a display of special interest.