

The Historical Collection of Physics Instruments and the Museum System of the University of Palermo

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In 2011, the University of Palermo instituted the University Museum System (Sistema Museale di Ateneo, SiMuA), in order to coordinate all the museum activities with the aim to pursue common goals, to foster the development of their activities and making them accessible to the public at large. The SiMuA coordinates 6 Museums and 13 Collections. The Botanical Garden, founded in 1789, with its richness of cultivated flora, is the “flagship” of European living museums and the cradle of botany in Sicily; the Museum of Zoology “P. Doderlein”; the Museum of Geology “G. G. Gemmellaro” and the “Specola”, the latter housed in the Astronomical Observatory founded in 1790; the Museum of Radiology and the Museum of Engines and Mechanisms. The Collections mainly concern single disciplines of science and technology.

The Historical Collection of the Physics Instruments is displayed at the Department of Physics and Chemistry in the historical building of via Archirafi 36. The oldest instruments of the Collection date back to the early 19th century, when experimental Physics began to be taught in the University, by using instruments and apparatus, during lectures. In particular, the equipment grows considerably after Domenico Scinà got the chair of Experimental Physics, in 1811, at the old “Gabinetto di Fisica” of the “Reale Università di Palermo”. The Collection today consists of more than 500 items, reflecting the scientific research carried out in Palermo from the middle of 19th century onward.

The SiMuA, combining the development of the individual museum institutions with a more general University's policy that tends to protect them and their enrichment, promote the enhancement of this heritage through a better coordination between its facilities and the organization of events, exhibitions, conferences, etc. A large effort has been devoted to the *Virtual Tour*, online interactive 360° panoramic photos; it ensures an immersive feeling and high user's involvement. One can freely wander through the museum halls or the open spaces of the Botanical Garden as well.

I will describe the Museum System of the University of Palermo and in particular the Historical Collection of the Physics Instruments, with more attention to the activities carried out in collaboration with secondary schools, emphasizing the possibility to utilize laboratory activities, connected with historical instruments, for an inquiry-based science education.