

Bodies of stone: Girolamo Segato (1792-1836)

**Giovanni E. Orlandini¹, Roberto Tempestini¹, Donatella Lippi¹,
Ferdinando Paternostro¹, Sandra Zecchi-Orlandini¹ and Natale Villari²**

Departments of ¹Anatomy, Histology, Forensic Medicine and of ²Clinical Physiopathology,
Unit of Image Diagnostic – University of Florence

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SUMMARY

The life, activity and specimens of Girolamo Segato (Sospirolo 1792 – Firenze 1836), as well as the mystery still surrounding his petrification method are outlined in this paper with the aim of shedding some light on one of the most controversial naturalists of the 19th century. Even if after his death many preparations became scattered or even destroyed, the greatest nucleus of them is now collected and exhibited in the Museum of the Department of Anatomy in Florence. Special attention has been given to the description of one of the most famous “pieces”, a female head, recently added to the collection, coming from Museo Civico of Belluno. This sample, submitted to conventional Rx analysis and CT Scan Tomography, displays an outstanding injection of the thinnest peripheral blood vessels.

The figure of Girolamo Segato (1792-1836), 170 years after his death, is still interesting and intriguing due to his skills as a cartographer, naturalist and experimenter, typical of the illuministic period, namely curious and science-lover.

He is famous as “the man who could transform the organic matter into stone” but, really, the most recent investigations on the methods he used, tend to overcome this definition.

Even if he was not born in Florence, he spent many years there, and most of his work is collected and exhibited in the Museum of the Department of Anatomy of Florence University. The literature about Segato is relatively rich and exhaustive (Wolinski, 1892; Pieri, 1936; Pocchiesia and Fornaro, 1992; Arimondi, 1996; Zecchi and Orlandini, 2004; Orlandini and Lippi, 2005), even if the greatest mystery concerning the methods he used to obtain the preparations remains still obscure.