

EARTHQUAKE HITS ZAGREB



IMAGE Boris Bolikovit

ABOVE The cathedral showing damage to one of its spires.

In recent months, museums and other institutions around the world have been struggling to deal with the unprecedented economic and logistical fallout of COVID-19. In the Croatian capital of Zagreb, however, an already difficult situation has been made considerably worse by the powerful earthquake that hit the city on the morning of 22 March.

The earthquake, whose epicentre was four miles north of the city, was the most powerful to hit Zagreb since 1880. With a magnitude of 5.3, it caused widespread damage – including to the cathedral, parts of whose belfry collapsed, and other historic buildings.

Zagreb's Archaeological Museum – within the landmark 19th-century Vranyczany-Dobrinović Palace and home to more than 450,000 objects – was among several institutions to suffer extensive damage, with numerous cracks appearing in the exterior and interior walls of the building.

Fortunately, many of the museum's most-celebrated exhibits were unharmed – including the 4,500-year-old ritual vessel known as the 'Vučedol Dove'; the 3rd-century BC Liber Linteus Zagrabensis (the 'Linen Book of Zagreb'), which is the longest-known Etruscan text, written on a linen sheet; and the 'Lumbarda Psephisma', a unique stone inscription telling of the founding of the Ancient Greek settlement on the island of Korčula in the 4th or 3rd century BC.

However, photographs posted on the museum's website (www.amz.hr) reveal the extent of the destruction to the permanent collections of prehistoric, Ancient Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and medieval artefacts. Among the many broken and damaged objects are a pair of 7th century BC ceramic *askoi* (oil jars) with handles in the shape of rams, and two cups with bird-shaped handles; a unique amber pendant in the shape of a female head, produced by the lapodes, one of the ancient peoples of Illyria, whose territory formed part of modern-day Croatia; and a 1st century AD marble sculpture of a naked young man, which was thrown from its pedestal, shattering into several pieces.

According to Dr Ivan Mirnik, an archaeologist and numismatic specialist who has worked at the museum for many years, 'total havoc' could be seen after the earthquake in the Egyptian galleries, where sarcophagi, canopic urns, and funerary figurines were damaged and some stone stelae collapsed. He also described as 'most tragic' the sight of shelves of smashed Ancient Greek vases from the museum's extensive collection – including a 70cm volute krater (a bowl used for diluting wine with water) that had broken into 26 pieces.

Following the earthquake, the museum's director Sanjin Mihelic and his team have been taking stock of the damage, and preparing for the daunting task of restoration – though their efforts have inevitably been hampered by restrictions arising from the pandemic.

At the Archaeological Museum, as at other institutions across the city, a huge amount of work now lies ahead – but one thing is guaranteed: putting right the destruction will be a long, difficult and expensive job. Already, several institutions and many individuals have come forward with offers of help and money. For details of how to contribute, see www.croatianmonuments.org.

BELOW Smashed pottery in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum.



IMAGE Igor Krajcar