Numerous publications describe the Fabergé products. However, a great part of these deal with items now displayed outside of Russia. Collections of the Armory Chamber and State Hermitage are widely known. Items, which belong to the non-art museums are less known. Some of the collections are interesting, even unique. We believe that the Fersman Mineralogical Museum collection is one of these.

The gem and art stone collection of the Museum gained a greater part of its exhibits during the 1920s. It was a period when the state confiscated huge amounts of jewelry and pieces of art from the palaces of the tsar’s family and the wealthy to transfer these, via the Museum Fund, to various museums. This was the way some lapidary masterworks were acquired by the Mineralogical Museum. Among these were products of the famous House of Faberge. In addition, in 1926, Peter Carl’s son Agafon Karlovich Faberge, a good friend of Academician A.E. Fersman, then director of the Museum, donated the remaining cut stones after the firm was closed. These were high-grade cut alexandrite, as well as variegated ornamental stones, completely representing the wide variety of gem materials the firm used. It is a known fact that the Faberge firm has been famous not just for its gold and platinum items adorned with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds but also for its excellent works made from relatively inexpensive and common color stones (jasper, chalcedonies, garnets, malachite, lazurite, beryls, topaz, etc.)

Besides faceted gems A.K. Faberge contributed two items produced by the firm, of which one remained unfinished. His other donations were albums with photographs of Faberge workshops and some carvings, mainly flowers and animals. One album contained the sealing wax impressions of seals produced by the firm (Photo 1).

As a result of all these events, the Museum obtained about 30 masterpieces, more or less reliably attributed to Faberge.

The articles from the Museum collection fall into two groups. Items, which make the first group, are reliably attributed to Faberge. Another group comprises the items classified as the firm products just by analogy from available catalogues or by the expert judgments. More, it should be kept in mind that a good part of the objects in question had been transferred to the Museum via the Commission for Studies of the Natural Productive Forces; both A.E. Fersman and A.K. Faberge were its members. Most probably, both participated in selection and attribution of the objects for the Museum. Thus, a part of the exhibits from the Museum collection, which are not hallmarked but described by A.E. Fersman in his Essays on the Gem History (a section about the Faberge) we classify as products of the firm.

What are the minerals, which make this collection?

Cut stones make up the majority (a total of 40 minerals and varieties). These are inexpensive colored stones: garnets (pyrope and almandine), quartz (rock crystal, smoky quartz, citrine, amethyst, and chalcedony), topaz and beryl (emerald, aquamarine, and heliodor). Moonstone, tourmaline, opal, zircon, spinel, and phenacite (the mineral then unknown to non-specialists) are a smaller part of this donation. Malachite, amazonite, jasper, aventurine, and even flint represent opaque materials. Several items are made of amber and turquoise. It is interesting that they used chiastolite (an opaque variety of andalusite containing black carbonaceous impurities cut so that a section normal to the longer axis of the crystal shows a cross-like pattern); this mineral is a rarity in lapidary and jewelry.

The majority, of these are conventional gems of various colors and cuts. Along with
jade desk set of nine items, with the silver bear-
recorded according to his statement (Photo 4).

In addition to various stone products origi-
nating from the workshop of the firm, the
Museum possesses a series of beautifully cut
gems previously owned the Faberge family.
This fact is recorded from a personal communi-
cation of V.I. Kryzhanyovskiy, a former director
of the Museum. It comprises large greenish
beryls, blue aquamarines, heliodors, topazes
(blue ones from Russia and colored from
Brazil), a large finely cut olivine (chrysolite),
small star sapphires, rubies, opals, chrysober-
yls, alexandrites, and spectacular amethysts
(Photo 2). This part of the collection presents
unique exhibits of historical importance, as it
demonstrates personal preferences of their
owners. A series of Brazilian topaz comprises
12 large finely cut stones of yellow, wine, gold,
orange, and violet (Photo 3). Many gemologists
believe that the quality of these gems and their
color range, is unique.

The statuettes in the Museum do not use a
wide variety of materials. F.P. Birnbaum,
a chief artist of the firm, named seven varieties
of colored stones predominately employed:
jade (of six hues), rhodonite, jasper, the
so-called Belorechensk quartz (aventurine
bowenite, Lapis lasuli), and rock crystal.
Further he reports that, along with the above, a
wide variety of other stones, including the
seashore pebbles and chips of simple stone
pavement blocks could have been used, pro-
vided the patterns these exhibited were appro-
priate and artistically interesting: (Birnbaum,
1997, p. 69). This approach has been especially
typical of the period after 1908, when the firm
started a lapidary workshop of its own headed
by P.M. Kremlev, a talented artist. Evidently,
the exhibits from the Museum collection
belong to that period, as evidenced by
F.P. Birnbaum and indicated by the very style
of the items the masters developed and cher-
ished. F.P. Birnbaum classified the works the
firm produced into two categories, those that
required settings, and those, which did not.

The Museum possesses items from both.

One of the best Faberge carvings in the
Museum belongs to the first group. This is a
low vase, with bowl and foot cut from rock crys-
tal from Madagascar colored colored and gems
adorn the gilded silver details of this vase hall-
marked by H. Vigstroem. A.K. Faberge donat-
ed this vase in 1925, and relevant facts are
recorded according to his statement (Photo 4).

Other objects of the same category are a
jade desk set of nine items, with the silver bear-
ing the hallmark of A. Hallstroem (Photo 5) and
an exquisite little cup made of a violet-green
moss agate with a gilded silver handle having
the hallmark of M. Perkhin (Photo 6).

Probably, the most exquisite Faberge mas-
terpiece in the Museum is a bonsai tree: a tiny
golden pine entwined by a blooming vine; both
«grow» from a cylindrical vessel (Photo 8). The
trunk of the pine and the liana are made of
gold, the leaves are jade, and the vines blos-
soms are of greenish-gray and light gray-
ish-violet enamel. The pine needles hide bright
emerald sparkles. The vessel is cut of marble
onyx, and the stand of Bowenite. F.A. Afan-
as'ev hallmarked this composition (note that
such pieces are not typical of this artist).

A massive matchbox made of
course-grained brown aventureine, (from
Shoksha, Karelia), a recent acquisition of the
Museum, is a stone mushroom mounted on a
silver cylindrical stand hallmarked by
Yu. Rappoport (Photo 7).

However, works with no metal setting pre-
vail in the Faberge collection. They are com-
posite carvings of animals and people cut from
colored stones great favorites of the public.
Two of these are widely known due to numer-
ous exhibitions and publications: A Reserve
Regiment Soldier, 1914 (Photo 9) and An Ice
Carrier (Photo 10). F.P. Birnbaum mentioned
these as the best pieces of art of the type the
firm produced (Birnbaum, 1997, p. 74).

Of stones used in these sculptures, F.P. Bi-
 rnbaum mentioned just quartz (snow along
which the ice-carrying sledge runners) and
jasper (a figure of a horse). A.E. Fersman gave a
detailed description of stones used in the Ice
Carrier composition, but reported no data on the
Soldier. The latter is listed in the Museum
catalogue as a jasper item.

The results we obtained from detailed stud-
ies of the Soldier are as follows. His face, hands,
a cap, a uniform, and a butt of his rifle are made
of jasper. Flint or Jasper is the material used to
make the hair. Breeches and a cauldron are
green slightly patterned calcite, a bag is made
of fine-grained granite; black high boots previ-
ously believed to be made of gagatite turned
out to be made of fine-grained carbonate rock
(black calcite). The materials of his trench coat
and flask remained unrecognized. Large mag-
nification reveals fine-grained low-porosity
rock composed of colorless (quartz?) and op-
ague grayish-yellow grains of a soft mineral,
probably, altered feldspar-quartz sandstone, a
good imitation of coarse wool fabric. The belt
buckle is made of gold, and silver is used for
metal parts of the rifle.
**Soldier** is a rare signed carving: an engraving on a sole of his boot reads *Faberge 1915*.  
*Ice Carrier* required a wider variety of stones. Along with several kinds of jasper, it employs cacholong (an apron), jade (an earlap cap) lazurite (trousers) and serpentine (a shaft-bow) from the Urals, along with bowenite. The latter has been imported from New Zealand via England. Pieces of ice are made of white quartz of various transparency, and snow is grayish-white quartz. The rein and ropes that fix the load are silver. This sculpture bears no hallmark. The Museum owns a silver copy of this composition (only snow is quartz) hallmarked by Ya. Armfel’t (photo 11).

G.K. Savitsky is an author of the concept of both **Soldier** and **Ice Carrier**. In F.P. Birnbaum’s opinion, Savitsky «displayed here his fine taste and keenness of observation».

Three animal figures are made of pale green slightly translucent bowenite. These are a sitting lion of somewhat arrogant appearance (photo 12), an elephant, and a baby elephant (photo 13). The baby elephant is especially nice and funny with his raised leg and out trunk. Eyes of the elephants are made of small ruby cabochons set in gold. The Museum obtained the lion’s figure eyeless, and the Faberge masters could have hardly employed the material used: it is glass.

Several more small sculptures represent the animal world. A mouse that exhibits a laconic style has a smooth polished surface (photo 14). A pair of geese, is a masterpiece of fine work: literally, all feathers are countable on their bodies (photo 15). Natural poses of the animals are reproduced quite precisely. Light-colored material softens bulky contours of the birds. A gold chain connects flat golden rings with diamonds and rubies on the legs of the geese. Eyes of the birds are rubies framed with gold.

A snail that creeps out of its shell and an owl are both made of opaque stones. The snail shell is made of silvery obsidian, and the snail is jade. The knobby surface of the «living creature» beautifully contrasts the smoothness of its mineral «shelter». The snail raised only one of its feelers, the other remains pulled in. This small detail makes the figure lively and natural (photo 16).

An owl is a tiny figure of fine-grained garnet that gives a fair imitation of feathers. Eyes are rubies set in gold (photo 17).

Another spectacular carving is a spherical fluted cup with a wilted bud in it and an exquisite handle. The whole composition is cut from a single piece of agate with alternating brown and yellow layers (photo 18).

A.E. Fersman reproduced the images of two little vases of Belorechensk quartzite (photo 19) in his Essays on the History of the Stone when describing the Faberge products (1954, v. 1, p. 138). No other data are available on the authorship of these items. The Faberge catalogs we know of contain no descriptions of similar objects. The same situation exists with other two little flasks (presumably, glue containers), a Belorechensk quartzite apple (photo 19) and a pear made of bowenite (photo 20). Similar objects and their sketches are known to be produced by the firm (Tillander-Godenhielm et al, 2000); however, the attribution remains questionable. A.E. Fersman, a friend of A.K. Faberge, could have classified these items by a personal communication of the latter.

Due to the same reason we conditionally classify as Faberge works a carved bowl and a tureen made of dark gray talc-chlorite schist (photo 21). Oriental (Siamese, according to A.E. Fersman, 1954) ornaments cover the outer surfaces of these objects totally. Faberge, via his London branch, dealt with the Far East countries, mainly with India and Siam (now Thailand). Orders from Siamese royal court were especially numerous. On invitation from Prince Tchakrobong who used to study in St. Petersburg, Peter Carl Faberge visited Siam and had been awarded a title of royal «jeweler and enamellist» (Tillander-Godenhielm et al, 2000). Jewelry prevailed in supplies to Siam, but pieces of art produced from relatively inexpensive materials are a possibility, as was the case in Russia and Europe.

A modest delicate leaf-like trough is made of dark-green, almost black jade, a material infrequently used (photo 23). A gold inscription on its container reads: K. Werfel. The same workshop produced a large round smooth plate made of East Siberian (Onot) jade. It is not ornamented; presumably, they planned to use metal decorations.

Flowers are among the most popular Faberge articles. Their meticulous workmanship is striking. Lapidaries have been unbelievably skillful here: a dandelion with a stone stem and a realistic blossom is an example. The Museum collection has a sweet pea in a little vase (photo 22). Petals are made of aventurine and rhodonite; a vase (with some «water» it) is rock crystal. The stem is not a commonly used copper wire wrapped in silk, but jade. F.P. Birnbaum believed that it is the same as shoeing a flea: labor consuming and impractical (Birnbaum, 1997). This object is extremely fragile and joined the collection in fragments. After restoration it became transportable (cer-
Photo 1 (a, b). An album with the Faberge seal offprints. FMM.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 2. Faberge cut gems. FMM.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 3. Cut topazes, Faberge. FMM.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Faberge lapidary in the Fersman Mineralogical Museum collection
Faberge lapidary in the Fersman Mineralogical Museum collection


Photo 8. A cup (moss agate, gilded silver). Hallmark: M. Perkhin. FMM, ID 1756.


Photo 13. A baby elephant and his mother. Bowenite (New Zealand), rubies, and gold. Height 2.5 and 7.5 cm. IDs 1762 and 1761. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov
Photo 14. A mouse. Rock crystal, rubies, and gold. Height 4.5 cm.
FMM, ID 1757.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

Photo 15. Geese. Rock crystal, diamonds, rubies, and gold. Height 8 cm.
FMM, ID 1617.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

Dimensions 5 × 3 cm. FMM, ID 1748.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

Photo 17. An owl. Granite 2.5 cm.
FMM, ID 1602.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 18. A cup. Agate (Saxony).
Diameter 10 cm. FMM, ID 1524.
Photo Jeff Scovill
Fabergé lapidary in the Fersman Mineralogical Museum collection

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17

18
Photo 19. A vase and an apple.
Belorechensk quartzite
(Altai, Russia). IDs 1776 and 1777.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 20. A peach (a flask for glue).
Bowenite (New Zealand).
Height 10 cm. FMM, ID 1584.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 21. A bowl and a turret
(Siamese) Chlorite schist.
Diameter 18 cm. FMM, ID 1614.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 22. Sweet peas in a vase.
Rhodonite, Belorechensk quartzite,
jade, rock crystal. Height 19 cm.
FMM, ID 2354 and 2350.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

Photo 23. A little trough. Black jade,
K. Werbel’s workshop. Size 10×10 cm.
FMM, ID 1744.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

Height 8.5 cm. FMM, ID 4153.
Photo Michael A. Leibov
Photo 25. Easter eggs. Purpurine, rock crystal, lazurite, and rhodonite. Dimensions vary from 0.8 to 1.6 cm. FMM, ID 3728. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov


Photo 27. A plate and eggs. Purpurine. Eggs size 0.8–1.6 cm. FMM. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 28. A box with the gold sand samples from the Nerchinsk placer mines (1881). Dimensions 36x30x6 cm. a) Fragment of top cover; FMM, ID 7827. Photo Michael A. Leibov
Faberge lapidary in the Fersman Mineralogical Museum collection

28

28a
Photo 29. A sketch of an Easter egg (1917). T.F. Faberge’s archive

Photo 30. Tsesarevich (crown prince) Alexei: an Easter egg (1917). Rock crystal and glass. Height 18 cm. FMM, ID 2723. Photo Michael A. Leibov
Petersburg after his arrest. Chaos seized Russia and celebrated Easter in Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg. In March Nicolas II gave up his crown to his mother and another for his wife. His wife was Maria Fyodorovna, his wife. She liked it so much that every year Alexander III gave her as a Faberge Easter egg present a new symbol of the resurrection. Nicolas II continued this tradition and every year ordered an egg for his wife.

The Faberge firm was closed. F.P. Birnbaum just mentioned in his memoirs that orders remained unfinished. In his letter to Evgeny Karlovich Faberge he wrote that he knows nothing about their location.

Many years later (first in 1953, then in 1986 and 1997) the sketches of these eggs were published, preserved in an archive of T.F. Faberge, a great-granddaughter of Peter Carl Faberge (Faberge et al., 1997). Still, there were no data on those eggs.

In 1925, prior to his escape from Russia, A.K. Faberge, donated to the Fersman Museum along with other articles, pieces of a composite carving: two halves of a glass egg and a cloud-like support made of the rock crystal. Orifices had been drilled in the egg and support, but other details were missing. This egg was stored in the Museum for about 80 years, until V.Yu. Voldayeva, an expert from the Gokhran (State Storage) Museum happened to see it. At her (and our) request, T.N. Muntian, a supervisor of the Russian jewelry collection in the Armory Chamber, studied it. Subsequent events were rapid. A comparison to the published sketch (Photo 29) and F.P. Birnbaum’s description demonstrated that this has been the unfinished Easter egg ordered in 1917 that had disappeared and had been considered as a loss (Muntian, 2002, 2003).

The sketch shows a cloud positioned above a rectangular jade stand (as Birnbaum described) with cherubs on it supporting a celestial sphere. Unfortunately, both cherubs and the stand either were never made, or missed being acquired by the Museum. Thus, the Museum now owns only two halves of the egg as hemispheres of dark blue cobalt glass and a rock crystal cloud. A skillfully matted rock crystal surface brings exquisite translucency and sprightliness to this cloud of stone. The upper half of the egg displays constellations of the Northern Hemisphere, and the stars on it were to be diamonds. The smallest of these remained on the glass. The largest stone was due to be in Leo: under this sign Alexei the crown prince was born, the hope of the tsar’s family for continuation of the dynasty.

The egg joined the Museum collection as separate parts and could not be exhibited in public. After an appeal from the Museum, Yu.A. Ossipov, an artist and restorer of the Kremlin Art Workshop, assembled it following the original sketch (Photo 30).

The public saw it for the first time at the Faberge Easter Egg exhibition along with articles from the Armory Chamber and State Hermitage. Now it is safely back in the Museum.
Thus, the collection of the Mineralogical Museum has an almost complete range of the Faberge works which includes the mineral materials used by the firm and their spectrum of colors.

References


