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FABERGE LAPIDARY IN THE FERSMAN MINERALOGICAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

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The Faberge collection of the Fersman Mineralogical Museum comprises a diverse group of Peter Carl Faberge masterpieces: functional items, flowers, animals, human figures, and Easter presentations.

Numerous cut gems from the Faberge lapidary workshops and others from their family collections are exhibited there.

This article describes these items.

30 color plates, 6 references.

Numerous publications describe the Faberge 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 firm) 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

standard cuts, some stones present the playing card suite symbols, small shields, and other designs.

In addition to various stone products originating 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 communication of V.I. Kryzhanovskiy, 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, chrysoberyls, 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 the colored stones predominately employed: jade (of six hues), rhodonite, jasper, the so-called Belorechensk quartz (aventurine bowenite, Lapis lazuli), 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, provided the patterns these exhibited were appropriate 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 cherished. 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 crystal from Madagascar colored enamel and gems adorn the gilded silver details of this vase hallmarked by H. Vigstroem. A.K. Faberge donated 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 masterpiece 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 blossoms are of greenish-gray and light grayish-violet enamel. The pine needles hide bright emerald sparkles. The vessel is cut of marble onyx, and the stand of bowenite. F.A. Afanas'yev hallmarked this composition (note that such pieces are not typical of this artist).

A massive matchbox made of coarse-grained brown aventurine, (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 prevail in the Faberge collection. They are composite carvings of animals and people cut from colored stones great favorites of the public. Two of these are widely known due to numerous 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. Birnbaum 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 studies 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 previously 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 magnification reveals fine-grained low-porosity rock composed of colorless (quartz?) and opaque 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 earflap 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 stuck 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 granite 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



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Photo 4. A vase a la Renaissance. Rock crystal, gilded silver, enamel, and garnets. Hallmark: H. Vigsrtoem. Height 20 cm. FMM, ID 2724.
Photo Michael Leibov

Photo 5. A writing set (jade and silver). Hallmark: A. Hallstroem. FMM, ID 2300–2308.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 6. A liana-wound pine (jade, marble onyx, bowenite, emeralds, gold, enamel). Hallmark: F. Afanassiev. Height 11.5 cm. FMM, ID 2406.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 7. A mushroom (a matchbox) (belorechensk quartzite, silver). Hallmark: Yu. Rappoport. Size 17×17×17 cm. FMM, ID 7785.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

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





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Photo 9. A reserve regiment soldier, 1914. Jasper, calcite, flint, silver. Designed by G.K. Savitsky, performed by P.M. Kremlyov (1915). Height 15 cm. FMM, ID 2571. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 10. An ice carrier. Jasper, cacholong, jade, lazurite, serpentinite, quartz, and silver. Designed by G.K. Savitsky. Height 18 cm. FMM, ID 2570. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 11. An ice carrier. Quartz and silver. Hallmark: Ya. Armfelt. Height 18 cm. FMM, ID 7782. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 12. A lion. Bowenite (New Zealand). Height 21 cm. FMM, ID 1616. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

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



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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

Photo 16. A snail. Jade and obsidian. 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



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

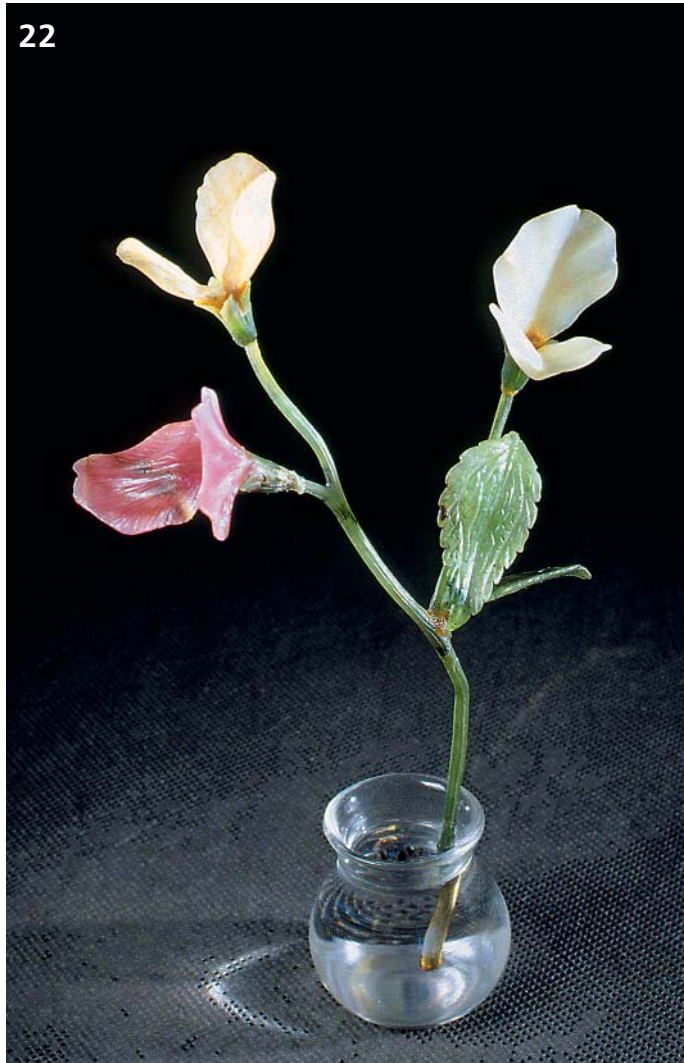
Photo 20. A peach (a flask for glue).
Bowenite (New Zealand).
Height 10 cm. FMM, ID 1584.
Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

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 2530.
Photo Michael A. Leibov

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

Photo 24. A seal. Lazurite.
Height 8.5 cm. FMM, ID 4153.
Photo Michael A. Leibov





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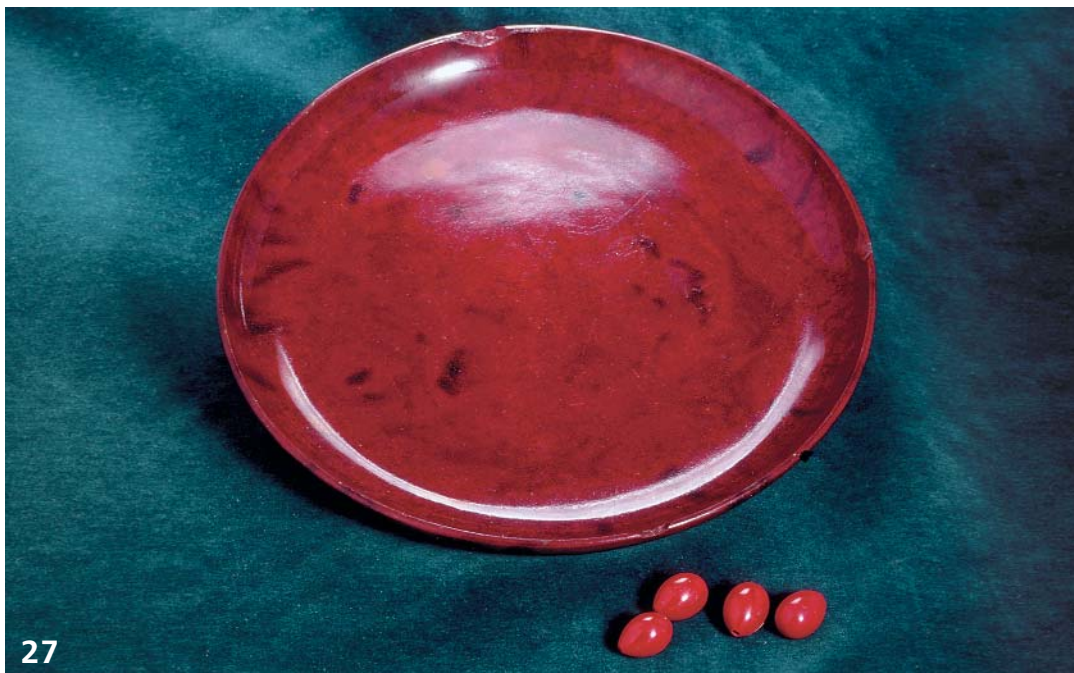
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Photo 25. Easter eggs. Purpurine, rock crystal, lazurite, and rhodonite. Dimensions vary from 0.8 to 1.6 cm. FMM, ID 3728. Photo Michael A. Kalamkarov

Photo 26. A seal. Vein quartz/syenite. Height 8.5 cm. FMM, ID 4169. 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



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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

tainly, with greatest care). A jade stem is a real rarity: there is no other in Moscow.

The Museum collection has two seals, one made of lazurite (Photo 24) and another of a quartz vein in syenite (Photo 26). Some art experts who studied these items presumed that these are Faberge works. Some of them were of the opinion that in the 19th and early in the 20th centuries Faberge was the only firm that produced small-faceted rounded items resembling the seals. However, we have no direct evidences.

Small stone eggs in a special box presumably served as specimens of the Easter presents the firm was famous for (Photo 25). Every egg bears a mark made with India ink. Some eggs have bases of gold; in other cases, it is a common metal. Several eggs are made of purpurine, a special glass, developed by S.P. Petukhov, a supervisor of the St. Petersburg glass works. The process was later lost (Donova, 1973). Presumably, Faberge was the only firm that employed it. Other purpurine articles in the Museum are several small eggs (Photo 27) and a flat round plate.

A large oval-shaped fluted silver box manufactured in the Faberge workshop is interesting. It has no stone parts, but contains a dozen of glass silver-plugged tubes filled with gold sand from the Nerchinsk (the Transbaikalian area) placer mines. It was a gift from the owners of the mines to crown prince (tsesarevich) Nicolas on his return from Japan via Siberia in 1891. A map of the Nerchinsk uyezd (a territorial unit) is engraved on the lid, along with a decorative metal band with inscription and the state emblem (Photo 28).

Finally, the Museum owns another remarkable article, the Tsesarevich Constellation, an unfinished Easter egg of 1917 that K. Faberge donated to the Museum. Its history is tragic. It was the last article Nicolas II ordered from Faberge as an Easter presentation for Empress Alexandra Fyodorovna.

The first of the famous Easter eggs Faberge produced for the Russian tsars was made in 1885 as a present from Alexander III to Empress 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 mother and another for his wife.

The last two eggs were ordered to be made for the Easter of 1917. These remained unfinished. In March Nicolas II gave up his crown and celebrated Easter in Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg after his arrest. Chaos seized Rus-

sia. 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 art 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.

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