

RUSSIAN IMPERIAL DYNASTY AND THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, BERLIN

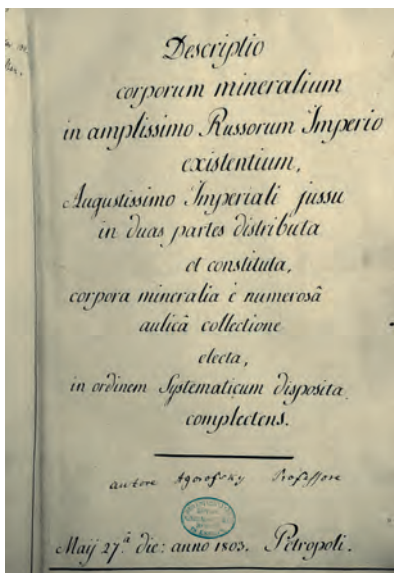
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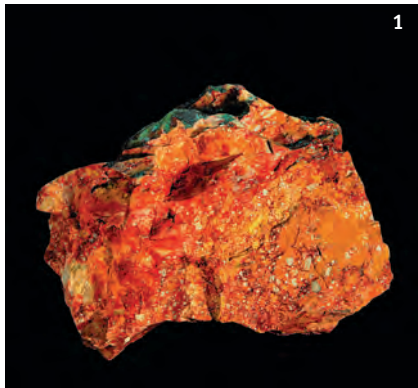
Catalogue of the *Old Russian Collection* and its title page, 1803



The Museum of Natural History in Berlin, Germany, inaugurated in 1889, houses one of the world's largest natural history collections with more than 25 million specimens in the disciplines of mineralogy, paleontology and zoology. The collections themselves date back to the times before the establishment of the museum in the 18th century. They are closely related to the Prussian Royal House. In 1770, Prussian King Friedrich II (1712–1786, King since 1740) founded the Royal Academy of Mining in Berlin, with Carl Abraham Gerhard (1738–1821) as its first director. Gerhard used his private mineral collection for teaching purposes. In 1781, Gerhard donated his mineral collection to the Prussian administration in exchange for a lifelong pension. This constituted the foundation of the Royal Mineral Cabinet, the most important precursor of the mineral collection of the Museum of Natural History. The Royal Mineral Cabinet, located from 1800 in the building of the Neue Münze (pulled down in 1886) in Berlin, was increased rapidly by collecting and through purchases and gifts.

Throughout the 19th century there was extensive exchange of craft articles from minerals and rocks, and minerals and rocks for decorative purposes between the Prussian and Russian dynasties. In Prussia, these articles were used, for example, for the famous Grottenaal of the New Palace in Potsdam near to Berlin. Apart from this, minerals were also acquired directly or indirectly through the Russian dynasty. A collection of Russian minerals was requested by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840, King since 1797) through diplomatic channels in connection with a state visit of Russian Tsar Alexander I to Berlin in 1803. Alexander I donated after this visit an extensive collection of minerals, ores and rocks from Russia to Friedrich Wilhelm III. This collection, the so-called “*Old Russian Collection*” (ORC), originally contained 3081 samples and was derived from the imperial collection in Petersburg. The collection was accompanied by a hand-written catalogue in Latin by professor Agorofsky, dated 27 May 1803. The collection arrived in Berlin in autumn 1803 in 31 boxes. Dietrich Ludwig Gustav Karsten (1768–1810), at that time the director of the Royal Mineral Cabinet, received the collection on 5 October 1803 from the Prussian administration by Graf von Haugwitz. Due to a shortage of space in the building of the Neue Münze the collection was stored and exhibited in the Palace of Prince Heinrich located at Berlin's main boulevard Unter den Linden. Today, the mineral collection comprises 679 samples, which could all be undoubtedly assigned to this *Old Russian Collection*. Additional samples from this collection might be redis-

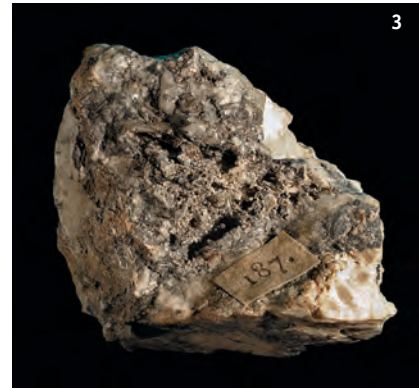
Old Russian Collection – ORC



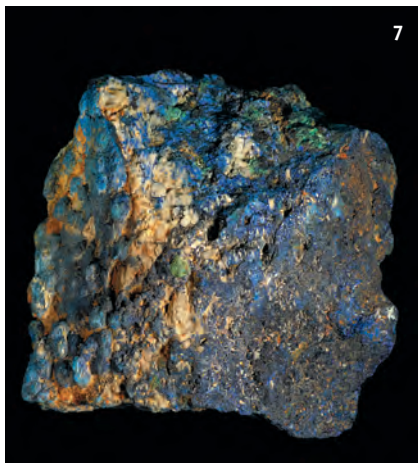
1001) Opali picee species colore rubi-
1002) lundo et flavo eleganter macu-
lata, una pariete polita ad
fodinam Buchturma de Kulivan.



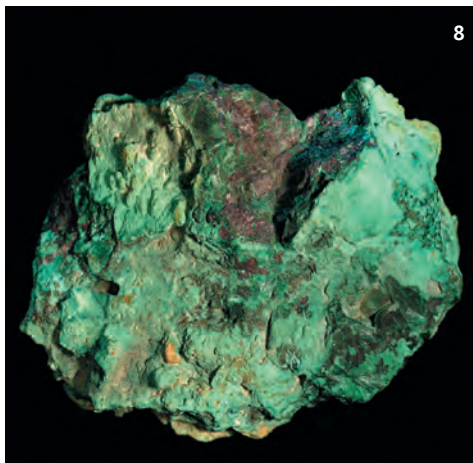
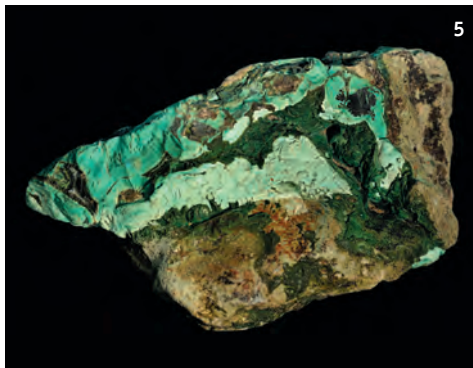
423. Cuprum nativum granulis maximis,
viridi montano et arena tectum. rarum.
Kexer'soj fodina in Permia.



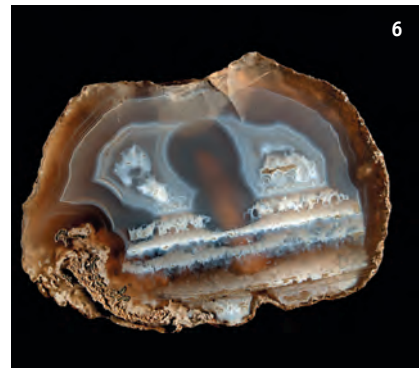
187. Argentum nativum capillosum
accretum lapidi calcareo mixto car-
neo, Salair'skoj fodina de Barnaul.



468) Coeruleum montanum varam ce-
469) lationem et figuram habens.
ginina zavod in provincia Ufa.



314. Vitrea cupri minera diversis crustis
315) tecta viridi montano Sibir'soj za-
vod in Uralensi jugo.



1. **Opal**, 10 x 8 cm. Bakhturminskoye, Altai, Russia. MNH-B No 2003-9718, ORC #1002
2. **Copper**, 4.5 x 2.5 cm. Perm, Urals, Russia. MNH-B No 2007-04429, ORC #423
3. **Silver**, 8 x 5.5 cm. Salairskiy Mine, Altai, Russia. MNH-B No 2003-6143, ORC #187
4. **Chalcedony**, 11 x 7 cm. Samara, Volga River, Russia. MNH-B No 2007-05058, ORC #1.825
5. **Chrysocolla**, 10.5 x 6 cm. Frolovskoye, Karpinsk (Bogoslovsk), Urals, Russia. MNH-B No 2004-2315, ORC #571
6. **Quartz**, 4 x 2.5 cm. Barnaul, Altai, Russia. MNH-B No 2003-6143, ORC #187
7. **Azurite with malachite**, 9.5 x 7 cm. Luginina, Ufa, Russia. MNH-B No 2004-1020, ORC #469
8. **Malachite**, 8 x 6 cm. Gumeshevskiy Mine, Urals, Russia. MNH-B No 2004-1165, ORC #514

Photo: Michael Leybov
Specimens from Museum of Natural
History, Berlin (MNH-B).