

THE FERSMAN MINERALOGICAL MUSEUM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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1. Building of Fersman Mineralogical Museum of Russian Academy of Sciences, 2010.

Photo: Michael B. Leybov

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The Fersman Museum is one of the world's best mineralogical museums. It began its history back in the early 18th century. It was 1716 in St.-Petersburg when Peter the Great founded the *Kunstkammer*, with a Mineralogical Cabinet as part of it. The foundation of the cabinet was based on the quite large mineral collection (1,195 specimens), which was acquired from Gotwald, a Doctor of Medicine from Danzig. Originally, according to an edict of Peter I, the task of the *Kunstkammer* was to collect, keep and display publicly the “subjects of anatomy, zoology, mineralogy and other rarities, naturally and artificially created”. Later another function was added to the three original tasks. It was to describe and study the collected material. For this purpose, the *Kunstkammer* invited German natural scientists, because there were no Russian ones then. However, Mikhail Vasilievich Lomonosov soon joined the study group after completing his education abroad. The mineral collection comprised 3,000 specimens by then. Lomonosov has worked in the *Kunstkammer* for a total of 20 years. The result of his 5-year-long collaboration with the other workers beginning in 1741 was a descriptive publication of the *Kunstkammer* collection: *Catalogue of Minerals and Fossils from the Mineralogical Cabinet of Kunstammer*, St.-Petersburg Academy of Sciences, printed in 1745 in Latin.

In 1767, Academician Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811) was appointed head of the natural science chamber in *Kunstkammer*. He contributed greatly to putting in order and replenishing the natural science collections. Between 1768–1774, academic expeditions delivered abundant new material to *Kunstkammer*. Pallas, Laxman, Ozeretskovskiy and other outstanding scientists were the leaders of these expeditions. As a result, the Mineralogical Cabinet received about 1,500 specimens, including the famous meteorite called *Pallas' Iron*. Described as iron on delivery, the specimen was inspected by the outstanding German scientist Ernst Florens Chladni who developed a theory of origin of meteorites and their burning in the atmosphere. In 1794, Chladni published a book dedicated to this subject, which laid the foundation for the new science of meteoritics.

From the end of the 18th century to the early 19th century the collection of the Mineralogical Cabinet counted 6,125 foreign and 3,460 national specimens (e.g., about 10,000 in total) and was rightfully considered as the largest and richest in Russia. It was at this time (1789) when the outstanding mineralogist Academician Vasilii Mikhailovich Severgin came to work in the cabinet, soon becoming its head (1807–1826). The work on developing the scientific background and systematiza-

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2. **Gold** (31.05 g). Lena River district, Siberia, Russia. Fersman Mineralogical Museum of RAS # 33434.

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3. **Emerald**. 16.5 x 11 cm. Ural Izumrudnye Kopi, Russia. Fersman Mineralogical Museum of RAS # 31219.

4. Main hall of the Fersman Mineralogical Museum of RAS. 2010.





