

■ THE FIRST RUSSIAN CELESTINE

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*It combines all kindness of your gaze,
all brightness of a spring day and
all depth blue of the Volga River*

Reminiscences of Stone
by Alexander Ye. Fersman

The Sernaya Gora Mt. is located on the right bank of Volga River and is one of the highest points (276 m)¹ of Zhiguli mountains which are part of Volga Upland (Figure 1). The Mountain is located in the eastern, the highest part of the Samara Luka² and is integrated in the *Samara Luka* national park. Together with the Tip-Tyav Mt. situated on the opposite side of the river it forms Zhiguli Gates. This is the most known topographic location on Volga River that used to be called Two Brothers. Legendary brothers Sokol and Zhigul who did not let their beautiful sister Volga to run away to silver-haired Kaspj. Historical mine sites from early 18 century were preserved on the Sernaya Gora Mt. are unique geological and mining sites.

T.G. Maslennitsky mentioned Sernaya Gora Mt. together with Molodetsky Kurgan and Sokol'y Mts. among the most important localities of Volga region describing Simbirsk City vicegerency yet in 1785. He wrote: *“Among the mountains along Volga River the most interesting are... 3) Sernaya Gora Mt. located against the mouth of the Soka River in Samara Luka is the most noticeable from other mountains by occurrence of sulphur”* (Maslennitsky, 1785).

Artisan mining of sulphur was carried out yet by bulgars³ from outcrops in karst caves on the top of Sernaya Gora Mt. Industrial scale mining commenced earlier than 1699 and was associated with the name of I.T. Pososhkov, the author of known “The Book on the Poverty and the Fruitfulness” (Nebritov, Sidorov, 2004). Commencing of the mining was in the news in the trial edition of *Vedomosti of Moscow State* in 1702: *“they report ... that many occurrences of sulphur and other metals were discovered near the Samara City”* (Danilevsky, 1954). I.T. Pososhkov owned a sulphur mine for sometime,

1. Sernaya Gora Mt., Zhiguli Mountains,
right bank of Volga River.
Photo: A.A. Sidorov, 2010.



REMEMBERING THE TEACHER...



1. Victor Ivanovich Stepanov. Moscow.
1982. Photo: Alexander A. Evseev.

On January 7, 2014 scientific mineralogy community and mineral collectors in Russia celebrate 90-year Anniversary of **Victor Ivanovich Stepanov** (1924–1988). He is a prominent Russian mineralogist, one of the founders of mineral ontogeny (division of mineralogy) and made a significant contribution to mineral collectors movement in Russia.

Victor Ivanovich Stepanov was my Teacher in mineralogy. More than that, he was my good friend. More than quarter of a century went by since he left us, yet I still check and correct my thought and acts with his principals. I question myself: What he would say? What he would do? He arises in my imagination with his mocking face, bold head, a sample squeezed in his steady hand and a hammer in the other. I hear his jokes and ironic voice again.

I met him in the fall of 1967. I told this story hundred of times, but repeat it again as it was very typical how numerous amateurs and mineralogists met Victor I Stepanov. Random cases combined into regularity – Stepanov’s mineralogical Circle. Stepanov’s authority and influence on people around him was enormous.

That summer I sought to help my 10 year old son to gather a small collection of minerals for forthcoming natural science class. I was keen in collecting, I took of from bookshelf “Amusing Mineralogy” by Alexander Fersman, one of my favorite book in my childhood and try to knew more in the subject. Ones my son and I found a large boulder of magnetite in Podolsk open pit (building limestone pit near Moscow, *trans.*). How magnetite can occur in Podolsk? Students from Geology Department of University worked nearby suggested to consult at MGRI museum on Mokhovaya street (later Vernadsky State Geological Museum). At the museum nobody could explain our “discovery”, but gave us a telephone number to call Victor Ivanovich Stepanov at IMGRE (Institute of Mineralogy, Geochemistry and Crystallography of Rare Elements, *trans.*). “If he will not able to answer, then nobody would”.



2. Victor Ivanovich Stepanov with colleagues from Fersman Mineralogical museum RAS (from left to right): N.V. Manucharyants, I. Borisova, M. Terent’iev, B.B. Shkursky, D.A. Romanov, V.I. Stepanov, D.V. Abramov, T.I. Matrosova, U.S. Kobayashv. May 21, 1987.
Photo: Alexander A. Evseev.



3. **Spessartine** in the muscovite-albitic greisen. Izumrudnye kopi, Urals, Russia. Fersman Mineralogical museum RAS, Stepanov collection, # 3805.

4. **Chalcidony** pseudostalactites, 18 cm. Staraya Sitnya, Moscow region, Russia.

5. **Almandine** skeletal crystal. 6 cm wide. Yelovyi Navolok, Karelia, Russia.

6. **Getchellite** (3.5 cm) with **orpiment** and **quartz**. Khaidarkan, Kyrgyzstan.

Photo 3: M. Leybov, 4–9: Boris Kantor.

7. **Chalcidony** pseudostalactites. 6 x 3.5cm. Staraya Sitnya, Moscow region, Russia.

8. **Andradite** with **epidote** and **quartz**. 8 cm. Dashkesan, Azerbaijan.

9. **Apatite** crystal (4.5 cm) with **quartz**. Dashkesan, Azerbaijan.



The first meeting as many following ones occurred at his “office” – a forsaken of God and utility services basement of shabby wood building on Novokusnetzkaya street. I had a sight of a heavily built bold man with patronizing-forthcoming manners and speaking with retained unstressed ‘o’, a habit he very quickly got rid of. He was not young and as I learned he joined the army during the Great Patriotic War (1941–45). My son and me spent every winter weekend in that basement unwrapping and sorting samples that Victor Ivanovich brought from the “fields”. He told us about minerals, his journeys and many other subjects and very often presented something interesting to our collection.

He grew up in Semenov town on Volga River and was the only person in this small town who studied mineralogy and even Victor was awarded for his work with a silver medal on All-Union agricultural exhibition. He was recruited to the army in the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, finished short-term lieutenant courses on Pamir, where he discovered in passing two quartz deposits. Victor Ivanovich did not like to talk about the war. Apparently, he fought very hard and at cutting across West Bug River his greatcoat was so damaged by bomb fragmentations that it was to through away. He escaped unharmed. Then he served in occupation forces as a translator from German. He never smoked even on the frontline, drunk only on special occasions. He quickly shifted to a first-name basis with me, and I could not change from the formal terms with him while there was only 6 years difference between our age.

We went to Moscow region open pits and outcrops as soon as snow thawed. There were some funny cases as usual, but most importantly I harvested from his vast knowledge and learned from Victor how to understand minerals, tactics and techniques of fieldwork. We traveled widely throughout 20 year of our friendship: in old mines in Karelia, in Dashkesan (Co-Fe deposit, Azerbaijan, *trans.*), Lukhumi (As deposit, *trans.*) in Georgia and others. I worked a month in Khaidarkan (Sb-Hg deposit, Fergana, *trans.*), when the group consisted just of two of us. Victor returned to office studies ones in a while to sort, to clean, to prepare collected samples and then he used to sing his favorite “*Raskinulos’ more shiroko*” (“The sea is so wide”) song as he knew numerous couplets of it. Visiting together with him quarries, underground workings, karst caves became a priceless lessons for me. Stepanov revealed his strong character in the field. We argued a lot on abstract subjects and everyday issues and even went into quarrels. Some time passed, and he called me up again to join him to the field: he was very important and close person for me. I appreciated very much communicating with Stepanov, so I never refused.

Meeting in the very same basement in Moscow went on. Later meetings were in other basements, where he moved after the old house was demolished. I met many interesting and outstanding people there almost every time: Misha Maleev, Bulgarian mineralogist who was preparing his PhD thesis, Nikolay Pavlovich Yushkin, great mineralogist known around the world, Yury Maximovich Dymkov, mineralogist-onthogenist, Hedemich Hori, Japanese mineralogist and many others. We discussed very interesting ideas as everybody came with various questions and ideas. The young scientists and amateurs as myself were attracted to him and he had a wide circle of disciples. He found time for everyone to answer a question and to give an advice. He certainly would show his priceless collection, taking out one box with specimens after another, where collected and prepared with love specimens were stored in perfect order. He used every chance to admire their beauty and result of his efforts.

He loved to puzzle people with mineral identification by appearance and find differences of a given specimen from similar ones. Questions of morphology and onthogeny of minerals were discussed the most often during our meetings. Stepanov himself gashed ideas on mineral ontogeny. Many times he started his PhD thesis under the advice pressure of his friends and colleagues, but always some new idea drew him away from everything. It happened that published works of Victor Stepanov could be counted just on the fingers of one hand. But all his articles, in return, are example of competence, logic, clear thinking and writing style. Official recognition was the only thing that needed to prove his doctoral degree level.

I think that he lived a life, as he wanted to live. Staying alone with minerals, his own and other people’s ideas, communicating with people who share his interests were much more important to him than doing paperwork and making career.

The last years he worked in Fersman Mineralogical Museum directly under supervision of the Museums director Alexander A Godovikov. It could be that Godovikov combined qualities of real scientist with determination and strong character and was a type of a manager necessary to Stepanov to materialize his ideas and conceptions. Together they created and described collection “*Natural Minerals Forms*”, but for many other things there was too little time left.

Nevertheless, minerals took all his day till late night and communication with the rest of the world was limited to reading newspapers. Victor Stepanov was very sensitive to his time and events. His position on authorities, society, individuals were self-sustained, independent and clear. Conformism was not among his principals at all. I remember how deeply he was depressed after learning of involvement of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, when we were in Khaidarkan.

The last time I saw him in the hospital, he was quite prostrate, but lively discussed our plans and current events. Leaving him I asked if he would like something. “*Nothing. I want just to shake your hand*” – he replied. He passed away in two days.

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