

THE KOLYVAN VASE: A PRIDE OF RUSSIAN STONE-CUTTING ART

Natal'ya M. Mavrodina, Elena A. Olkhovaya
The State Hermitage Museum, St.-Petersburg,
mavrodina@hermitage.ru, e.olhovaya@mail.ru

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St. Petersburg, Russia.

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The richest collection of Russian stone-cutting art is in the halls of the Hermitage Museum, where a colossal bowl of green-wavy Revnevaya jasper attracts the well-deserved admiration of visitors. In this unique work, the talent of the architect, who managed to create a form of structurally clear and logical proportions, the impeccable skill of stone cutters, who mastered the technique of stone processing, and, finally, the richness of nature all merged together.

Due to its size, far exceeding all of the most famous similar decorative items, it is often called the *Queen of the Vases*. The museum name *Kolyvan Vase* was given by the Kolyvan Lapidary Factory in Altai, which was the third stone processing center where it was created. Prior to that, two lapidary factories were opened in Russia - in Peterhof near Saint Petersburg and in Yekaterinburg in the Urals.

The Kolyvan Vase is a five-meter oval monolithic bowl on an oval three-part leg and an oval profiled plinth, resting on a massive cubic pedestal. The total height exceeds 2.5 meters (Fig. 2). The bowl is smoothly polished inside. Its outer surface is covered with convex spoons converging towards the center. In the upper part, the bowl is pulled together by a smooth interception; along its side are carved acanthus leaves (Fig. 3). The leg in the upper part is decorated with palmettes, the lower part is covered with large acanthus leaves. In the middle, the leg is intercepted by a polished belt with short concave spoons (Fig. 4).

A marble plaque is placed near the bowl, briefly telling its history in old Russian spelling: "This bowl was made at the Kolyvan Lapidary Factory, from Revnevaya jasper, according to the drawing of the Architect Melnikov; 7 arshin¹ in diameter, 3 arshin 10 vershoks² in height, together with a pedestal and a leg, more than 1200 pounds³ (19,656 kg) in weight. The stone was mined in 1829 by Unter-Schichtmeister Kolychev and cut on the spot over two years; the bowl was completely finished at the beginning of 1843. The vase was dispatched from the factory in February, under the supervision of the 12th class Berggeshvoren Ivachev, and delivered to St. Petersburg in August of the same year. While following the land route to the River Chusovaya at a distance of two thousand versts⁴, from 120 to 160 horses were harnessed under it" (Fig. 5). The text of the inscription was approved at the highest level on June 7, 1850 (RSHA, fund 468, inv. 35, file 246, sheet 48).

The beginning of the stone processing in Altai was laid in the last decade of the reign of Catherine the Great. The emergence of artistic processing of colored stones in Siberia was preceded by a long period of searches and study of their mineral deposits. The earliest information about them dates back to 1744–1745. An expedition to the Altai, organized in the spring of 1745, brought the first finds of



1. The New Hermitage Building (1842–1851, arch. Leo von Klenze), inside which is the hall of the Kolyvan Vase (#128). State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia.



2. Hall of the Kolyvan Vase in the New Hermitage. (Fig. K54 on p. 343 in N.M. Mavrodina's book "The Art of Russian Stone-Cutters of the 18th–19th Centuries. Catalog of the Collection." St. Petersburg: State Hermitage Publishing House. 2007. 580 pp.: ill. Inv. No. Э. 2519.)

3. The Kolyvan Vase, a detail. Carved acanthus leaves on the edge of the vase. (Illustration on p. 20 from the booklet by N.M. Mavrodina "The Kolyvan Vase." St. Petersburg: State Hermitage Publishing House, 2017).

ornamental rocks to the capital. In the 1760–1770s, news on the discovery of colored stones continued to arrive. In 1786, a small workshop was organized on the Aleya River at the Loktev silver-smelting plant, which did not last any longer than the summer of 1801. Subsequently, the processing of ornamental rocks was transferred to the village of Gornaya Kolyvan (over 300 km from Barnaul) as it was deemed necessary to have it closer to the place of extraction. Here in 1802, on the foundation of the Kolyvan copper-smelting plant (closed in 1799), a large lapidary factory was established. It was immortalized by numerous products that have no analogues in the world practice of this type of art.

During the heyday of Altai stone processing, the Kolyvan Factory achieved tremendous successes. From small egg-shaped vases and bowls, to smooth pedestals and countertops

¹ an arshin is an old Russian unit of length, about 27 inches (71 cm) long.

² a vershok is an old Russian unit of length, about 1,75 inches (4,445 cm) long.

³ a pound is an old Russian unit of weight, about 16,380,4964 kg.

⁴ a versta is an obsolete Russian unit of length defined as 500 sazhen. This makes a verst equal to 1.0668 km (0.6629 miles).