

ALTAI COLORED STONE OF KOLYVAN STONECUTTERS IN THE HERMITAGE

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The Kolyvan Factory vases and bowls on display at the State Hermitage evoke the delight and amazement of all visitors to the museum. Grandiose in size, beautiful in materials and fine craftsmanship, they stand on par with the great ancient works of stone. Their hard work, a difficult struggle with the harsh Altai nature and overcoming the enormous distances separating it from the cultural centers, resulted in artistic achievements and earned world fame to the Kolyvan Factory (Fersman, 1961, p.114).

Products of the Kolyvan stone-cutting Factory are currently on display in the halls of the Winter Palace, Minor and Old Hermitage, but the main part of the Altai collection of colored stones decorates the halls of the New Hermitage.

The foundation of ornamental rocks processing in Altai was laid during the last decade of the reign of Catherine the Great. This processing in Siberia was preceded by a long exploration period of its natural deposits. The earliest information about them goes back to 1744–45. An expedition to Altai, organized in the spring of 1745, brought the first finds of ornamental stones to the capital. In the 1760–70s, several other expeditions visited Altai. They focussed, among other works, on inspection of ores suitable for metal smelting and collected information about colored stones.

In the spring of 1786, nine prospecting parties were sent to the poorly explored regions of the Altai. Their task was to find hard colored stones, suitable for "producing of columns, vases, and tables." P.I. Shangin headed the most successful party, which explored the rivers Charysh, Inya, Koksun, Katun, Bolshoi Khair, Kumin, and Bukhtarma. Shangin left a description of the expeditionary route with characteristics of Korgon, Khair-Kumin and other deposits discovered by him. Totally, 145 occurrences of colored stone were discovered by Shangin's expedition. F. Ridder, head of the second prospecting party, surveyed the upper reaches of the Uba and Ulba rivers. He discovered a polymetallic deposit, named after him, as well as a deposit of jasper breccias and many others (up to 50 in total). By the end of 1787, 210 varieties of ornamental stone were discovered as a result of organized exploration and occasional finds in the Altai. Two deposits were discovered later: in 1789 it was Revnevskaia (Revniukha) jasper, a stone that later became world famous; and in 1807 it was Beloretsk quartzite, having no less astonishing decorative qualities. The deposits of colored ornamental rocks found in the Altai Mountains formed the necessary raw material base for the stone-cutting industry.

In 1786, a small workshop was organized at the Loktev Silver Smelting Plant located on the Alei River, not far from where black porphyry, a magnificent ornamental material, was discovered. Design of the grinding mill was copied from the Peterhof Plant. M. Denisov and



1. Vase of semi-ovoidal form.
Master P. Baklanov, 1788.
Purple khair-kumin breccia;
carving, polishing.
The height 70 cm, width 37.5 cm.
(Fig. K1, p.305 in the book by
N.M. Mavrodina "Art of Russian stone-
cutters of the 18th–19th centuries.
Collection catalog.").
Inventory № 3np. 2578.

2. Egg-shaped vase. 1794.
Blue-purple Korgon porphyry;
carving, polishing.
Height 57.5 cm, width 33 cm.
(Fig. K 18 on p.312 in the book by
N.M. Mavrodina "Art of Russian stone-
cutters of the 18th–19th centuries.
Collection catalog.").
Inventory № 3np. 2537.

P. Baklanov, both from the Peterhof Lapidary Mill, supervised the mill construction. The Cabinet of His Imperial Majesty managed the mill and later the Kolyvan Factory. This impacted all their activities. As a rule, stone-cutting products were ordered by the Cabinet, which invited leading St.-Petersburg architects.

The Hermitage collection contains more than 30 pieces made at the Loktev Grinding Mill between 1788 and 1801. From the very first years, its main products were vases and bowls that served as a necessary accent in the decoration of ceremonial interiors. In addition, the workshop produced mantels, columns, tabletops, pedestals, and paperweights. Early Altai vases were relatively small in size (71 cm height), which was determined both by the demands of the Cabinet and limited technical capacity of the workshop. They were usually created in pairs.

The earliest pair of vases from Khair-Kumin breccia (Fig. 1 – cat. K1), dated 1788, made by stonecutter P. Baklanov, bears the stamp of early classicism. Their bodies are sharply truncated in the upper part; the shoulders, throat, domed lid, as well as the leg, on which the vases rest, are decorated with numerous horizontal profiles. Later, a more elongated ovoid shape was adopted, and the number of horizontal members was sharply reduced. The compositions of the Loktev vases are similar. The monolithic body rises on a low thin leg, while broad shoulders move smoothly to the expanding neck (Fig. 2 – cat. K18). These objects have clearly visible tectonics of classicism construction. All its elements are strictly thought out and organic.

The material used for these items was stone with dark, dull colors of a homogeneous structure. These are black Loktev porphyry, of which no items have survived in the Hermitage, and red, dark purple, and blue-purple porphyry, as well as dark coffee-jasper.

Photo: K.V. Sinyavskiy,
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