



Conference Paper

Russian Hardstone Pieces at the Bavarian Kings' Residences: Introductory Notes

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Abstract

The article describes Russian colored hardstone works used in the decorations of the Bavarian royal residences during the existence of the Kingdom of Bavaria (1806–1918). We provide the description of and verify the existing attributions of these objects, as well as the circumstances under which these were acquired.

Keywords: stone-cutting art, diplomatic gifts, Russian empire, Kingdom of Bavaria, malachite, jasper, lapis-lazuli

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1. Introduction

Diplomatic and family relations between the House of Romanov and the Bavarian Royal House can be traced over the entire period of the existence of this Southern Germanic state. This fact provides the relevance for our work. However, due to the dominance of Catholic religious tradition in this area, there were no dynastic marriages (the only attempt to negotiate such a marriage, which could have united Ludwig II and the only daughter of Alexander II, was unsuccessful [4, p. 274]). This influenced considerably both the quantity of gifts and the attention they received. Unlike Great Britain [4], France [3], Württemberg [9] and Prussia [11], where Russian heritage has long been a subject of detailed study, research and display, Bavaria shows little interest in the works of the Russian masters.

Meanwhile, despite their limited number, Russian-made colored hardstone pieces, which appeared in Bavarian royal collections in the XIXth century, are the remarkable artifacts testifying to the history of relations between the two countries. An exhaustive analysis of objects themselves and of the circumstances surrounding their appearance in Munich, is impossible within the limited space of this article. Therefore, this paper should be seen as an introduction into the problem and a first review of the Russian-made hardstone pieces in Bavarian collections.

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2. Bavaria and Russia: The Origins of Cultural Communication

Caroline of Baden (1776–1841), the elder sister of the Russian Empress Elizaveta Alexeyevna, became the first Bavarian queen to receive this status thanks to the politics of her husband who aligned himself with Napoleon I. Her name is tied to the bronze and malachite jardiniere (Bayerisches National Museum, Munich, Reg.No. 93/564). The museum lists the date of this object as ‘circa 1815’; the bronze work is considered to be Parisian, but the malachite inlay is ascribed to the Russian masters [6, p. 641]. The dating is confirmed by the existing contemporary depictions of the queen’s rooms: for example, an 1820 watercolor by Friedrich Zebland ‘Queen Caroline’s Blue Study in the Garden Suite of Munich Residence’ [10, p. 119], which clearly shows the jardiniere on a stand.

However, there is no data to support the Russian provenance of the stone work. Based on our knowledge that the Ural malachite was extensively used by the Parisian masters in 1800–1820s [1, 2], it seems much more possible that this object belongs to the Parisian school. This fact also casts doubt on the existing opinion that this jardiniere was a gift from Empress Elizaveta Alexeyevna. We believe that the French source of the gift is much more likely: political sympathies of king Maximilian I (1756–1825, reigned from 1806) created this family alliance. In 1806, the daughter of the Bavarian king Augusta (1788–1851) married the step-son of the French Emperor Eugene de Beauharnais (1781–1824).

The marriage of the Bavarian princess and the imperial prince ended abruptly. In 1824, Eugene, Duke of Leuchtenberg, died suddenly. The miniature portrait of his widow, Duchess Augusta Amalia of Leuchtenberg, was painted by Franziska Schöpfer (1763–1836). Probably soon after the portrait was made, it was incorporated into a rectangular paper-weight with a movable bronze handle (Bayerisches National Museum, Munich, Reg. No. R 6303). In this case, the museum curators believe that all bronze and malachite works were made by the French masters.

During the reign of the next Wittelsbach king Ludwig I (1786–1868, reign 1825–1848), the diplomatic relations between the two countries had taken a surprising artistic turn. In 1826–1835, court architect Leo von Klenze created a new wing of Munich Royal Palace, with the special place allocated to the Nibelungen Halls (painted by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld) and constructed a number of monumental buildings in the vicinity of the Bavarian capital. Nicholas I, who visited Munich in 1837, noted the style of

the architect. The Emperor's acquaintance with the architect resulted in the commission of a New Hermitage building in Saint-Petersburg.

One of the Nibelungen Halls includes an impressively large Medici vase: a krater made of several parts cut from the Urazov Ural jasper, decorated with bronze handles with mascarons and set on a grey-green Kalkan jasper plinth (Residenz München, Munich, No. ResMü.P.10374). The style of this work, its material of choice and a succinct decor are all typical for the works of Ekaterinburg Lapidary Plant in the early half of the XIXth century [5, pp. 200–201]. This preliminary dating is supported by the vase design found in the archives, which was a part of design set intended for the Ekaterinburg plant. A sheet dated March 8, 1828 contains notes on the use of a material called 'raspberry agate' (Urazov jasper) and on the concrete stones from the plant storages that were to be used for this project. It also includes a note on the delivery of a plinth made of Kalkan jasper (1829) and the vase itself (1837) to Saint-Petersburg (a note of gratitude to Paul Dyson, researcher of Russian stone cutting heritage, for an opportunity to explore this document). Regrettably, we have been yet unable to find any information about the date when this gift was given.

3. Russian Stone-cutting Art During the Reign of Ludwig II

The reign of Ludwig II (1845–1886, reigned from 1864) became the next period of intense acquisition of Russian hardstone works for the Bavarian residences. This king, famous for his multiple building projects and his passion for Richard Wagner's music, carried for years a friendly correspondence with Empress Maria Alexandrovna.

Their first meeting happened in 1864, when the Russian imperial family visited German lands. Four years later, the Empress returned to Bavaria hoping that a healing mountain air would improve her health. The king was very attentive to the Empress: he opened his castles for her disposal and organized excursions and entertainments.

It is quite probable that one of the expressions of gratitude from the Empress Maria Alexandrovna took shape of the two malachite tables. These tables, which today decorate the throne room in Linderhof palace, have unusual scallop-shaped tabletops, with Gothic motives decorating their bronze legs. An opportunity to explore these objects in detail was kindly provided by the employees of this museum palace. The tables are identical to the tables from Hermitage collection (State Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg, No.Э.3587 and Э.3586) and attributed as the work of Petergof Lapidary Plant made in 1830s–1840s and designed by A.I.Schtakensneider [5, pp. 119–120]. N.M.Mavrodina who had made an attribution, compared the unusual Gothic motives

of the tables (gilded bronze of the legs form a setting for the malachite panels) with the signed projects of the monumental candelabra made according to the architect's projects at the Petergof Lapidary Plant for the golden (malachite) dining room of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna in Winter Palace. However, the lack of documentary confirmation of gift and the undeniably great popularity of malachite during the reign of Nicholas I, provide a possibility that these tables had actually arrived to Bavaria at an earlier date.

While the presence of malachite tables in Linderhof may be due to circumstances, lapis lazuli objects decorating Ludwig II personal interiors is, undoubtedly, a result of communications between the Bavarian king and the Russian monarch. The reign of Maria Alexandrovna was the heyday of fashion for lapis lazuli in Russian hardstone art. In 1848, she (at the time still a Royal Princess), ordered the works to be done at the Lyons Hall of the Catherine Palace at Tsarskoye Selo. The Hall formed a part of a suit of rooms allocated to the Crown Prince's wife. The interior created by Charles Cameron in 1771–1774 was notable for its lavish lapis lazuli decorations: this stone was used to line wall panels, friso, door frames and ovens. In the mid-XIX century, the hall's interior was renovated, and the silk on the walls was replaced. The manufacturing of furniture for this hall (designed by I.Monigetti) started in 1860s [7]: Petergof cutters made lapis lazuli lining, while gilded bronze was purchased from the imperial court suppliers, the firm 'English Shop Nickols and Plinke'. Over several years, the interior was decorated with large and small tables, consoles, candelabra, fire screens and jardinieres, which combined gilded Louis XVI-style bronze with the striking elements made of the blue stone.

The King of Bavaria requested a description of the Tsarskoye Selo residence. He was especially interested in the interior of the Amber Room and the lapis lazuli hall. His request was fulfilled: the text of the description was illustrated by the photographs made by the court photographer S.L.Levitsky [7]. The King's interest was explained by the finishing of the construction works in Linderhof Palace (1874) and the beginning of the interior decoration works. Ludwig II seems to have been highly impressed by these descriptions and photographs of the furniture and wall decorations lined with lapis lazuli: the confirmation may be found in the fact that during the next years of 1875–1876, Petergof Lapidary Plant made two luxurious fireplaces to the king's commission, lined with lapis lazuli and decorated with the gilded bronze from the 'English Shop Nickols and Plinke' [5, c. 553]. Made in the Second Rococo style, these fireplaces came to decorate the Hall of Mirrors at Linderhof; today they can be seen by the palace's visitors.

The last documented object made by Russian stone cutters and sent to Bavaria was a big table – or, more precisely, the tabletop made of ‘Bukhara lapis lazuli’ at the Petergof plant in 1884 [5, c. 542]. The current location of this Russian-made work is unknown.

4. Preliminary Conclusions

The accumulation of Russian-made hardstone objects in Bavarian royal residences took several decades. Most of these objects today can be found in national museum collections and are open to research. In conclusion, let us stress once more that this article is not an exhaustive research, but rather a first introduction into the topic of Russian stone works in Bavarian royal residences. We would also like to thank our colleagues who were very helpful in providing access to these works, as well as to an additional information.

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