

A MONOGRAM ON BASALT. A HISTORY OF ONE MUSEUM SPECIMEN

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The article describes a legendary place of formation of one specimen from the Fersman Mineralogical Museum, a history of its appearance in Russia and Great Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich, his first owner.

3 figures, 6 references.

Among numerous specimens, delivered from various sources to the Fersman Mineralogical Museum in the 1920s, are such specimens, which bear evidence on previous owners, sometimes even a history of how they were initially received. These are monograms, other inscriptions, and personal labels. Unfortunately, they do not always help, because the museum specimen might have had more than one owner before it came to the museum, and the monogram will not tell who the first owner was. We managed to recognize first owners only for several specimens in the collection of decorative and precious stones.

One of these specimens is the small piece of black basalt, polished on both sides. One of its sides has a flat golden monogram consisting of united Russian letters of "K"(K), "H"(N) and "P"(R). The other side has inscription "Fingal's Cave" and a date of "July 6/18 1847" (Fig. 1).

The specimen arrived to the museum in 1926 with other objects from Gatchina and Stroganov Palaces (State Hermitage). Russian letter "P"(R) helps to suggest that the item could belong to a member of *Romanovs* (the Royal family). Initial letters and date (1847) pointed to the Great Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov (1827–1892). However, such a good coincidence was not very convincing to confirm that this fragment of basalt belonged to him. It was therefore necessary to remember a biography of Great Prince.

Konstantin Nikolaevich, youngest and favourite brother of the Emperor Alexander II, was devoted to the navy service since childhood. F.P. Litke, famous Arctic explorer, was his teacher. In addition to compulsory subjects, necessary for the future activity, the boy studied history, literature, philosophy, European languages, and music. He was one of the most educated people in Russia of the

time. His large library was filled not only with books about ship building and exact sciences, but also on history, geography, and various arts. He knew modern literature very well. He was a collector of paintings and very well played a violin.

Since 1850, Konstantin Nikolaevich began to serve in the Navy Department. He was a liberal and a supporter of many innovations. The Great Prince was a dedicated enemy of peasant's serfdom and provided much effort on its reformation and abolishment in 1861. Earlier, due to his efforts and persistence, the Admiralty liberated peasants, who belonged to the Admiralty (1858). Since 1861 to 1881, Konstantin Nikolaevich was a head of the General Committee on Agriculture. Since 1862 to 1863, he was a governor of Poland. Since 1865, he was a chairman of the State Council. In 1870, he participated in the military reform. He paid attention to art, and in 1873 he was a head of the Imperial Musical Society. This is incomplete characteristics of the interesting personality of the Great Prince. He lived a bright life, full of turbulent state activity and complex personal life experience (Barkovets, 2002), but we are interested only in a very brief period of his life during summer 1847 (6 to 18 July, if to be very precise), in relation to the history of our museum specimen.

As it was already mentioned, the Great Prince was preparing himself for the navy activity. When 8 years old, he was a nominal commander of the navy brig "*Hercules*"; when 17 years old, he became a true commander of brig "*Ullis*"; and at the age of 20, he was a first rank captain during the navy expedition around Europe on large frigate "*Pallada*". It was in 1847, mentioned on our specimen together with the Fingal's Cave, a cave well known in Europe and Russia, whose origin was related to the feat of ancient Celtic heroes. As follows



Figure 1. Basalt from the Fingal's cave, Isle of Staffa, Inner Hebrides, Scotland, with a monogram "KHP" (KNR) and engraved inscription. Length 9.5 cm. FMM No PDK-1609

from the diary of Konstantin Nikolaevich, he went to England after engagement with Princess of Sachsen-Altenberg in May 1847. During relatively long trip to this country, he visited various attractions, such as castles, waterfalls, zoo parks, plants, factories, museums, picture galleries, and many other locations, including Fingal's Cave (A diary of the Great Prince, 1847).

The names of Fingal and his son Ossian emerged in the collection of ancient Scottish stories of the "Poems of Ossian" by James Macpherson published in London in 1762. The author stated that during his staying in Scotland he found ancient manuscripts, containing the legends of the 3rd century, written in Gaelic, which he translated to English. These were lyric-epic stories about Fingal, a king of the legendary Morwen State on the western coast of Scotland. The ancient writer was a warrior and bard Ossian, an elder son of Fingal (Macpherson, 1762). The originality of these manuscripts was soon strongly questioned. Macpherson promised to show original manuscripts, but he never fulfilled these promises. The debates continued for decades, but regardless to the trust in originality of these poems, they had a great success in Europe and stimulated many imitations.

The "Poems of Ossian" described pictures of great nature, with detailed descriptions of battles, victories and defeats of ancient heroes, their love passions, with mourning about the relatives and passed heroic times. The poem hugely influenced development of romanticism and sentimentalism in practically all aspects of art, with dramas and operas on Ossianic subjects. Mentioning of Ossian and motifs of his poems can be traced in the writings of Scott, Goethe, and Byron. At the order of Napoleon, the Gerard, Girodet, and Ingres produced romantic land-

scape paintings with Ossianic heroes for the Malmaison Palace (Fig. 2).

By the 1830–40s, romanticism emerged brightly in music. In 1829, Mendelssohn visited the cave on the Isle of Staffa, related to the Ossian legends. It greatly impressed him. Being impressed by the great creature of nature and heroic-poetic spirit of the "Ossian" poem, he composed a concerto ouverture "The Hebrides", or "Fingal's Cave" (1830–1832). After release of the ouverture, the place became officially called Fingal's Cave.

It is important to say that in the end of the 18th century Ossian also penetrated into Russian literature together with romanticism and sentimentalism (Levin, 1980). First data about Ossian and his songs appeared in Russian press in 1781, in the translated Goethe's novel "The Sorrows of young Werther", and in 1792, a complete edition of the poems was published. Practically all the writing and reading public of Russia of the time was fascinated by the songs of ancient bard. He became a favorite poet of the youngsters, and old masters were influenced as well. It appeared in the Derzhavin's odes, Karamzin's creative works, and later in the verses of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gnedich, and others. There were publications entitled "The Ossian's Shadow", "Imitating Ossian" and alike. In 1805, tragedy "Fingal" by Ozerov was staged on one of the scenes of St. Petersburg, which survived for half a century.

Poetry of Ossian was perceived as popular and heroic. It became especially sensitive when "The Word about Igor's Regiment", the most ancient product of the Russian literature, was published in 1800. Both epics were perceived as analogous examples of the ancient military poetry.

During Patriotic wars with Napoleon, the heroic motifs of the "Ossian" poem were in har-



Fig. 2.
The painting
"Ossian" by
Gerard. 1801

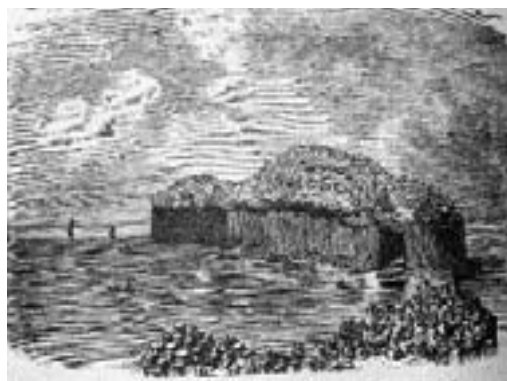


Fig. 3. The
Fingal's Cave
(illustration
from the book
by I.V. Mush-
ketov, 1924)

mony with Russian patriotic motifs. This appeared in the poetry of famous Russian poets Vasiliy Zhukovskiy, Konstantin Batyushkov, Kondratiy Ryleev and others.

In essence, by the time of our interest (1847), the Ossian songs about feats of his father Fingal and places, where they took place, were very well known to the educated Russian public. The Royal court could not be an exception. Naturally, young Great Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich was well informed about both existence of the famous cave and related legends. Therefore, the famous cave became a 'must to visit' sightseeing place during the cruise around Europe on the frigate "Pallada".

Even without legends, the Fingal's Cave deserved attention. As it was mentioned above, it is located on the Isle of Staffa near the western coast of Scotland (Inner Hebrides). It is part of the National Natural Park of Scotland and is a National Heritage.

This huge cave was washed by marine surf in the steep rock of the volcanic island, between the two rows of basaltic columns (Fig. 3). According to different data, its length is 70 to 85 m, and the height is 20 to 30 m. With its size and regularly shaped columns along the walls, it reminds a great and mysterious cathedral. Its floor is covered by water so that during the high tide the waves produce a strange and strong sound, which can be heard at long distance. This sound gives a mystic impression and reminds a heroic past of this place, when Ossian built this cave for his father Ossian. Walter Scott visited this place and wrote that it is most unusual place he ever seen and believed that none description would be able to reflect impression it produces.

The Great Prince was also impressed by the cave. On the 6th of July 1847, he wrote in his diary, "we lifted an anchor and moved to the northern side of the Isle of Mull. At about 9 o'clock in the morning, we approached the Isle of Staffa. Its basalt sides are extremely strange. Fortunately, the sea was absolutely quiet so that we could enter the famous Fingal's Cave. This is an absolutely beautiful view" (A diary of the Great Prince, 1847). The effect was so impressive that Konstantin Nikolaevich not only collected and preserved a piece of basalt from the cave, but he also ordered to rework it as a souvenir with his initials and a date of visit.

It's unknown when and how this specimen appeared in Gatchina. However, its affiliation to the Great Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich is out of doubts.

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