

The Enamel Earrings in the Preslav Treasure

The earrings in the Preslav Treasure belong to two main types: earrings with *cloisonné* enamel; and filigree earrings with pearls and precious stones. The enamel earrings are decorated with floral and zoomorphic motifs, which are the main topic of my paper (figs 1-12). This text consists of two parts: the first part provides a brief description of each item, while the second part is devoted to the discussion of the earrings' decoration and workmanship.

The Preslav Treasure was discovered in 1978 in the outer city of the medieval Bulgarian capital Preslav, today Veliki Preslav (district of Šumen, Bulgaria). This extraordinary convolute of medieval gold jewellery came to light in two stages¹: in 1978, workmen found parts of the treasure while ploughing the fields in the area of Kastana, 3 km north-west of the medieval centre of Preslav (the location of the tsars' palace). The following year, extensive archaeological excavations under the direction of Professor Totyu Totev were undertaken in the area. The excavations yielded comprehensive information on the circumstances of the treasure's discovery and its archaeological context. The golden jewellery was in a wooden box with silver fittings that had been placed inside a stone-built oven in one of the dwellings of the early medieval settlement that existed on both banks of the Dervishka River. The archaeological context of the treasure indicates that it was deliberately hidden in this place. As to the date of hiding such a valuable treasure, it is usually assumed that it was connected to the turbulent events of 971, when the Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimiskes captured the city of Preslav². The hoard included a group of 15 Byzantine silver coins minted in the years 945-959 during the reign of the emperors Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos and Romanos II³, thus providing a *terminus post quem* for the concealment of the Preslav Treasure.

The treasure consists of more than 180 objects made of gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones, enamels and bronze. It comprises five enamelled gold plaques reconstructed as a diadem, a two-sided necklace, three gold medallions with precious stones and pearls, also reconstructed as a necklace, five pairs of earrings made of gold and *cloisonné* enamel, as well as gold filigree and pearls, two spherical pendants with *cloisonné* enamel, a rock crystal bead, a rock

crystal seal set in gold, rings, and gold pendants, buttons, appliques, and two thin silver bracelets.

The Preslav earrings with enamel have been examined in several studies. The most comprehensive analysis so far has been provided by Antje Bosselmann-Ruickbie, who also included analogies for the Preslav earrings⁴.

Descriptions

1. Earring (inv. no 3381/8), forming of a pair with no. 2 (inv. no. 3381/11), made of gold, pearls and *cloisonné* enamel (figs 1-4). Composed of a crescent-shaped element, decorated with enamels set within a beaded wire frame on each side, a round medallion and three two-sided pendants, embellished with the *cloisonné* enamel technique. The hoop is mounted on two golden bi-conical beads attached to the short sides of the cassette. The hoop ends in a hook that fastens into an eye attached to a bead on the earring. Rising from the centre of the arc is an enamelled medallion framed with beaded wire and pearls. A blue and white peacock with a tapering tail fills the medallion. The plate is filled with a whitish tendril with bunches of grapes twisted over the blue background. Three pendants are suspended from the lower edge of the plate, the middle one with five, and the ones on the side with three almond-shaped leaves framed with beaded wire. Whitish drops set against a green background fill the pendants (figs 1-3). Enamels with blue, green and white colours are used for the decoration. Dimensions: height 10.7 cm, arched frame 4.3 cm × 1.1 cm, medallion diameter 2 cm, weight 42.2 g.

2. Earring (inv. no. 3381/11), forming a pair with earring no. 1 (inv. no. 3381/8), made of gold, pearls and *cloisonné* enamel (fig. 5). Only the hoop, the arched frame and one of the leaf-shaped pendants are preserved.

3. Earring (inv. no. 3381/9), forming a pair with no. 4 (inv. no. 3381/10), made of gold, pearls and *cloisonné* enamel (figs 6-9). The earrings are composed of crescent-shaped

1 Cf. the contribution by S. Bonev and P. Slavov in this volume.

2 Totev, Preslav Treasure 6-15. – Totev, Preslavskoto sakrovishte 26-28. – Totev, Preslavskoto 101-102.

3 Yordanov, Monetite 8-11. – Totev, Preslavskoto sakrovishte 12. – Totev, Preslavskoto 83. – Totev, Preslav Treasure 82.

4 Cat. New York 1997 no. 228. – Bosselmann-Ruickbie, Byzantinischer Schmuck 25-26. – Grigorov, Metalni nakiti 37-39.



Fig. 1 Gold earring with enamel (one of a pair), decorated with a peacock, Preslav Treasure, Constantinople, tenth century (before 971, 927?), Museum Veliki Preslav, inv. no. 3381/8. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.



Fig. 2 Gold earring with enamel (one of a pair) as in fig. 1, reverse, main enamels lost. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.

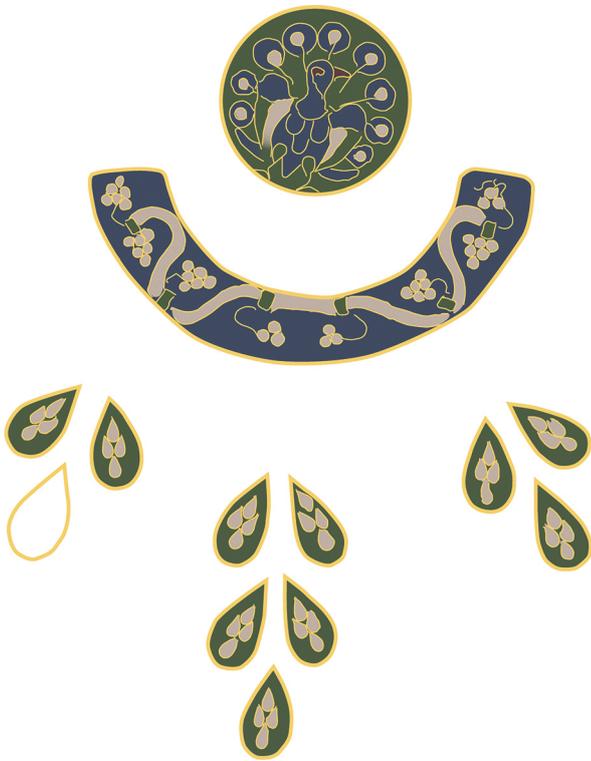


Fig. 3 Colour distribution of the earring in figs 1, 2 and 4. – (Drawing L. Vidanova).



Fig. 4 Detail of fig. 1 with peacock enamel (see also cover illustration). – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA).



Fig. 5 Gold earring with enamel (damaged counterpart of the earring in figs 1-4), Preslav Treasure, Museum Veliki Preslav, inv. no. 3381/8. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.



Fig. 6 Gold earring with enamel (one of a pair), decorated with confronted peacocks (central medallion missing), Preslav Treasure, Constantinople, tenth century (before 971, 927?), Museum Veliki Preslav, inv. no. 3381/9. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.



Fig. 7 Gold earring with enamel as in fig. 6, other side, decorated with running dogs. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.



Fig. 8 Gold earring with enamel, detail of fig. 7, dog. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA).



Fig. 9 Colour scheme of the earring in **figs 6-8**. – (Drawing L. Videnova).

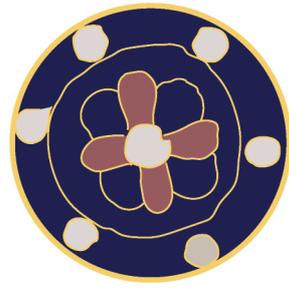


Fig. 12 Colour scheme of the enamel medallion (front and back) in **figs 10-11**. – (Drawing L. Videnova).



Fig. 10 Gold earring with enamel (counterpart of the earring in **figs 6-9**), medallion decorated with a rosette on a dark blue background (other enamels missing), Preslav Treasure, Constantinople, tenth century (before 971, 927?), Museum Veliki Preslav, inv. no. 3381/10. – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.



Fig. 11 Gold earring with enamel as in **fig. 10**, other side, decorated with a rosette on an emerald green background (other enamel parts missing). – (Photo S. Steidl, LEIZA). – Scale 1:1.

plates decorated on both sides with enamel, a hoop and pendants suspended from the lower arc of the plates. A medallion on the top of the crescent is missing today (compare no. 4). On the short sides of the crescent, two golden bi-conical beads are attached. In one of them, the end of the earring's hoop is fixed, while the other end can be pushed into the other bead to close the hoop (as opposed to nos 1 and 2 with a hook-and-eye fastening). The crescent-shaped plates are double-faced, embellished with *cloisonné* enamel and originally framed by rows of pearls (only the rings to hold the strung pearls are preserved). One side of the crescent is decorated with a plant and two peacocks with twigs in their beaks, facing opposite directions (fig. 6). The figures are filled with light green and yellow enamel on a dark blue background. On the other side, there is a palm tree in the centre, surrounded by two hunting dogs running towards the left and the right (figs 7-9). Dark blue, yellow, light blue and red enamel were used on a light green background. Five (of originally six) pendants consisting of golden bi-conical beads with a pearl at each end are attached to the lower end of the crescent. Another pendant that would have been in the centre is now lost and only a hinge construction testifies to its former presence.

Dimensions: height 8 cm, width 4.5 cm, thickness 0.6-0.8 cm, weight 15.89 g.

4. Earring (inv. no. 3381/10, forming a pair with no. 3 (inv. no. 3381/9), made of gold, pearls and *cloisonné* enamel (figs 9-10). Of this earring, only the crescent-shaped frame is preserved today, but as opposed to the earring's counterpart no. 3, the round medallion framed by beaded wire on top of the crescent has survived, decorated with *cloisonné* enamel. On one side is an eight-leafed rosette in blue and red on a blue background (figs 10. 12). The rosette is surrounded by a ring-shaped enamel cell with six white dots. The enamel on the other side (figs 11-12) is decorated with a multi-faceted rosette with four white almond-shaped leaves on the top against a green background. Four (of originally six) bi-conical beads with pearls are preserved on the underside of the frame.

Dimensions: height (with beads) 7 cm, width (with arched frame) 4.5 cm, weight 17.9 g.

Discussion

The design of the first earring consists of three elements, arranged from top to bottom as follows: a circular medallion, a crescent-shaped plate, and leaf-shaped pendants in which three images are placed (figs 1. 3). A visually striking peacock with broad wings and tail fills the medallion (fig. 4 and cover). On the plate, there is a vine scroll with grapes. The leaves of the pendants are decorated with stylised drops. Three colours are used: blue, green and white. The bird is blue with white on the wings and tail on a green background. The tendril is entirely white on a blue background. The drops are white on a green background. These are not just images of a peacock, a tendril with grapes, and leaves with drops. This pictorial scheme can be described as a bird of paradise perched in a fertile vineyard, from which drops fall – perhaps as a symbol of youth and fertility.

The use of peacocks to decorate ornaments began in the Late Roman period, but reached significant popularity in Early Byzantine jewellery. In the sixth to the seventh centuries, crescent-shaped type earrings with peacock images, most often two, standing around a bowl, palm tree, or cross⁵ became particularly fashionable. Baldini Lippolis includes over 20 pairs of earrings with two peacocks in her Early Byzantine earrings catalogue⁶. According to Marvin Ross, the frequent use of this iconography derives from the notion that peacocks symbolise paradise⁷. The crescent-shaped earrings with the image of a bird were, however, not only widespread in Early Christian and Byzantine art, but also popular in sixth- to eleventh-century jewellery of the Islamic lands. Thus, the crescent-shaped type could be characterised as a »universal« type⁸.

Another example comes from the excavations in Chersoneses, which is a part of a *cloisonné* enamel earring: a half-moon with two peacocks facing a goblet⁹ (fig. 13). However,



Fig. 13 Gold plaque decorated in *Senkschmelz* (*émail enfoncé*) with two confronted peacocks, found in Cherson in a tenth- to eleventh-century stratum. – (From Cat. Sevastopol/Austin no. 72, fig. on p. 179).

5 Deppert-Lippitz, *Jewellery* 55-56.

6 Baldini Lippolis, *L'oreficeria* 100-105. See also Yeroulanou, *Diatrita*.

7 Ross, *Goldsmith-work* 362-363.

8 Albani, *Elegance Over the Borders* 194-195.

9 Cat. Sevastopol/Austin 2011 no. 72 (D. Zhuravlev / E. Novikova / V. Zaleskaya).



Fig. 14 Gold earring with enamels, decorated with peacocks, found on Crete, Constantinople, tenth century (before 961), National Archaeological Museum, Stathatos Collection, inv. no. Στ 485. – (Photo A. Bosselmann-Ruickbie).



Fig. 15 Gold earring with enamels, decorated with dogs, found on Crete, Constantinople, tenth century (before 961), National Archaeological Museum, Stathatos Collection, inv. no. Στ 483. – (Photo A. Bosselmann-Ruickbie).

the Byzantine crescent-shaped earrings from Crete with the image of two peacocks facing a palm tree in the centre are the closest *comparanda* to the Preslav earring with peacocks¹⁰ (fig. 14). The similarities continue in the medallions: both the Preslav and the Crete specimens are round and with four, five-leafed rosettes with a circle in the middle. Very similar is also the medallion rosette applied to the icon of Mary from Georgia, dating back to the tenth century. It is framed with

an outer circle of granules and golden round wire inside, has four almond-shaped leaves and a red dot in the centre¹¹.

The similarities of the Preslav earrings and the ones found on Crete are also transferred to the opposite side, depicting running dogs with open mouths¹² (figs 7. 8. 15). They are the closest *comparanda* to the Preslav pieces. They feature identical triangles that seem to support the palm trees. In the Crete earrings, clearly, similar triangles represent the hind legs.

10 Ross, *Goldsmith-work* fig. 440. – Cat. Athens 1985 no. 192 (M. Borboudakis). – Cat. Thessaloniki 2011, nos 5. 7. 72 (K. Sidiropoulos / M. Vasileiadou). – Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Byzantinischer Schmuck* no. 66.

11 Dshawachischwili/Abramischwili, *Goldschmiedekunst* 8-24.

12 Coche de la Ferté, *Collection Stathatos* 18-19 fig. 5 pl. 2.

The plant between the dogs is almost identical to the Preslav example. On the Cretan earrings, the dogs' tongues hang out. What distinguishes the dogs from Crete and Preslav is that the former run towards each other, while the latter run in opposite directions. There are also two more crescent-shaped earrings from Crete with three birds with twigs in their beaks and a round medallion with a bird¹³, as well as other examples, such as the earrings in London with three birds and round medallions with a bird¹⁴.

The contours of the birds and plants on Preslav and Crete earrings are executed in a similar fashion. The same golden beads hold the ring. The plant between the animals has the same triangular base and identical leaves. The visualisation of peacocks, vines, palm trees and dogs is undoubtedly due to popular narratives and the universal symbolism of these images. It can be assumed that peacocks would have been a symbol of paradise, while the dogs represented bravery and power. Apart from the symbolism of the images, however, it is clear that the makers of the ornaments have used common patterns and technologies.

There are two views regarding the origin of the Crete earrings: either they were produced in Constantinople; or they were products of a local Cretan workshop. The arguments for the second hypothesis are, above all, the (legible) Kufic inscription on the Cretan earrings, as well as the depiction of running dogs, which point to the hybrid character of their decoration, closely related to both Byzantine and Fatimid traditions. Coche de la Ferté suggested that these earrings were made in the tenth-century Crete for Islamic residents¹⁵, while Bosselmann-Ruickbie argued that the earrings were of Constantinopolitan origin, however, displaying Arabic inscriptions to accommodate the recipient of a supposed imperial gift, which would have been given to one of the rulers of Arab-occupied Crete in the mid-tenth century¹⁶. In the case of the Preslav Treasure, however, one earring would combine two cultural traditions and, at first sight, two conflicting symbols – peacocks can be read as an emblem of aristocratic origin for women in Byzantium, and hunting dogs are a sign of the ruler's power in the Islamic and Sasanian cultures¹⁷.

Going beyond the jewellery, we will see that borrowing Islamic motifs in art and architecture is not unusual for the Middle Byzantine culture¹⁸, nor is it something incidental in the First Bulgarian Kingdom. The clearest example is the Large Palace in Pliska. Its dimensions, plan and manner of construction follow exactly those of the Umayyad palaces¹⁹. The same happened in Constantinople. It was as late as the early ninth century when the construction initiatives of the Byzantine Empire were renewed. The newly constructed buildings were the product of different cultural parameters and broke the traditional classic pattern. The style of the palaces built during this period reflects the inspiring influence of Islamic architecture. The most famous example is the Abbasid-style palace of Emperor Theophilos in the Asian suburbs of Constantinople²⁰.

Looking at the Preslav earring, we can clearly see the combination of cultural influences from both Byzantium and the Arabs²¹. One explanation for the wide geographical distribution of crescent-shaped earrings, especially those with peacocks, could be that all of them were made in Constantinople. Yvonne Stolz, however, stated with regard to the Early Byzantine period and some jewellery from Egypt that »it can be excluded that all high-quality jewellery with »interregionale« techniques, shapes, motifs, and styles was made in Constantinople«²². However, the situation in the tenth century was different in many aspects, and more research is needed.

The question remains where the Preslav earrings were produced. Part of the answer may be in the chemical composition of the enamels, particularly the trace element pattern²³. As to the date, the earrings are comparable with the other jewellery from the treasure and should be dated according to the coins deposited together with the jewellery. The latest ones belong to Emperor Constantin VII and his son and co-Emperor Romanos, struck in 945-959. This is *terminus post quem* for the burial of the treasure. The production of the jewellery could be connected with the events of 927 when the Byzantine princess Maria became a Bulgarian queen. The wedding took place in Constantinople and, although explicit proof is lacking, it is likely that the jewellery, especially the earrings, came to Preslav with the Byzantine princess²⁴.

13 Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Byzantinischer Schmuck* nos 65, 67.

14 Earrings in the British Museum London: Cat. London 1994 no. 142 (D. Buckton). – Other examples, see Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Byzantinischer Schmuck* figs 115-124.

15 Coche de la Ferté, *Collection Stathatos* 19.

16 Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Email- und Körbchenohrringe* 97-107.

17 Stanilov, *Risano »Capsule«* 27-31.

18 See, e.g., Walker, *Courtly Objects*.

19 Vaklinov, *Kontaktite* 33.

20 Brubaker/Haldon, *Byzantium* 18.

21 See generally on Byzantium and the Arabs, e.g., Cat. Thessaloniki 2011.

22 Stolz, *Jewellery Production* 33-34.

23 See the contribution by M. Aubin, S. Greiff and R. Schwab in this volume.

24 See Bosselmann-Ruickbie, *Byzantinischer Schmuck* esp. 36-38.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung / Résumé

The Enamel Earrings in the Preslav Treasure

About 20 examples of luxury gold earrings made using the technique of *cloisonné* enamel are known to date. The only complete earrings with a solid provenance are the two pairs from the Preslav Treasure that are discussed in this paper. They were found during archaeological excavations, together with 15 Byzantine silver coins dating to 945-959, and are, consequently, the only ones that can be dated with some certainty. It is usually assumed that the jewellery was concealed in 971, when the Bulgarian capital of Veliki Preslav was conquered by the Byzantine army of Emperor John I Tzimiskes (969-976). As far as the date is concerned, this is most likely 927, when the Byzantine princess Maria married the Bulgarian King Peter I (927-969) in the Byzantine capital Constantinople. The question of their exact manufacturing date is, however, still open.

Die Email-Ohrringe aus dem Preslav-Schatz

Bisher sind etwa 20 prächtige Goldohrringe bekannt, die in der Technik des Cloisonné-Emails hergestellt wurden. Die einzigen vollständigen Ohrringe mit gesicherter Provenienz sind die beiden Paare aus dem Preslav-Schatz, die in diesem Beitrag besprochen werden. Sie wurden bei archäologischen Ausgrabungen zusammen mit 15 byzantinischen Silbermünzen aus den Jahren 945-959 gefunden und sind somit die einzigen, die mit einiger Sicherheit datiert werden können. In der Regel wird davon ausgegangen, dass der Schmuck im Jahr 971 versteckt worden ist, als die bulgarische Hauptstadt Veliki Preslav von der byzantinischen Armee des Kaisers Johannes I. Tzimiskes (969-976) erobert wurde. Was das Entstehungsdatum anbelangt, so handelt es sich höchstwahrscheinlich um das Jahr 927, als die byzantinische Prinzessin Maria den bulgarischen König Peter I. (927-969) in der byzantinischen Hauptstadt Konstantinopel heiratete. Die Frage nach dem genauen Herstellungsdatum ist jedoch noch offen.

Les boucles d'oreilles en émail du trésor de Preslav

À ce jour, on connaît une vingtaine de boucles d'oreilles de luxe en or réalisées selon la technique de l'émail cloisonné. Les seules boucles d'oreilles complètes dont la provenance est bien attestée sont les deux paires du trésor de Preslav qui sont évoquées dans cet article. Elles ont été trouvées lors de fouilles archéologiques, en même temps que 15 pièces d'argent byzantines datées entre 945-959, et sont donc les seules à pouvoir être datées avec une relative certitude. On suppose généralement que les bijoux ont été dissimulés en 971, lorsque la capitale bulgare de Veliki Preslav a été conquise par l'armée byzantine de l'empereur Jean I^{er} Tzimiskès (969-976). La date de fabrication est probablement 927, lorsque la princesse byzantine Marie épousa le tsar bulgare Pierre I^{er} (927-969) dans la capitale byzantine, à Constantinople. Cependant, la date exacte de fabrication reste sujette à discussion.