Kiev, one of the most ancient cities of Europe, was for three centuries the capital of the powerful East Slavonic state of Kievan Rus’ (10th–13th centuries). Prince Vladimir the Great, ruler of Kievan Rus’ (r. 980–1015) introduced Christianity to Rus’ from Byzantium, making it the new state religion in 988. The event marked the beginning of a new era in art for Rus’ in general and for Kiev in particular, which accessed and absorbed the rich culture of the Byzantine Empire.

Strategically located on the steep banks of the river Dnieper, Kiev became the focal point of contact between Rus’ and the Byzantine Empire. Kievan Rus’ was very active in adopting everything it needed to become a prosperous state. It developed quickly following the construction of the first Rus’ Christian stone church – richly decorated with marble, mosaics and frescos – built by Byzantine architects and builders in the 10th century in a courtyard in the centre of Kiev. In the wealthiest and most influential parts of the city, where there was a high concentration of very rich members of princely families, marvellous palaces, stone churches and monasteries were erected surrounded by the building complexes and courtyards of nobles, warriors, administrators, merchants and craftsmen. Local architects, painters and goldsmiths prospered there. In the course of a century Kiev developed into one of the largest international centres in Europe and some Western prelates in the 11th century described Kiev as being ‘the rival of Constantinople’. Chronicles glorified Kiev as ‘the charm of the world’ and ‘the mother of all cities of Rus’, and wrote ‘Kiev does honour to all the lands of Rus’..., it is the glory of Rus’.

Throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, ecclesiastical and cultural contacts between Byzantium and Rus’ continued to flourish. Both architecture and the adornment of churches reflected Byzantine influences and features. The most expensive form of monumental decoration appeared in the interiors of Kievan churches where rich mosaics and frescos depicted events from the life of Christ. Mystical images of individual saints beautified churches while simultaneously seeming to form an integral part of the congregation. Byzantine influence can also be seen in the miniatures of Kievan Rus’ illuminated manuscripts, the old Chronicles and in a number of other books. Christian objects of Rus’ religious services, such as the magnificent processional crosses, patens, chalices and other sacred vessels further enhanced the rich liturgical tradition of the Church. The Byzantine Empire not only supplied the craftsmen of ancient Rus’ with Christian iconography and objects but the rich goldsmiths’ tradition encouraged the development of techniques such as the enamelled-gold technique.

Although Byzantium played an important role in the art of ancient Rus’ and the two cultures were closely connected, its influence on the artistic culture of the Kievan state varied during different periods. This is probably why we do not have enough evidence to confirm the full extent of the deep interaction between the two cultures in the field of jewellery.
Jewellery from Princely Kiev and Byzantine Influence

During the 11th to 12th century. Moreover, Byzantine jewellery itself (earrings, bracelets, finger-rings) remains better known from earlier examples of the 4th to the 7th centuries. From the second half of the 11th century, one of the most remarkable periods in the 1000-year development of Byzantine culture, the identifiable number of Byzantine or Constantinopolitan pieces of jewellery is very limited, as it is from later periods. In contrast significant numbers of hoards (close to 70), large and small, were found over the past 200 years, in the central, aristocratic and fortified part of medieval Kiev. Most of them were discovered by accident (during the laying of water-pipes or drains, digging of foundations, creation of roads, etc.), close to old monasteries and churches where during turbulent times they were buried in the ground for their protection. These hoards, which included articles of princely apparel and religious artefacts, consisted mainly of jewellery of high artistic workmanship decorated with polychrome enamel, niello work, filigree, pearls and precious stones. Among them were gold cloisonné diadems, temporal pendants known as kolty, medallions, ceremonial chains and necklaces as well as silver bracelets, finger-rings, kolty decorated with niello and filigree, etc. The discovery of this large amount of jewellery (over 2,000 ornaments) brought to light native Kievan enamelled gold and silver work from the 11th to 12th centuries. Through their shape, style and subject matter, these ornaments indicate that Kiev developed its own goldsmiths’ workshops and traditions distinct from the Byzantine heritage.

One of the most fashionable female ceremonial headdress ornaments in Kievian Rus’ in the mid-11th and beginning of the 12th century was the gold and cloisonné enamel temporal pendants (kolty), which originally contained small pieces of cloth infused with aromatic oils or herbs. Over 20 pairs of these elegant and luxurious ornaments have survived to the present day. Each pair is unique in its design and motifs, suggesting they were all specially commissioned.

The decoration on the gold cloisonné kolty as well as on the other enamelled gold jewellery found in Kievan hoards follows traditional designs: most of them depict a pair of birds, rare sirens flanking a tree of life, or a geometric and floral composition (vine tendrils, trefoils and quatrefoils). The depictions of birds in general are popular in gold cloisonné Kievan jewellery, but they are most numerous on the kolty. Stylistically, the birds fall into several different categories, the main ones being:

1) A pair of birds facing each other on either side of a stylised tree of life or a small medallion with a three petalled flower above a triangle (Pls 1a and 1b),
2) A single bird in profile moving to right (Pl. 2),
3) A pair of sirens (birds with human female heads) flanking a stylised tree of life or an equivalent central composition (Pl. 3).

Such bird compositions originated in Syrian ornaments in use in Asia Minor which were, via Byzantium, transmitted to the whole of the barbarian world. They were widespread in Byzantine art of the 10th to 12th century.

Working alongside Byzantine artisans, Kievian craftsmen learned varied skills and became masters themselves, particularly in goldsmithing and enamelling. This is why the Kievan interpretation of these Near Eastern and Byzantine motifs displays idiosyncratic details uncharacteristic of the Greek examples. The latter show peacocks (or alternative types of birds) with folded or spread wings, whereas most of the medieval Rus’ artefacts show short-necked birds with stocky and static figures, most likely doves. The idea that the dove is a sacred bird came from the Christian tradition: it is associated with the Holy Spirit and symbolises kindness and beauty.

Although the basic design of kolty is similar, the details of the depiction of the tree (thin, tall, with trefoil roots and short branches, tied in the middle with a distinct band) and of the
two birds (one wing folded, the other raised and separate from the body) or sirens with their different type of headdress/crown, tails and plumage, as well as the floral and geometric design on the back of each pair, are different. There are similar examples but none of them is an exact copy of the other pair.

A rare class of these gold and cloisonné enamel temporal pendants depict images of saints and isolated heads within enamelled circles. Prior to the present study only three examples of pairs with crowned heads were known among Kievan Rus' gold and cloisonné enamel kolty. All of them were found in hoards together with other precious jewellery in the ancient central part of medieval Kiev.

The first pair to be considered, found in July 1906 and now preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is less well-known in the corpus of medieval Kievan jewellery. On the fronts of the pendants are depictions of two birds with scaly plumage and wavy tails. They flank a central composition of a miniature circle and a triangle. On the backs there are isolated female crowned heads within enamelled central circles with three ornamental elements around them (Pls 4–5).

Another pair was discovered in 1876 on the Leskov estate, near the Desyatynna Church (Pl. 6). Kondakov, who was the first to describe the hoard and these kolty in particular, believed that they depicted female heads. The reason for his suggestion was the loose flowing hair and the shape of the crown in the form of a kokoshnik (female headdress), which he thought indicated female depictions. Another scholar was more specific, suggesting that the image is a ‘portrait of a famous Kievan woman of the 12th to the beginning the 13th century’.

The third pair of gold and cloisonné enamel kolty with similar images was found in 1949 on Trekhsvyatytelska Street (Pl. 7). This pair is very interesting in terms of both the design and the type of construction. Each kolt consists of two individual disc-shaped base plates in sheet gold; the outer rims of these were cut to form rays in an arcaded pattern and covered at the ends by small hemispheres. A soldered internal gold strip holds the two base plates together. What is very uncommon is that at the tops of the kolty the small u-shaped gaps are not open as on other examples. In this pair the tops are covered by thin gold strips each with three holes for perfume or scented oil to escape. Each pendant is embellished with a pearl border, but in an unusual way. A fine wire is woven through the edge of the border, so that each arch originally contained a single pearl. Each central plaque with a cloisonné depiction is framed by an L-sectioned gold strip that is soldered in place. Two lengths of spiral wire composed of two wires twisted together encircle the frame. Between them there are five loops for a pearl border. Therefore this pair is quite luxuriously crafted and finely detailed in its use of a great number of pearls of different sizes, the best examples of which were imported to Kievan Rus’ from Persia.
In the central circle on the front of these pendants a young, attractive face is depicted on a bright blue enamelled background. The head has short, black, widening wavy hair, with curls on the forehead and eyes looking to the right. On the head there is a trapezoidal crown, with circular projections at both ends. The surface of the crown is decorated with three red vertical lines and circles of blue and red enamel, signifying precious stones. These images have been described in the literature and identified as female.9 Crowns of this type could probably have been worn by either males or females. Thus, on the Byzantine crown of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) similar crowns are worn by the Emperor himself, his wife Zoe and her sister Theodora. However, the women’s hair is bunched, pulled back and covered with a headdress.10 Bunched together hair covered with a light material can also be seen in the depiction of Desislava, the wife of Sebastokrator Kaloyan, in the fresco of the church of SS Nicholas and Panteleemon at Boyana (Bulgaria) dated to 1259.11 A similar depiction of a princess with a headdress and covered hair appears on the fresco in the north-western tower of the St Sophia Cathedral, Kiev, dated to 1037.12 It is unlikely that a woman of royal position would have worn short, flowing hair topped with a crown during that period.

The crown and hair style on the kolty from the hoard of 1876 find direct parallels in the depiction of Alexander the Great on an enamelled dish dated to the 1140s, which may have been an imperial gift from Byzantium to the Turkish Artukid ruler.13 The crown in both depictions has the same shape and is decorated in a similar way, with vertical lines in the centre and rectangles at the sides. This type of crown has close parallels in Byzantine art, representing the headdress of Byzantine Emperors. It can be seen on King Solomon, the Venetian Doge and Alexander the Great on the enamelled plaques of the Pala d'Oro, 1102–1108, and on the head of a youth, who plays a harp, on a silver-gilt Byzantine bowl of the mid-12th century found in Chernihiv (Pl. 8).14

These images suggest that the pairs of kolty from the Kiev hoards of 1876 and 1949 more likely depict crowned male rather than female heads. They are most probably representations of Alexander the Great, although the placement of both images in the central circle on a background of blue enamel is usual for holy depictions. On the kolty of 1876 the background to the head is patterned with miniature crosses and circles in a very similar manner to that on the halo design of the Byzantine gold, silver and cloisonné enamel medallions from an icon frame of the late 11th to early 12th century in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.15

Referring back to the pair of kolty depicting a female crowned head in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Pls 4–5), it
must be noted that it differs from the other two pairs discussed above in both the shape of the crown (which has smooth outlines) and in the hair style. The latter is shown as wavy hair reaching only down to the ear, suggesting that it was bunched and pulled back. Thus, all of the known gold and cloisonné enamel kolty from medieval hoards found in Kiev there is only one pair which bears the image of a crowned female head, making it unique among the jeweller’s art of Kievan Rus’.

The zoomorphic and foliate designs of the gold kolty are usually considered as local types rooted in pagan traditions and beliefs. However, many types of patterns known from Kievan Rus’ jewellery can be seen perfectly expressed in Byzantine enamels of the 11th to 12th century. Thus, compositions of four lilies in a cruciform shoot (krins) arrangement and with petalled flowers, can be seen on the medallions and enamel plaques of the Pala d’Oro in St Mark’s Basilica in Venice.18

The remains of jewellery workshops, with tools and bits of enamel, found during the excavations in the princely court on the Old Kievan Hill, provide direct evidence for native enamel production in the Rus’ capital in the 11th century.17 Among the excavated items were a copper former used to make each half of a kolty’s convex section, and a bronze template with a cut-out openwork depiction of two birds flanking a tree that was used as a model in preparing the gold sheet (see Szmoniewski, this volume, Pl. 13). This matrix corresponds to the depiction on one of the kolty in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s collection. An analogous pair of kolty was found near Desyatynna Church in 1876, which then entered the private collection of B. Khanenko. The find-spot supports the belief that kolty of this type were manufactured in a goldsmith’s workshop belonging to the princely court of ancient Kiev.

Only a few temporal pendants in the cloisonné technique are known amongst the group of similar types of Byzantine enamelled jewellery of the late 11th or beginning of the 12th century. One example is preserved in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Pl. 9).19 It consists of a hollow, crescent-shaped gold receptacle with an opening and a suspension loop. This was made from a relatively pure alloy (88–92% gold).19 The two convex sides were soldered along the outer edges and then overlaid with a plain band of gold. The front is decorated in the centre with a haloed, beardless young male head in three-quarter profile with dark hair falling about his neck. He may represent an angel or St John the Theologian.20 The image is contained within a gold circle on a field of red florets. The surrounding circular field is filled with translucent green enamels decorated with a cloisonné vine tendril. The central field on the back of the pendant contains an enamelled pattern of tightly interlocked red and white palmettes with accents of translucent green against a blue background. The enamel, with cloisons of varying widths, completely covers the convex surfaces of the pendant. A thin, gold stick, embellished with a pattern of crosses in cloisonné enamel (length 5.1cm) for inserting a cloth infused with aromatic substances into the pendant, accompanies the object. This ostentatious addition to the pendant only appears once in the collection of known temporal pendants/kolty.

Another such pendant, which is largely unknown to western scholars, was found during Pasternak’s excavations in the city of Halych in western Ukraine in 1940.21 Maybe this precious item (weight 11.79g) reached Rus’ as a gift from Byzantium. The two pendants are very similar to one another in their shape, patterns and technique of manufacture. The elaborate craftsmanship and minute scale of the enamelling on these objects, as well as their individual motifs, suggest that they are likely to come from a group of enamelled works produced in a highly specialised Constantinopolitan workshop of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century (Pl. 10).

Closely related to these temporal pendants are a collection of gold buttons/pendants in the Museum of Historical Treasures of the Ukraine in Kiev;22 and the tip of a sceptre, once in the Scolet collection, and now in Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC.23 Their surfaces are divided vertically and horizontally by bands into different sections and entirely covered with cloisonné enamel decorated with quatrefoil crosses and a floral motif in red and blue. Some scholars consider this group of enamels to have originated in Byzantium and to be associated with the same imperial court goldsmith’s workshop. They are an invaluable source for defining the differences between Byzantine and Kievan enamelled jewellery that has survived from the Byzantine period of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century.

Ross noted that the shape and the enamelling of Kievan kolty was derived from Constantinopolitan jewellery.24 But it should be noted that the shapes of the above mentioned Byzantine pendants are not identical to those manufactured in Kiev. These temporal pendants differ from the similar type of known medieval Kievian jewellery in their size, scale and profile, the intricacy of their design and the fact that the whole surface is filled in with a variety of enamel colours, implying some differences in production.

No exact copy of a Byzantine object has been found amongst the jewellery that has been discovered in Kievian hoards. Contemporary Byzantine, as opposed to Kievian, jewellery is not clearly associated with any particular centre of manufacture or related centres. One can discern a difference only in the quality of manufacture among groups of gold jewellery with enamel, pearls, and gems.

Jewellery that derived from Kievian workshops has
different characteristics. None of the Kievan kolty had the solid cloisonné enamelling that was used to decorate the entire surface of both lunate-shaped plaques, which comprised the front and back of the kolt. The enamels on Kievian jewellery also have a limited palette of white, red, green and blue, although some pieces contain additional colours such as yellow, black or turquoise.

Common to both Byzantine and Kievian enamels, the colours were separated by flat wires soldered to the base of the empty cavity. After layers of enamel were added, the whole piece was polished so that the enamel was not only flush with the wires but was also glossy. The result was an image intricately defined by bright colours separated by the finest of wires.

Yet Kievian enamels differ from Byzantine enamels not only in both colour and technique, but also, more importantly, in subject matter. Fine Byzantine workmanship, however, represents a crucial source of influence on the artistic culture of Rus’ and without its existence some types of ornaments may not have been created.

Kiev was as important to Rus’ as Constantinople was to Byzantium. Both cities created and developed medieval jewellery fashions for the upper echelons of society. All shifts in the fashion of Rus’ medieval ceremonial costume ornaments were closely connected to Kiev. Here, in the artistic centre of the state, gifted artisans, goldsmiths and enamellers were modifying old forms and creating new shapes/forms of decoration. They began to produce different variations for individual types of jewellery. For example, fashionable female ornaments, such as the similarly styled gold and cloisonné or nielloed silver temporal pendants, had different forms: round and smooth with a pearl border; with an inserted decorative plate and a border of cutout rays; star-shaped with filigree; with an arcaded filigree border, etc., and showed various images and decorative elements.

Plate 9 Gold and enamel kolt with a beardless male bust (front) and palmettes (back), with the gold stick for inserting a cloth infused with aromatic substances into the pendant, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Plate 10 Gold and enamel kolt from Halych
Local goldsmiths often borrowed decorative ideas from illuminated books and church paintings. Thus, the miniatures of St John and St Mark are compositionally placed within a form of quatrefoil in the ‘Ostrimor’ Gospel (1056–57). This type of quatrefoil is present on many Kievan gold temporal pendants as well as on ceremonial medallion chains. Likewise on the front cover of the ‘Yurievsky Gospel’ (1120s) one can see symmetrically positioned birds, geometric and foliate ornaments based on a three-petalled flower (krin). These motifs are also present in Kievan enamelled jewellery and have common features with decorative elements in the Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, as well as with the richly decorated St Mark’s Basilica in Venice, as noted above.

Kievan craftsmen may have fashioned their exceptional works to imitate the splendours of Byzantine art but were better able to create high-quality works of art than we might suspect. Compared to their counterparts, they were less inhibited by the canons and traditions of Byzantine art. The perfection of medieval Kievan cloisonné jewellery has often resulted in it being labelled ‘Russo-Byzantine’. However, in this case the term ‘Byzantine’ characterises the type and the level of art, but not its origin or place of manufacture. In developing a distinctive fine art and perfecting considerable technical skills, medieval Kiev created its own rich traditions in enamel and niello production. This deeply rooted cultural style can be labelled old Kiev.

Notes
1 V.N. Lazarev, Mikhailovskie mosaiki, Moscow, 1966, 15.
2 The word ‘kolt’ derives from ‘kolo’ (circle), the sun. Hence, the kolt symbolised the shining sun by its shape and golden colour. In Kievan Rus’ the sun was regarded as a goddess of light. Interestingly, the word ‘kolt’ (meaning circle) remains in use in present-day Ukraine.
3 N.P. Kondakov, Russkie klady: Issledovanie drevnostei velikokniazheskogo perioda, St Petersburg, 1896, 198.
4 MMA, Department of Medieval Art and the Cloisters inv. no. 17.190.702/704
5 Kondakov (n. 3), 113.
6 V.M. Vasilenko, Russkoe prikladnoe iskusstvo, Moscow, 1977, 287.
7 I.M. Samoilovsky, ‘Novyi skarb chasiv Kyivs’koi Rusi’, Arkheologiya 6 (1952), 123–4, fig. 5.
11 Ibid., 320. See also Albani, this volume.
13 Evans and Wixom (n. 10), 423, fig. 281.
15 Evans and Wixom (n. 10), 347, no. 234.
16 Hahnloser and Volbach (n. 14), pls LXIX, LX.
18 Inv. no. 1990. 235a; height 2.3cm; with loop 4.9cm; depth 1.2cm.
21 Y. Pasternak, Arkheologiya Ukrainy, Toronto, 1961, between 280 and 281; M. Fihol, Art of old Halych, Kiev, 1997, 146. For many years it was suggested that this kolt had been lost in the 1940s. However, it was in the collection of Y. Pasternak who emigrated to Canada. After his death the kolt was kept by his student, L.Palij, and in 1998 she brought it back to the Ukraine. At present the kolt is preserved by the Historical Museum in Lviv.
22 Museum of Historical Treasures (n. 14), 174, n. 135.
23 Wixom (n. 20), 661, fig. 6; Evans and Wixom (n. 10), 249, no. 175.
25 M.C. Ross and G. Downey, ‘An Emperor’s Gift and Notes on Byzantine Silver Jewelry of the Middle Period’, The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery XIX–XX (1956/7), 29–30. Some scholars have confused the term ‘Russo’ with the concept of Russia. The two terms Russia and Rus’ cover two different historical realities (the Latin word for Rus’ was Ruthenia; the name Ukraine appeared later).