In the passage concerning jewellers, the *Book of the Eparch*, published by Leo VI the Wise (886–912), states that if a jeweller discovers a woman offering for sale objects of gold or silver, or precious stones, he should inform the Eparch of these things so that he could prevent their being exported to foreign peoples. The content of this passage betrays the Byzantine state’s intention to control the circulation of jewellery outside its borders. How realistic was this aim? Was the medieval taste for objects of personal adornment strictly ‘national’ or can we speak of an ‘international’ fashion for jewellery? As modern research has pointed out, persons, goods and ideas circulated quite widely in the Middle Byzantine period (9th–13th centuries), I shall attempt to support this point of view on the basis of the archaeological evidence provided by medieval earrings, concentrating mainly on the relationships between the forms and types of jewellery prevalent in Byzantine, Islamic and Slavic regions.

Two well-known examples of Middle Byzantine painting may speak in favour of our point. On the late 12th-century fresco of the Church of Hagioi Anargyroi at Kastoria, Anna Radine, the wife of the donor Theodoros Lemniotes, wears a pair of gold earrings with a crescent-shaped body (Pl. 1). Gold earrings of the same type, which are very similar to a pair of earrings that probably originated in Kievan Rus’, also adorn the elegant figure of Desislava (Pl. 2), the wife of Sebastokrator Kalojan, who in 1259 commissioned the wall-paintings of the Church of SS Nicholas and Panteleimon at Bojana, near Sofia, in the Bulgarian kingdom.

It is no exaggeration to say that crescent-shaped earrings, which appeared in the mid-2nd millennium BC, and passed from Rome to Byzantium and from Byzantium to Islamic and Slavic countries, are the most popular type in the Middle Byzantine period, as there are a large number of surviving specimens. They are made not only of gold and silver, aimed at the aristocracy, but also of other materials such as copper and tin-plated bronze which could be purchased by people of a lower social status.

A single gold earring in the Kanellopoulos Museum in Athens (Pl. 3), and a pair in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC, are characteristic examples of the crescent-shaped type. In the centre of the body is an openwork medallion with a repoussé bust of the Virgin orans surmounted by a cross with the engraved inscription ΦΩΣ, ΖΩΗ (‘Light, Life’). As these earrings in Athens and Washington have the same dimensions and decoration they have been attributed to the same Constantinopolitan workshop and dated to the 10th–11th century. Inscribed earrings with the same body shape (the crescent or ‘hilal’ in Arabic) also seem to have met the taste of the Islamic public, as testified by a pair of 12th-century earrings found in Majorca and a pair in the Benaki Museum in Athens (Pl. 4), both of which are attributed to a workshop in Islamic Spain. The central motif over the upper edge of the semicircular body is symbolic of redemption, as it depicts two confronted falcons nourished by the Tree of Life, a very popular motif in both Byzantine and Islamic iconography. The content of the Arabic calligraphic inscription, executed in filigree on

Plate 1 Anna Radine, detail. Wall-painting in the Church of Hagioi Anargyroi at Kastoria, late 12th century

Plate 2 Desislava, detail. Wall-painting in the Church of SS Nicholas and Panteleimon at Bojana, dated 1259
Plate 3 Gold earring, 10th–11th century. Kanellopoulos Museum, Athens

Plate 5 Pair of gold earrings with enamel decoration, first half of 10th century. London, British Museum (PE AF 338)

Plate 4 Pair of gold earrings, late 12th century. Benaki Museum, Athens


Plate 7a-b Gold earrings probably from Crete, 10th century. National Archaeological Museum, Stathatos Collection, Athens
the crescent-shaped body, is also religious; it has, however, a more pronounced decorative role than that on the above-mentioned Byzantine earrings.

On the other hand an iconographic repertoire inspired by nature can be observed on a number of crescent-shaped earrings which have been dated to the 9th to 10th centuries. They all consist of a lunate plaque framed by hollow gold spheres and lavishly decorated with enameled depicting animals, birds and plants, granulation and precious stones, while around their outer edges gems, fastened to rods or inside rings, alternate with triangular projections composed of granules. To this group belong two single earrings, one of which is a tomb find from Naupactos, western Greece, while the other, probably from the municipality of Rethymnon, belongs to the collection of the Historical Museum in Herakleion, Crete.

Further specimens are two pairs of earrings in the Kanellopoulos Museum, Athens, and in the British Museum, London (Pl. 5), as well as two single earrings from the Preslav Treasure (Pl. 6). The latter are datable to the first half of the 10th century, which indicates that this type was also in fashion in the capital of the first Bulgarian kingdom (681–1018). Further outstanding examples of this group are a pair of earrings (Pl. 7) and three single earrings in the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, found in Crete together with coins of Michael II (820–29) and Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (913–59). Two pairs of these earrings bear Kufic inscriptions on the reverse, asking for God’s blessing on their owners, Aisa and Zaynab. Pointing to the hybrid character of their decoration, closely related to both Byzantine and Fatimid traditions, Coche de la Ferté suggested that these earrings were manufactured in 10th-century Crete for Islamic residents, probably before the Byzantine re-conquest of 961.

Surviving silver earrings with a flat crescent-shaped body are decorated in the same techniques as their gold counterparts (filigree and granulation) but not enamel, thus creating less colourful effects. Instead, they have attachments of various shapes axially fixed to their lunate body. Typical examples are the excavated finds from two cemeteries, at Azoros in the

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Plate 8 Pair of silver earrings, 9th–10th century. Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens

Plate 9 Pair of silver earrings from Veliko Gradište, mid-10th–early 11th century. National Museum of Požarevac

Elasdan district and in Hagia Trias near Melea, in Thessaly. Another well-known example is a 9th- to 10th-century pair in the collection of the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens (Pl. 8). The lunate body is formed of three braid wires ending in spherical ‘beads’. A cast cross with flaring arms is attached to the upper edge of the body, while a convex disc surrounded by five granulated triangular protrusions projects from the bottom. The same circular motif is encountered on a bronze crescent-shaped earring, an 11th-century excavated find from Corinth, the upper part and the right half of which are now missing. A triple braid also forms the lunate body of an elaborate pair of mid-10th- to early 11th-century silver earrings found at Veliko Gradište, Serbia, belonging to the National Museum of Požarevac (Pl. 9). From the body, which ends in two biconical beads, is suspended an elongated attachment composed of conical elements of openwork filigree and granules. Because of the high artistic level of their execution and their exceptional shape, which is unique in Slavic countries to date, these earrings are thought to have been imported into medieval Serbia by a Byzantine merchant for an aristocratic client with a penchant for Byzantine forms.

Bronze earrings of the crescent-shaped type have the same characteristics as those made of silver, but are less elaborately decorated. A bronze earring of this type was found in the excavations at Corinth, Greece (Pl. 10), and can be dated to the 10th century or later. Its lunate body, studded with small knobs, has a scalloped upper edge and an elongated granulated projection at the bottom, which terminates in a biconical bead. A group of 11 single earrings, dated to the 9th to 10th centuries and found together in the excavation of the 6th-century fortress of Boljetin on the south bank of the Danube in Serbia, similar to the Corinth earring (Pl. 11). The upper edges of their crescent-shaped bodies are scalloped and pendants are attached at the bottom. Five of these pieces are made of tin-plated copper and are decorated in filigree, while their pendants are pear-shaped. The other six, made of tin-plated bronze, are cast; their decoration imitates the filigree technique and their attachment is in the form of a...
three-pointed star. These 11 earrings have been attributed to a local workshop which would have been aware of Byzantine models. As they are all single specimens, they have been interpreted as samples used by a Slavic artisan-merchant.

Crescent-shaped earrings with elongated pendants attached to their bodies are closely related to earrings where the lower part consists of a thick wire flanked by two beads and axially decorated with an attachment. This type is considered to have been a northern import to Byzantium in the 5th and 6th centuries during the period of the ‘Völkerwanderung’, but is also widespread in the Middle Byzantine period, from Macedonia to Crete, with specimens closely related to earrings of Slavic origin. A typical and very well preserved example is a pair of bronze silver-plated earrings from a cemetery at Azoros, Elasson in Thessaly. The axially fixed attachment is in the form of a granulated cylinder, which is flanked by two spherical beads with knobs. Three similar specimens, with biconical beads, were found in the excavations at Corinth and can be dated to the 10th to 11th century. This type is further represented by a pair of earrings from a Middle Byzantine tomb in the Church of St John Theologos at Stylos, Apokoronas, in the municipality of Chania, Crete (Pl. 12). In form and technique these specimens resemble three pairs of silver earrings found at Veliko Gradište, dated to the mid-10th
to early 11th century, and thought to have been imported by a Byzantine merchant (Pl. 13). Further parallels are two pairs of bronze earrings found during the excavation of a cemetery in the fortress of Belgrade and dated to the 10th or 11th century. A variation of the above-mentioned type, in which the central attachment consists of only one or two biconical beads, have earlier precedents in the art of the 'Völkerwanderung'. Typical 10th- to 12th-century examples are a pair of silver earrings from a cemetery in Ierissos near Ouranoupolis, Chalkidiki, a bronze earring found on a small island in Karla Lake near Pelion, Thessaly, a pair, also in bronze, from the excavations at Apokoronas, Crete (Pl. 14), a silver pair from the cemetery in Matičane, Kosovo as well as five silver artefacts from an Early Medieval hoard found at the hill fort of Zawada Lanckorońska in southern Poland.

Crescent-shaped earrings are also found in a heavier version, the so-called boat-shaped type. These ornaments, made either of gold or silver or even bronze, were constructed from two convex sheets in the shape of a full crescent, which were soldered together. The faces are plain or decorated with filigree, granulation, enamel and stone inlays. Since examples of this type are found not only in Constantinople but also in Fatimid Egypt and Greater Syria, these ornaments must have enjoyed great popularity in both Byzantine and Islamic regions.

The hollow, box-like, lavishly decorated crescent-shaped earrings, a good number of which have survived in museum collections, have so far been considered typical of the Fatimid goldsmith's art. Like the boat-shaped type, these are also composed of two sheets, though these are not attached to each other but are joined by means of a rectangular strip at the bottom, thus forming a crescent-shaped 'box'. It seems, however, that even lunate earrings of box-like construction were not unknown in Byzantium, as attested by two specimens that have come to light in excavations at Sparta, in the Peloponnese, and at Valta, in Macedonia. It is noteworthy, moreover, that this box-like construction is further encountered on a pair of 11th- to 12th-century lunate earrings from Constantinople, on a pair of 11th- to 12th-century gold and cloisonné enamel earrings which probably originated in Kievan Rus', and on a pair of 11th-century silver-gilt earrings with enamels attributed to Kievan Rus' or Byzantium.

Leaving aside the crescent-shaped type, it is interesting for our topic to examine a type of earring prevalent in Slavic countries from the 10th to the 13th centuries which is thought to have been based on Byzantine models. It consists of a plain hoop in which an attachment in the form of a stylised bunch of grapes is fixed axially and occasionally flanked by two, four or six beads with or without knobs. This earring type is embellished with filigree or granulation. It may, moreover, be cast in imitation of both these techniques. Characteristic specimens, either in silver or in bronze, are excavated finds from the medieval Serbian cemeteries of Donićko Brdo in Kragujevac (Pl. 15), Lešje, Braća Palanka, Veliki Gradac and Niš. Earrings of this type are further encountered in Kievan Rus', Hungary and Poland and have been interpreted as Byzantine imports. It cannot, however, be ruled out that a number of these earrings may have been manufactured by local workshops following Byzantine models. The pair found during the excavation of the Middle Byzantine cemetery at Azoros, Elasson, in Thessaly could have been a Byzantine prototype (Pl. 16). Each of these earrings, made of silver, consists of a plain hoop, to which two elongated granulated pendants and four spherical beads with small knobs are fixed.

A more simplified variation of the above-mentioned earrings consists of a wire hoop on which are strung one or more, generally three, beads of various shapes: spherical, cubic, conical etc., plain or decorated. This type of ornament is also supposed to have originated in the North, as specimens have been found in Kievan Rus', Germany and Serbia. Typical examples found in Byzantine territory are the pairs of bronze earrings from the excavation of the cemetery at Aerino, in the municipalities of Magnesia, Thessaly, and from the excavation at Apokoronas, in the municipality of Chania, Crete (Pl. 17), both decorated with three plain spherical beads. In a good number of specimens, the beads are kept in place by a wire wound around the ring, as for example on the pair of earrings from the cemetery at Aerino and that of the Taxiarchis at Ermitsa, Agrinio, in western Greece. A pair of silver earrings from St Panteleimon, in Niš, Serbia (Pl. 18), as well as a pair found in poor condition in the cemetery of Donićko Brdo, Serbia, decorated with three ellipsoid beads, are similar in
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Earrings with a single bead of various shapes and techniques are also very widespread, as is documented by medieval excavation finds in Lukovit-Mušat, Bulgaria,\(^6\) in Prahovo,\(^6\) Korbovo,\(^6\) Braničevo,\(^6\) Ribnica,\(^7\) in Kurjače near Požarevac,\(^6\) Serbia, in Corinth,\(^6\) Greece, as well as by a wall-painting in the Church of St Nicholas at Polemitas in the Mani, Peloponnese, depicting St Kyriaki.\(^7\) This fresco, which can be dated on the basis of stylistic criteria to the 14th century,\(^7\) also reveals the long-lasting appeal of this type to the Byzantines.

If we now turn to the Iranian goldsmith’s art of the 9th to 13th centuries we find both simple and elaborate specimens of the above-mentioned type, which provides evidence of its popularity in medieval Islamic society. Well-known amongst these are two exquisite unmatched 12th- to 13th-century gold earrings in the L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art in Jerusalem (Pl. 19),\(^7\) as well as a simple 9th-to 10th-century earring of gold and sard found in the Nishapur excavations by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and now part of its collection.\(^7\)

Two more types of earrings may be mentioned which are rarer but have parallels in both Byzantium and Slavic countries. The first is the so-called ‘granulated’ type.

Plate 18 Earring from St Panteleimon, Niš

Plate 19 Gold earring from Iran, 12th–13th century. L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem

Plate 20 Gold earrings from Thessaloniki, 10th–14th century. Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki

Plate 21 Earring from Visiko Ravan

Plate 22a–b Earrings from Corinth, 11th–12th century. Archaeological Museum, Corinth
Elegance Over the Borders

I will conclude with the most elaborate and best-known type of earring, namely the ‘basket-shaped’, which suited the taste of the upper classes in the eastern Mediterranean from the 3rd century onwards. More than 50 Middle Byzantine gold pieces are preserved in museum collections in the United States, Germany, England, Greece (Pl. 24), Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Iran and Iraq. They consist of a hollow polyhedral body, to the faces of which three or five hemispheres are attached. A suspension hoop is fastened to its upper part. The elaborate adornment of these jewels – openwork, filigree and granulation – is often enriched with gems and enamel. Because of the close affinities of their decoration with Islamic goldwork, many scholars ascribe them to Islamic workshops. However, a mid-10th to early 11th-century bronze example found in Constantinople, a single silver earring found in Sparta in the Peloponnese, and a pair of silver earrings found in the excavation at Parapotamos, Thesprotia, western Greece (Pl. 25) may indicate that basket-shaped earrings were manufactured in both the Byzantine and the Islamic worlds.

This brief survey of medieval earrings has focused on the interconnections of types, materials and techniques between Byzantine, Islamic and Slavic jewellery. The crescent-shaped type may be characterised as a ‘universal’ one, since variations of it have been noted in all three cultures. The flat variation seems to be preferred by Byzantines and Slavs while the box-like construction is associated mainly with Islamic and Slavic countries.

Elaborate gold earrings, such as the crescent-shaped and the basket-shaped types, common in the Byzantine and Islamic worlds, point towards a shared taste for high-status objects. Although the Byzantines and Arabs were rivals and enemies par excellence, the emperors and the court of Byzantium acquired a taste for Islamic objects in the Middle Byzantine era, up to the mid-13th century, whilst Arabs admired Byzantine art, architecture, textiles and luxury goods. Jewellery exchanges between Byzantines and Arabs were possible mainly through diplomatic gifts and trade, but also through the mobility of prisoners-of-war with special technical skills.
On the other hand, the numerous types, materials and techniques common to both Byzantium and the Slavic countries, studied together with Byzantine-Slavic political, religious and economical relations, may betray a more global cultural interchange, with the influence of Byzantine models on Slavic jewellery being particularly strong. Diplomatic gifts between members of the Byzantine and Slavic social élite form only one aspect of this approach; others may be related to the mobility of ordinary people, merchants, artisans and workshops on both sides.91

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Notes

1. P. Preïsanti, 2.4. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
2. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
3. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
4. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
5. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
6. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
7. ‘Ελληνικά μικρά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου’, Ελληνικά έργα του μεσαίου και αρχαίου χρόνου, 2000, 2.4.
8. D.O.C. Inv. no. 51, 27; M. C. Ross, Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbraton Oaks Collection, Volume Two. Jewelry, Enamels and Art of the Migration Period, Washington DC, 1965, 92–3, no. 133. L.VX. The Dumbraton Oaks earrings and a similar example in the Kanellopoulos Museum (Pl. 3) have been considered to be forgeries: S. A. Boyd and G. Vikan, Questions of Authenticity among the Arts of Byzantium, (Dumbraton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Publications, No. 3), Washington DC, 1981, 20–21, no. 9. A. Bosselman-Ruickbie, ‘Byzantinisches, Islamisch oder ’Internationaler Stil’, Email- und Körben-ohränge aus dem östlichen Mittelmeerraum’, in U. Koenen and M. Müller-Wiener (eds), Grenzgänge im östlichen Mittelmeerraum, Byzanz und die islamische Welt vom 9. bis 13. Jahrhundert, Wiesbaden, 2008, 6. In my opinion, the arguments against the authenticity of these jewels are not strong enough: the words ‘Light’ and ‘Life’, engraved on the cross, are not related to the Virgin but, as usual in Byzantine iconography, to the cross (see, for example, the incised crosses with the inscriptions ΦΩΣ ΖΩΗ which decorate the centrepiece of two patens (one in Pliska and one in Washington DC) and which have been dated to the 9th–11th centuries: M. Mundell Mango, ‘The Significance of Byzantine Tinned Copper Objects’, Θωράκιον. Αφιέρωμα Thηματικά της Λασκαρίνας Μπούρα, Athens, 1994, 222.
9. Furthermore, the anthropomorphic form of some Byzantine Antiquities, and Dr Anastasios Antonaras, Curator at the Museum of Byzantine Culture, for their valuable advice and assistance in my research.

20 Derzietis and Kouyounmoglu (n. 10), 72, pl. 27.
21 Inv. no. B.M. 318; Kypraiso (n. 7), 208, no. 240.
24 Ibid., 130.
25 Davidson (n. 22), 253, nos. 2033–33, pl. 108.
27 Other examples of tin-plated copper and tin-plated bronze are widespread in the Middle Byzantine period. This technique was also used on liturgical objects and utensils of this period to imitate silver. P. Sevrugian, Liturgisches Gerät aus Byzanz. Die Berliner Patene und ihr Umkreis, Berlin, 1992, passim; Mundell Mango (n. 8), 221ff, esp. 226.
28 Eregeorgi-Pavlovic 1969 (n. 26), 95.
29 Davidson (n. 22), 250.
30 In the collection of the 7th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, Inv. no. M 297–298; Papanikola-Bakirtzi (n. 10), 436, no. 566, fig. 566.
31 Davidson (n. 22), 253, nos. 2033–33, pl. 108.
33 Now in the National Museum of Požarevac: Minić and Tomić (n. 23), 129–30, pl. I/1, 2, 3. For examples from Croatia, see Corović-Jubinković (n. 6), fig. 2.
35 Davidson (n. 22), 250, 253, no. 2030.
38 It belongs to the Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Collection in Chania (Inv. no. M.K.1): Albani (n. 32), fig. 14.
39 Marianović-Vujović (n. 34), fig. 24.
41 E.g., a pair of earrings from a hoard in an unglazed earthenware vessel found in Tiberias, which has been dated by means of coins to 1021 and 1040, now in the Israel Museum (Inv. no. IAA 2045–7, fig. 57, pl. 108). It is kept in the archaeological site of Nea Anchialos (Inv. no. E.E.86.1–E.E.86.4): Papanikola-Bakirtzi (n. 19), 562, no. 779, fig. 779.
42 Ibid., 250–253, nos. 2025–29, pl. 108.
44 Ibid., pl. X/5, 6.
48 Davidson (n. 22), 252, nos. 2018, 2024.
49 N. B. Brändanakis, ‘Βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες της Μέσα Μάνης (Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αθήνας Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας, ψ. 141), Athens, 1995, 148, fig. 10.
50 Ibid., 150.
51 Inv. nos J269 and J237: Hassan (n. 5), 33, no. 26, figs 26 and 37 and 32, fig. 32.
53 They belong to the Museum of Byzantine Culture (Inv. no. BKO 262/2): Kypraiso (n. 7), 224, no. 274.
55 Davidson (n. 22), 250, 252, no. 2025.
56 Ibid., 250, see, for example, 252–253, no. 2025–29, pl. 108.
57 Ibid., 252, 108, no. 2025.
58 D. Minić (n. 53), pl. I/1; Janković (n. 64), pl. XII/3.
59 Davidson (n. 22), 252–3, no. 2028, pl. 108.
60 Petrikak (n. 12), 69.
61 It belongs to the the collection of the 7th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities (Inv. no. M 111-122): Papanikola-Bakirtzi (n. 19), 434, fig. 560, no. 560.
62 Jovanović (n. 63), pl. II/tomb 6, pl. III/tombs 26, 27.
Evans and Wixom (n. 3), 418–19, nos 274, 275, figs 274, 275B.


Inv. no. 1416: Byzantine Art (n. 13), 381, no. 435.


Canard (n. 2), 39, 54; Sureau (n. 90), 404; Gerolymatou (n. 2), 92–4, 108, 111, 117–18, 123–7, 134–6.
