

## **Ukrainian treasure kept in British collection**

### **Culture**

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**The eighteenth-century royal gates of the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of the Pechersk Lavra of Kyiv are kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is believed that Catherine the Great of Russia gave them to the monks of the monastery in 1784. The chance for their return to Ukraine is considered extremely low**

By Mariana Karapinka The eighteenth-century royal gates of the Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God of the Pechersk Lavra of Kyiv are kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is believed that Catherine the Great of Russia gave them to the monks of the monastery in 1784. Their weight in silver is two pounds, six lots. Sixty-six foreign gold chevrons were used for gilding. The gates were purchased at an auction in London in 1930 for 5,000 pounds. How they left Ukraine is unknown, but it is known that they disappeared from Kyiv in the late 1920s. This saved the masterpiece of Ukrainian art from destruction. For a long time the artifact was in the United States in the collection of famous media mogul William Hearst in California. In 1972 the gates were acquired by Rosalind and Arthur Gilbert (Arthur Gilbert is a well-known collector, who made a fortune in the real estate business in California). Arthur Gilbert donated the Ukrainian treasure to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1996. In the 1990s there was talk of returning this unique piece to Ukraine. "The probability that this object will return to Ukraine is very low, almost zero. This is not due to the high price (the nominal assessment of the royal gates made 13-15 years ago was 20 million sterling pounds) or the inactivity of the Ukrainian side. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the question of the return to Ukraine of the royal gates was addressed by the two governments. A special commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established, which thoroughly studied the law and the possibility of its return. The lawyers' conclusion was that there is almost zero chance," said the director of the Ukrainian Institute in London, Andy Hunder. According to him, the impossibility of the return is associated with the legislation of the UK, which has never returned any of the historical artifacts that it has acquired throughout the ages. It is worth noting that Greece, Egypt, Italy, and other countries have repeatedly demanded the return of a huge number of artifacts that are exhibited in the British Museum or stored in other museums in the UK. Interestingly, besides the royal gates, which are exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, several other Ukrainian artifacts are found in British collections. Jewelry from the sixth through twelfth centuries that was found in Ukraine is kept in the British Museum. Also, the Bank of England is said to have the legendary treasure of Polubotok.

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To access the museum's own description of the gates, link below:  
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O157670/gates-unknown/> \*The article above appears through courtesy of the Religious Information Service of Ukraine.