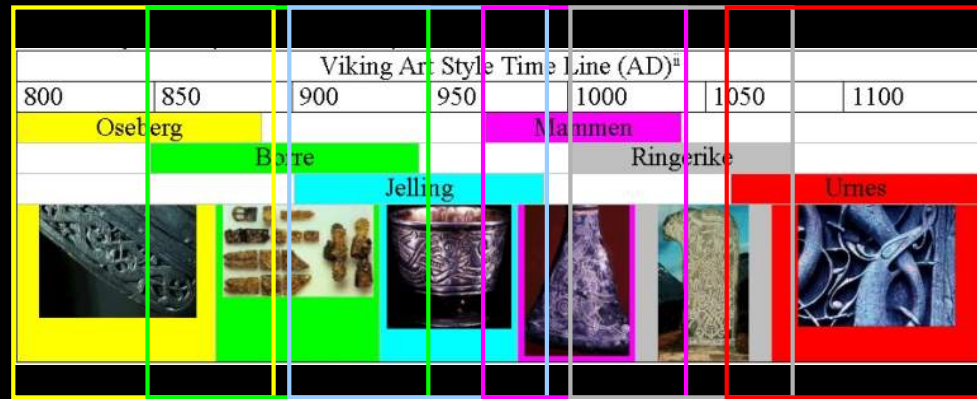


Art Development Timeline



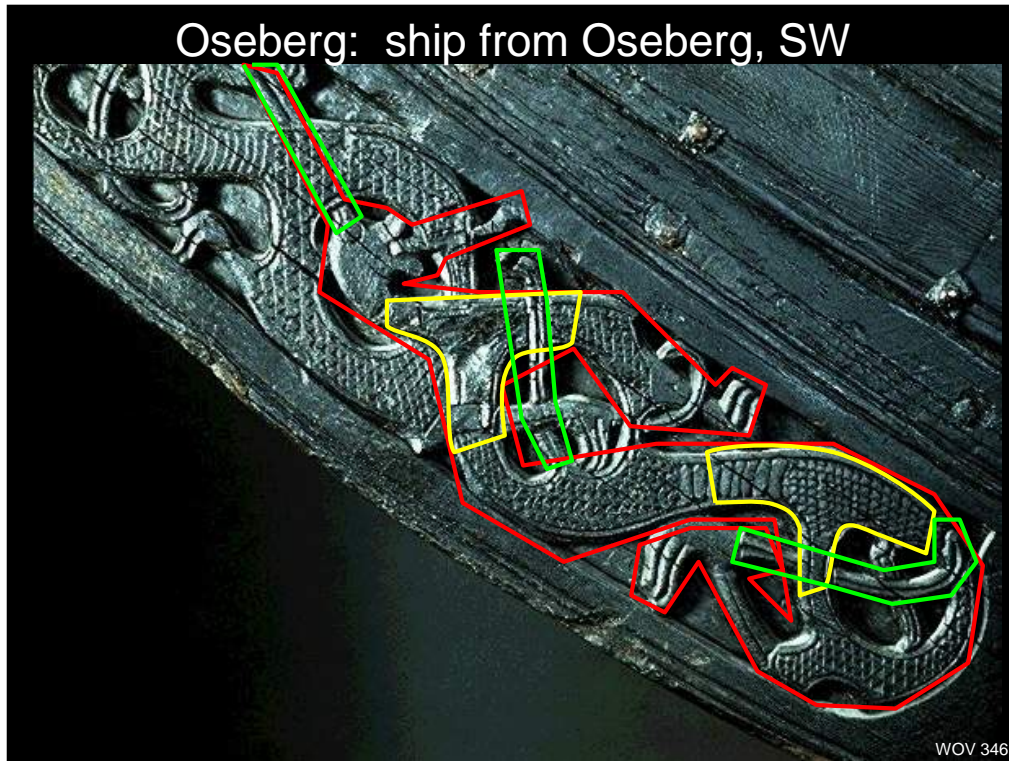
Data based on Graham-Campbell 99,
Photos from WOV 346, 3006, 2896,
2902, 3068, & 3080

The Viking Age artists of Scandinavia applied their decoration to items of practical use. Viking Art varied over time and by geography, as new styles were tried, adopted, and then remained in fashion for decades, even as new styles came along. Neighboring cultures, such as the Rus, the Celts, and the Germanic tribes, also influenced the art styles.

The purpose of this class is to provide a basic orientation to the six recognized Viking art styles. I will attempt to describe and define each style, its prevalent time period, and show its transition to the next style. I will conclude by showing some Norse artifacts that defy classification, and some art from neighboring cultures that may have had influence on Viking Art development.

The diagram below shows the six art styles, arranged on a timeline to show their period of prevalence. Each is named after the location where the particular artifact was found that first defined the style, and these artifacts are shown on the timeline as well. There are long periods of overlap as a new style waxed while an old style waned.

I invite class participation. Art style development is more complex than this simple schedule. Furthermore, archeologists sometimes use the presence of an art style to date a find, and sometimes date a find by other methods and then classify the art therein as being of the style that was prevalent at that time. For this reason, I sometimes disagree with the way some of these artifacts are classified. The opinions presented here are mostly drawn from my own observations of how archeologists classify the art styles, over the course of 5 years trying to create original art that replicates some of these styles. Therefore, some disagreement or discussion from the audience is expected and encouraged.



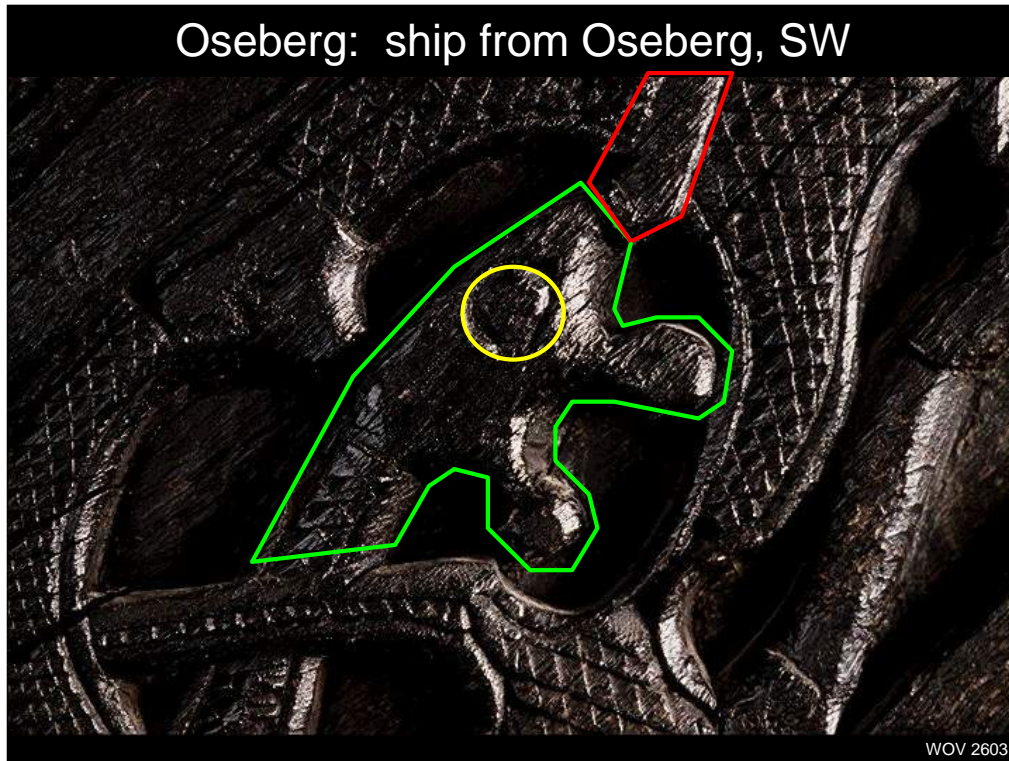
Named for the carvings on the Oseberg ship, this style shows minor variations from an earlier style, known as the Broa style. I will not discuss the Broa style in this class for 3 reasons: it predates the Viking Age, it is very similar to the Oseberg style, and I could only find one artifact to illustrate it.

Here is a view of the Oseberg ship carving.

Overall, the style is characterized by ribbon-bodied animals, whose limbs attach smoothly to the bodies.

Some appendages lead to long tendrils, each decorated with a groove down its center. The bodies are textured with patterns to suggest fur or scales. The eyes are large, round, and plain. The animal feet are stylized with the toes clearly depicted (showing individual toes) but in a simple fashion without much detail.

The bodies and limbs are interlaced, but the interlacing is neither as symmetrical nor as rigid in its adherence to the over-under-over sequence as with the Celtic art that it resembles. The Oseberg artist was willing to accept empty space, rather than fill it with interlaced tendrils as is common with Celtic art, but the overall impression remains balanced.



This closer view of the same ship allows us to see the animal's head clearly. Animal heads are one of the keys to classifying Viking art, and the shape of the eye can also be important.

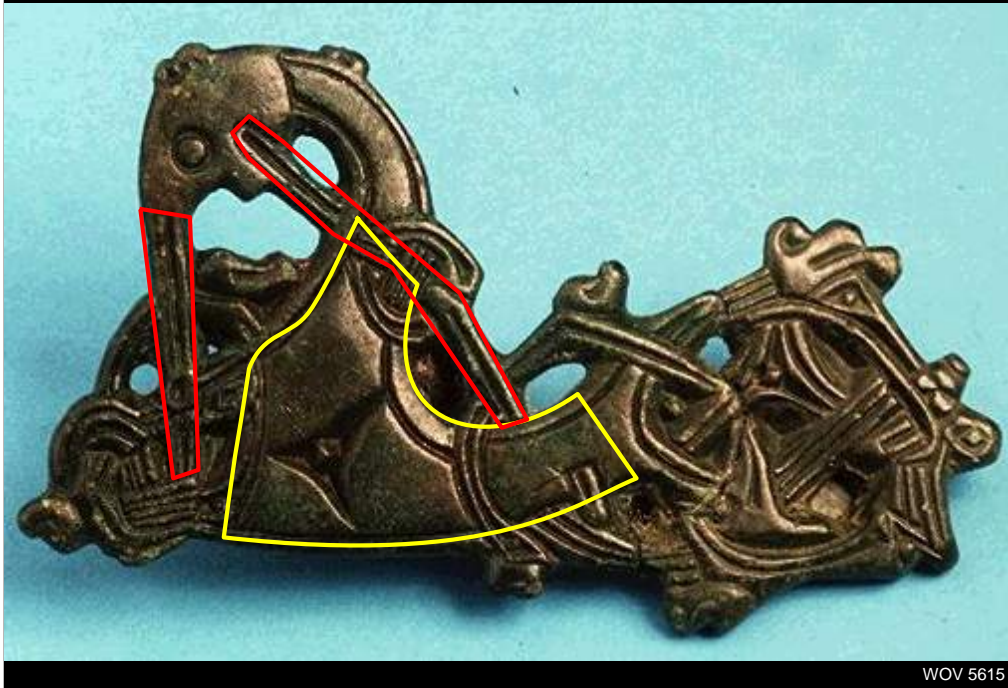
The head is not as stylized and more naturalistic when compared to the animal's body. The eye and jaw are simple but exaggerated in size. The animal has an ear or horn that becomes a short tendril.

Oseberg: bed post from Oseberg, SW



This bed post, one of several from the Oseberg ship, illustrates the Oseberg style as it applies to a larger area. Here, the same interlaced animals cover the surface of the beast. Note that both on the macro scale (the large animal head post) as well as the micro scale (the tiny animals covering it), that the same Oseberg characteristics are apparent: exaggerated eyes and jaws, a somewhat naturalistic portrayal of the shape of the head, and (with the small animals) a balanced but nonsymmetrical interlacing.

Oseberg: brooch from Vestfold, NW



WOV 5615

The final example of the Oseberg style is this brooch, from Vestfold, Norway.

It displays some characteristics of the earlier Broa style, and I do not fully agree with the experts who classify it as Oseberg style. However, it is one of the few pieces of jewelry I have found so far that is even close to the Oseberg style. This is probably because the Norse tended to put their jewelry in burial sites at the time.

Evident in this piece is the same smooth flow from body into limb, the exaggerated eyes and mouth, and appendages that become long tendrils, each marked by a groove.

Borre: belt set from Borre, SW

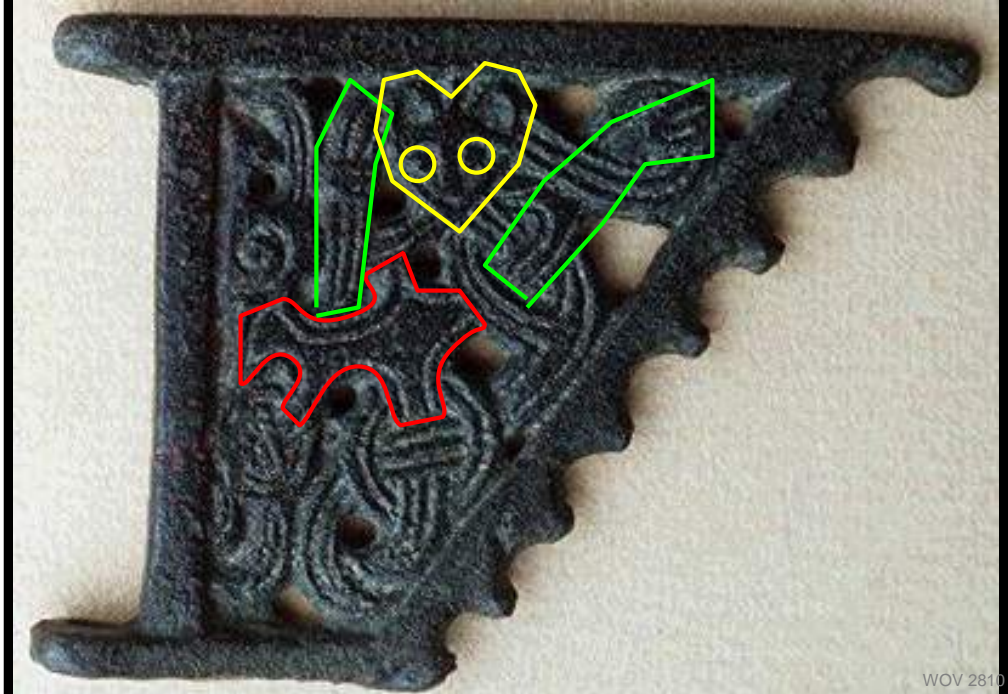


Named for a belt set from a burial in Borre, Sweden, the Borre style shows similarities to the Oseberg style. This belt set consists of buckle, keeper, strap end, decorative mounts, and other hardware.

This photo is not detailed enough to help describe the characteristics of the art style, and is included only because it defines the style.

The Borre style is characterized by two distinct elements: highly stylized interlaced animals, and “gripping beasts.” These elements can be found together on the same artifact, or separately on different artifacts.

Borre: mount from Åland, FI



This Borre-style decorative mount shows the resemblance to the Oseberg style, from which the Borre style developed. The animals are still interlaced, with grooves marking the borders of the bodies and running the length of the tendrils. The interlacing is still the flowing, informal, nonsymmetrical layout that characterizes all the Viking art styles and contrasts with the Celtic styles with their feel of formality.

The key difference is that the animal heads are shown facing the viewer, what the heralds call “affronty,” which is generally not found in Oseberg style. Also, the body texturing is minimal compared to the Oseberg style.

This particular artifact lacks the “gripping beasts” often found in this style, and may be a transitional piece

Borre: brooch from Lisberg, DK



This brooch from Lisberg, Jylland, Denmark, illustrates the “gripping beast,” the second element common in the Borre style.

The animal is somewhat stylized, with a large head, and limbs contorted to grip itself or neighboring animals. Its head faces “affronty.”

Surrounding the gripping beast are simple geometric and interlace patterns that complement, without distracting from, the main motif of the gripping beasts.

Borre: ring-headed pin from Ylâne, FI

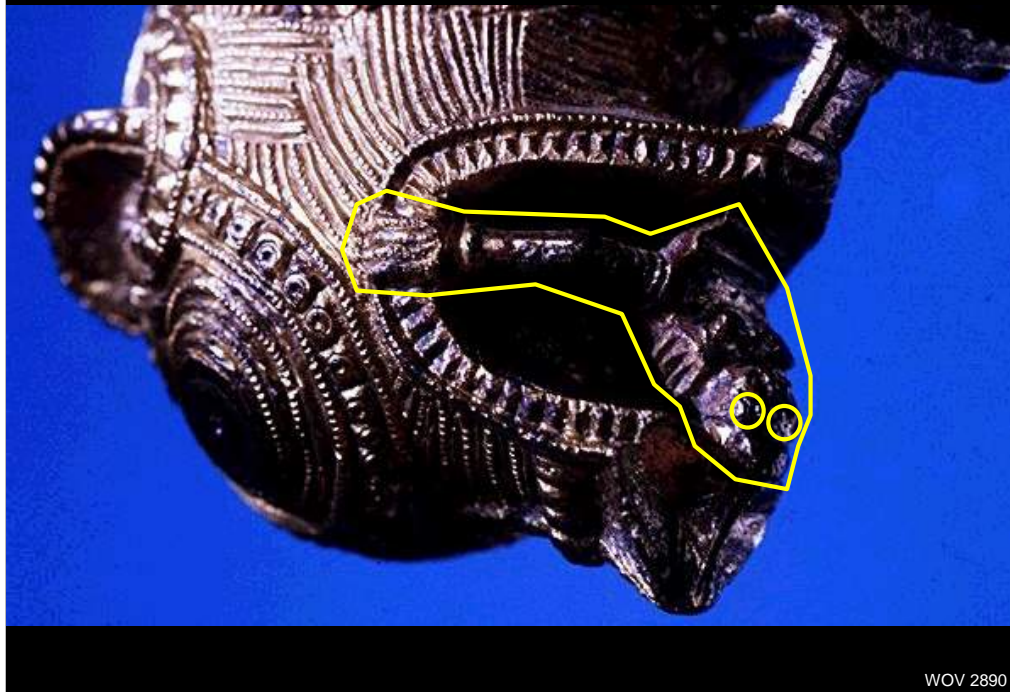


WOV 2814

This ring-headed pin shows a head decorated with beasts commonly classified as Borre style. There is interlacing visible, along with spirals.

I could not get a better photo of this artifact, so it is difficult to verify the characteristics. I include it here to show the variety of objects that could be decorated.

Borre-Jelling: harness-bow from Jylling, DK



This close-up view of an animal-head shaped harness-bow terminal, from a burial in Jylling, Denmark, shows an interesting mix of styles. While the animal head itself is of the later Jelling style, and will be seen again later in the class, the animal's mouth holds a Borre-style gripping beast.

This final example transitions us into the Jelling style that followed it.



Named for the silver cup found in Jelling, Denmark, this style shows some influence from Celtic art but retains a distinctive Viking flavor because of some similarities to the preceding Borre style.

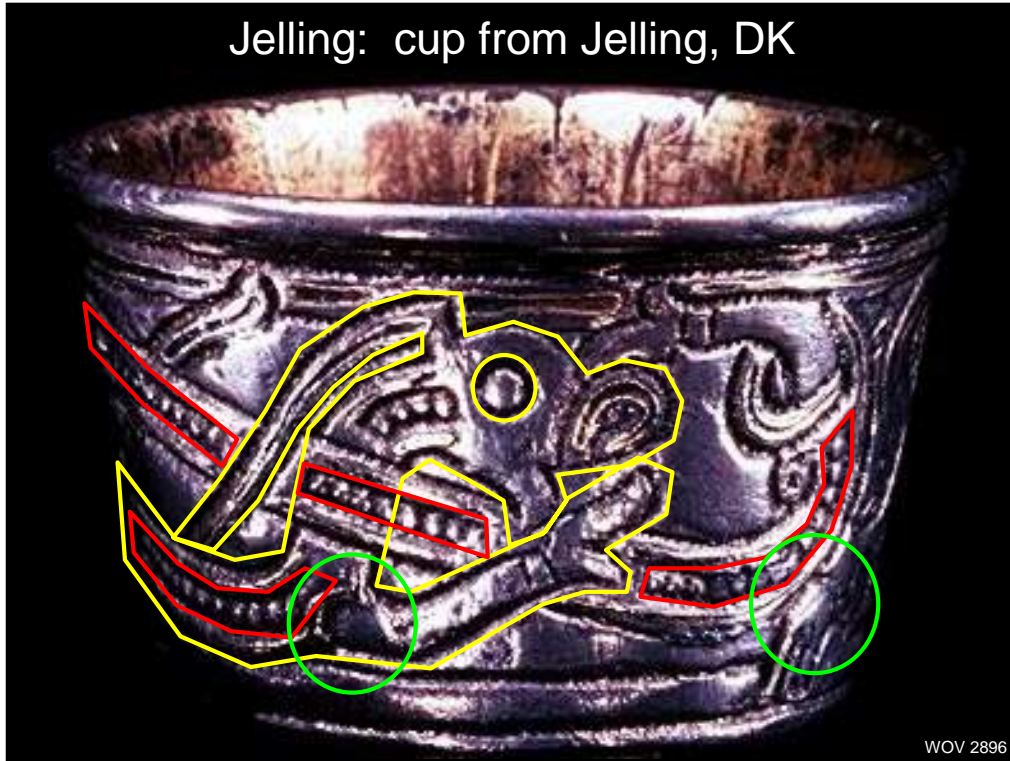
Rather than start this section with the Jelling Cup, I will begin with the transitional harness-bow seen in the previous section.

The overall impression of the work, discounting the gripping beast in its jaws, is an example of the Jelling style. The eyes are large, and for the first time in Viking art style progression, a study of the ears and shape of the jaw allows the observer to make a tentative, if uncertain, identification of the animal's intended species.

The surface decoration suggests fur or hair, and the border and ribbon decorations are characterized by edges and a row of matching geometric shapes, in this case round dots.

This particular artifact depicts a 3-dimensional animal, and thus the overall shape is more naturalistic than is seen with 2-dimensional Jelling style art. This was most likely a transitional piece, as the art style was changing from Borre to Jelling.

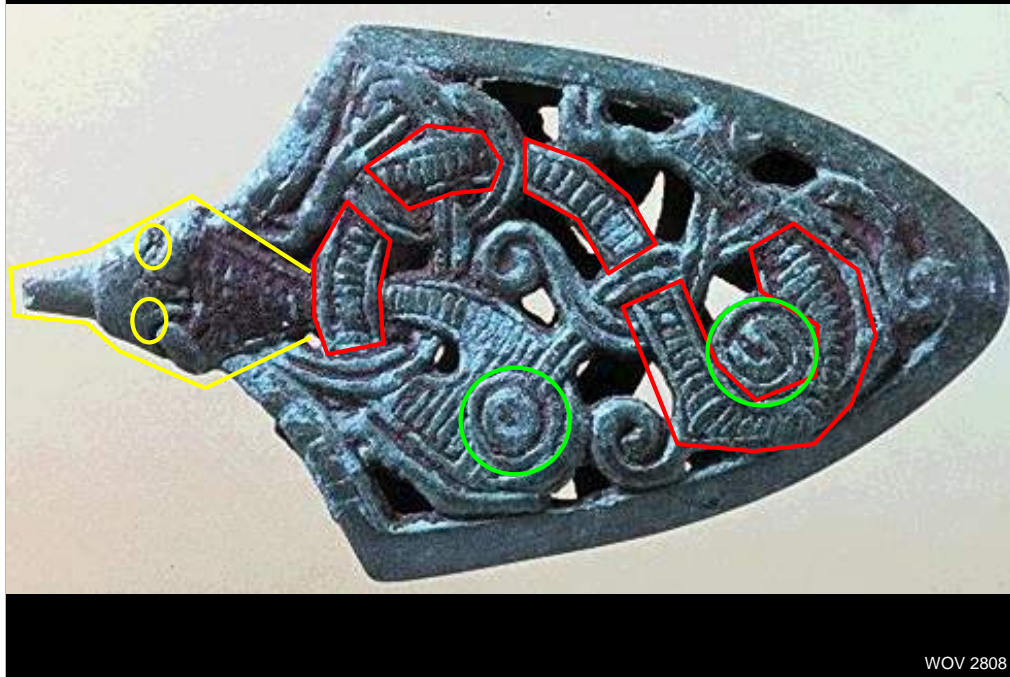
Jelling: cup from Jelling, DK



The Jelling cup, from Denmark, defined the Jelling art style. The animals have ribbon-like interlaced bodies, with short tendrils reminiscent of the Oseberg style. The surface decoration of the bodies, again, shows a definite edge and within that a row of dots. The limbs have a definite attachment point to the bodies, and the feet are vague and stylized. The eyes are large, and the nose curls up.

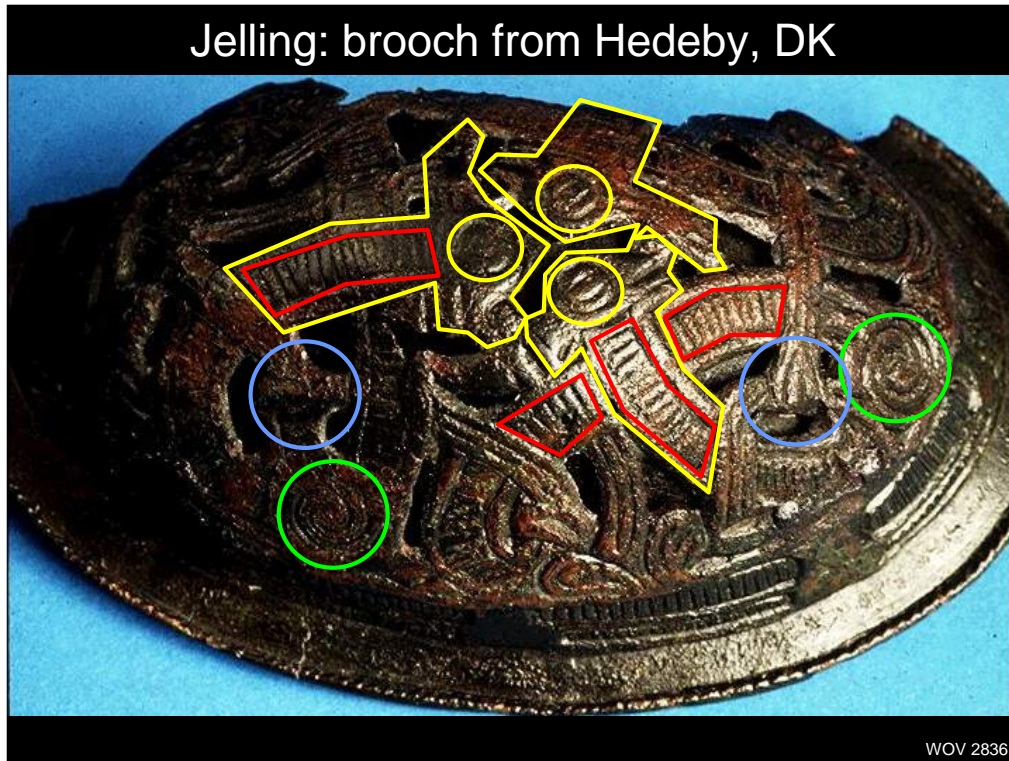
In this example, it is more difficult to identify the animal species than in the previous example.

Jelling: chaplet from Sări, FI



This scabbard-end (chaplet) from Saari, Finland, is also a fine example of Jelling style art.

This time, the limb attachment points are highlighted by spirals and roundrels. The animal's head (to the left side of the photo) is shown from the top, which is not common in Jelling style art. The grooved tendrils interlace with the body, which is decorated by a row of lines instead of the dots we saw in the previous examples.



This brooch, found in Hedeby, is exciting for several reasons. First, an almost identical one was found in Iceland. More importantly to our study, however, are the obvious Jelling style features mixed with more classical touches.

The large eyes, curled noses, spiral limb attachment points, grooved tendrils, and simply-textured bodies mark it clearly as Jelling style.

However, the feet grip other tendrils, a subtle reminder of the Borre style that preceded it.

Jelling-Mammen: casket from Bamberg, GE



I will finish the description of the Jelling style with a transitional piece. This casket from Bamberg, Germany, shows Jelling metalwork, but the bone carving is of the later Mammen style.

Here is a close-up of the top of the casket. The animal heads sport large eyes, spirals on the nose, and beaded wire details, all of which is definitely reminiscent of the Jelling style.



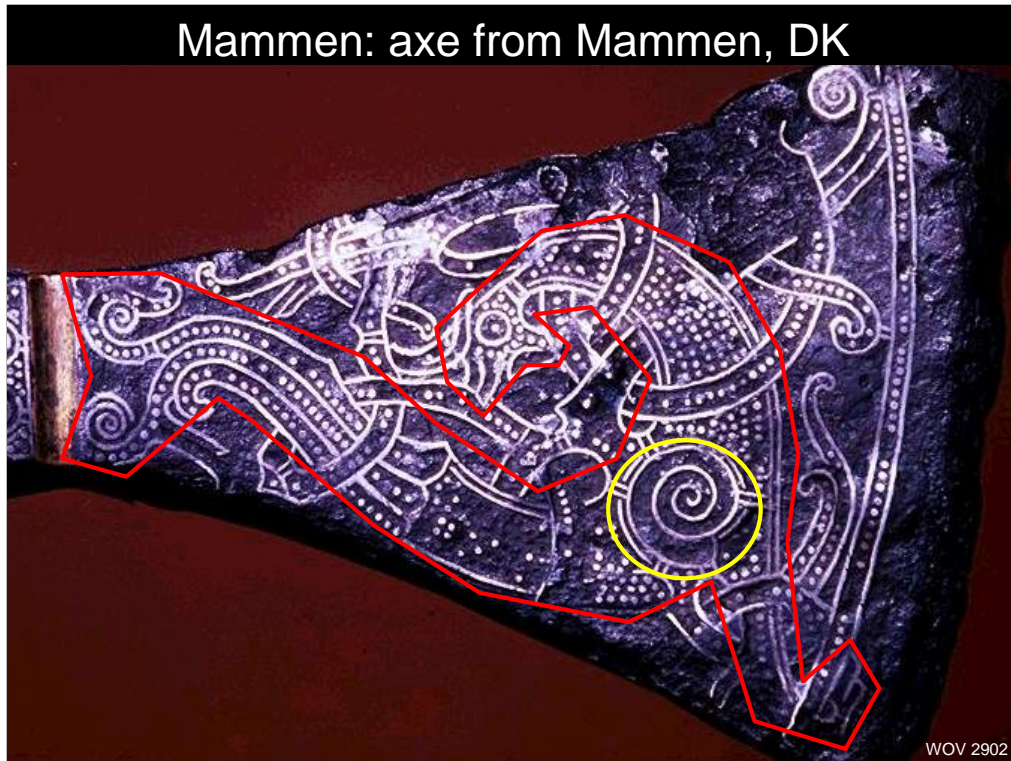
Named for the axe found at Bjerringhoj, near Mammen, Denmark, this style is quite different from earlier styles.

We begin with the transitional casket from Bamberg that we saw previously, but now we focus on the panels.

The Mammen style is a radical departure from its predecessor because, instead of a number of interlaced animals, we instead see a single recognizable animal for each decorated area. This dramatic change may be due to the cultural changes that were taking place with the conversion to Christianity in Denmark and other areas of Scandinavia at the time this style appeared. Just as one god replaced many gods, so did one animal in the art replace the many animals.

With only a single animal to fill an area, fat rounded tendrils sprout everywhere. In this example, the tendrils fill the space.

The Mammen animals sometimes had a resemblance to their Jelling predecessors, for example with spirals at the shoulder joints. The animal bodies, however, were less ribbon-like, resulting in body texturing similar to the much earlier Oseberg style. The final point about this artifact is that the frame around the panels shows plant motifs, an obvious influence from mainland Europe.



The Mammen Axe, which defined this style, was created using a metalworking process called inlay, in which silver wire is beaten into the roughened surface of the iron. For this reason, the artist was limited to simple lines and dots and could not create any relief.

Nonetheless, the art shows the key features of the Mammen style: a single animal, with a relatively fat, textured body, and which sprouts rounded tendrils.

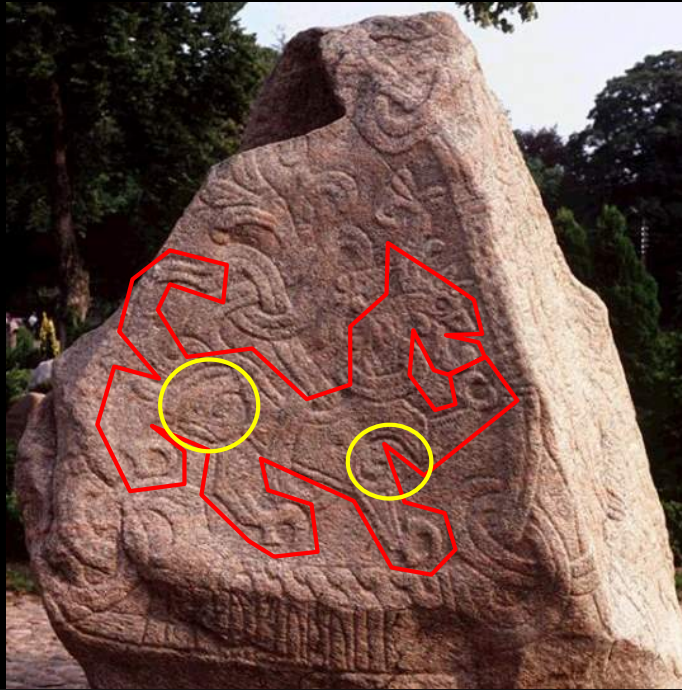
Mammen: bone sleeve from NW



This bone sleeve from Norway displays Mammen style ornamentation, with a single animal wrapped around it, sporting a fat textured body and interlaced tendrils.

At a casual glance, this piece seems as much Oseberg style as it does Mammen, but the date of the piece and the presence of a single animal classify it as Mammen.

Mammen: Jelling runestone, DK



WOV 2920

The final Mammen example is the Jelling Runestone from Denmark, one side of a granite monument raised by King Harald Bluetooth.

It depicts a lion in definitive Mammen style, killing a serpent. It is considered a single animal motif, however, because the lion dominates the picture.

The lion was sometimes used to represent a king in several Dark Ages cultures, and also represents Saint Mark. The serpent represents evil in both Norse myths as well as Christian tradition. Thus, the message conveyed by the picture was meant to be clear to both pagan and Christian people.



Named for the runestone in Ringerike, Sweden, this style is a variation of the preceding Mammen style with one major difference. Plant motifs, a result of mainland influence, became more prominent than animal motifs in Ringerike style.

This drinking horn rim from Aarhus, Denmark, is classified as Ringerike style, though I believe it would be better described as a transition from Mammen to Ringerike.

The motif is a single bird, with what are usually interpreted as plant tendrils around it, but the tendrils are more tightly packed than with the Mammen style.



Ringerike rune stone, NW

WOV 3068

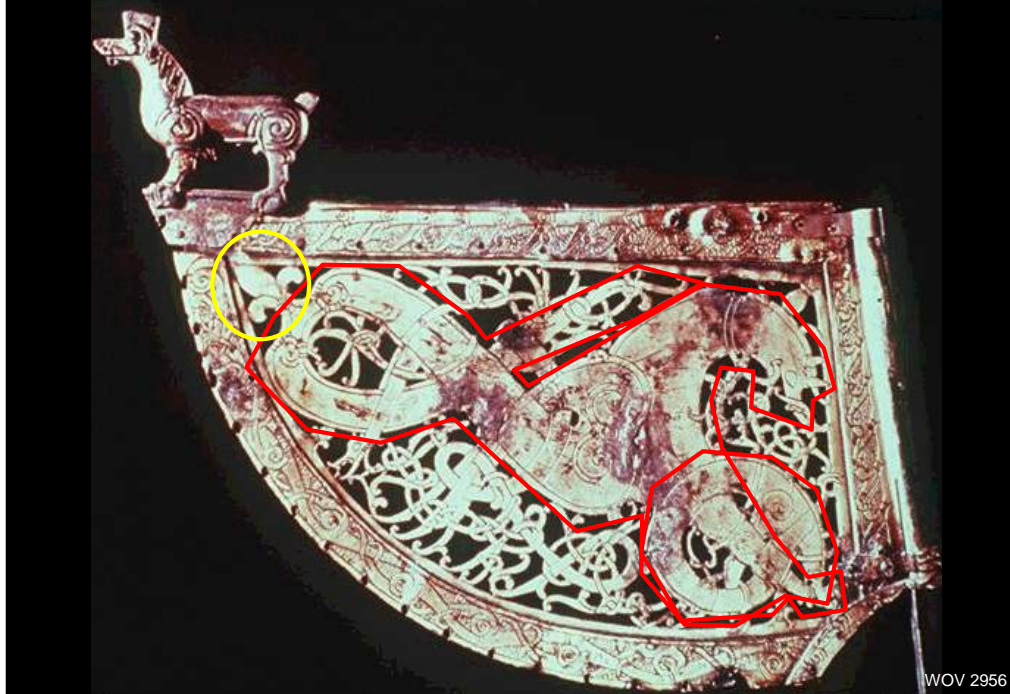
The Ringerike rune stone shows a boar running above a tree. The boar is small and relatively simple, while the tree is the main feature, with interlacing and tendrils. The tendrils are clustered tightly together where they interlace, a key feature of the Ringerike style.

Ringerike: arm ring from Ångermanland, SW



This arm ring from Ångermanland, Sweden, shows an interesting 3-dimensional application of the Ringerike style. Note that the animal's ears resemble acanthus leaves more than real animal ears, and that the body decoration resembles plant tendrils more than it does scales or fur. The tendrils are tightly clustered.

Ringerike-Urnes: vane from Hålsingland, SW



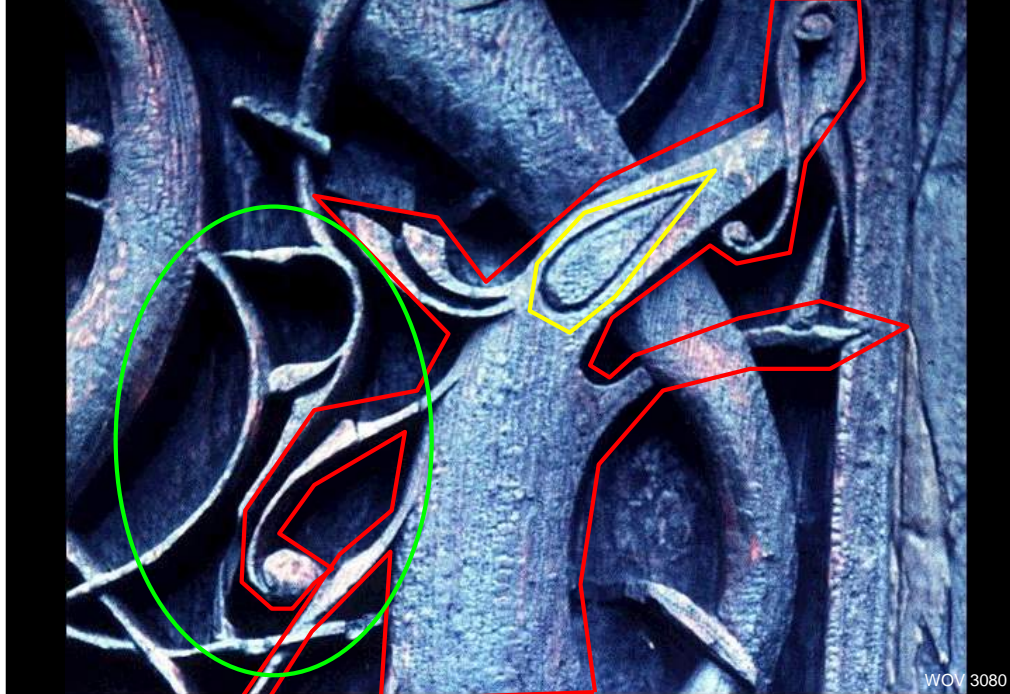
Finally, we have this transition piece, with elements of the Ringerike and Urnes styles.

This object is commonly referred to as a “weather vane,” though it was used for sea-borne signaling, not to measure wind direction. Its pierced openwork design shows a single interlaced animal, surrounded by interlaced plants.

The presence of plants points to the Ringerike style, and the borders of the vane are also of botanical nature. Finally, one part of the animal’s body (upper left) sprouts what could only be described as a lily.

The animal, however, displays characteristics of the later Urnes style. The body and limbs flow smoothly, reminiscent of the Oseberg and Jelling styles, but are much thinner.

Urnes: church door from Urnes, SW



Named for the carved church doors in Urnes, Sweden, this style has a light, airy quality that is unique among the Viking Art styles.

The Urnes style is both similar to and different from all the other styles. It has interlaced animals like the Jelling style, is usually made of single animals like the Mammen style, and includes tendrils, large eyes, and curled noses like several of the styles. However, the heads and bodies of the animals are much thinner and the interlace is more complex. Also, notice the shape of the eyes, which follow the contours of the head.

The overall impression of Urnes art is that of a streamlined, interlaced beast. The tendrils fill the majority of the space, but in a sparse way, such that the background shows through.

Urnes: Crozier of Clonmacnoise, Ireland



This is the Crozier of Clonmacnoise, found in County Offaly, IR, dates to the first half of the 12th C (with the addition of the saintly figure in the 14th C). It is made of bronze inlaid with silver and niello.

Urnes: Crozier of Clonmacnoise, Ireland



MMA 59

This is a closer view of the same crozier. The item is of Irish origin, but shows great influence from the Urnes art style. This portion of the artifact shows loosely-knotted Urnes-style beasts.

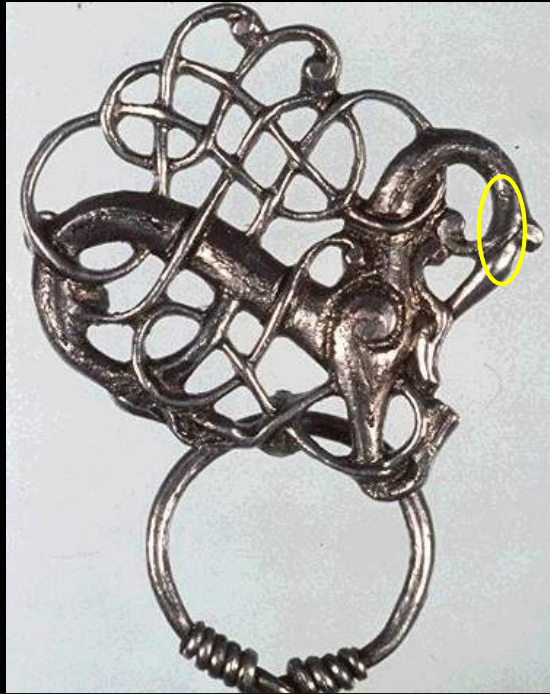
Along the back of the crook, a row of slim beasts (greyhounds?) line up, each biting the tail of the next, though the top ones have broken off. The saintly figure was added in the 14th Century. The remainder of the artifact, seen later, shows definite Celtic art styles that betray its origin.



These two views of a silver sleeve found in London show a good example of the Urnes style.

The two animals depicted are very thin, with interlaced tendrils, eyes that follow the head contours, and a lot of background showing through.

Urnes: brooch from Lindholm, DK



WOV 2882

This silver brooch from Jylland, Denmark, is another fine example of the Urnes style. As with the others, the tendrils are very thin and allow the background to be seen. In this case, the eye is not very apparent at all, but the overall impression is unmistakably Urnes style.

Urnes: bowl from Gotland, SW



WOV 2960

This chased bowl base from Gotland, Sweden, shows a simpler variation of the Urnes style. While the beast is substantially the same as other Urnes examples, the tendrils are very sparse, and the artist chose instead to fill the area with punched dots.

It is likely that the variations on this piece from the usual forms of the Urnes style are as much the result of the limitations of the chasing technique as from any particular desire of the artist. A random spread of dots is much easier than making many long curving tendrils to fill the space.



I will now illustrate some examples of Celtic art, which both influenced and was influenced by the Viking art styles. One of the advantages of reenacting a Norse persona is that you can create or possess items from a wide range of cultures and remain perfectly authentic.

This buckle and mount set comes from a Celtic grave on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland.

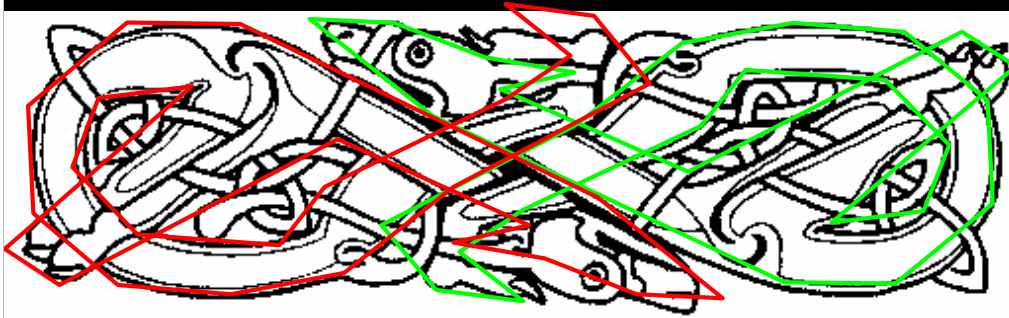
WOV 3214

While Celtic art also uses interlacing, the feel is very formal, symmetrical, and balanced.

Celtic knotwork is created using a mathematical formula that ensures it fills the space. The tendrils are all the same thickness and interlace in a regular pattern.

Even when depicting animals, Celtic art tends to be either radially or bilaterally symmetrical. For this reason, mathematically-oriented people sometimes find Celtic art easier to learn before moving on to one or more Viking art styles.

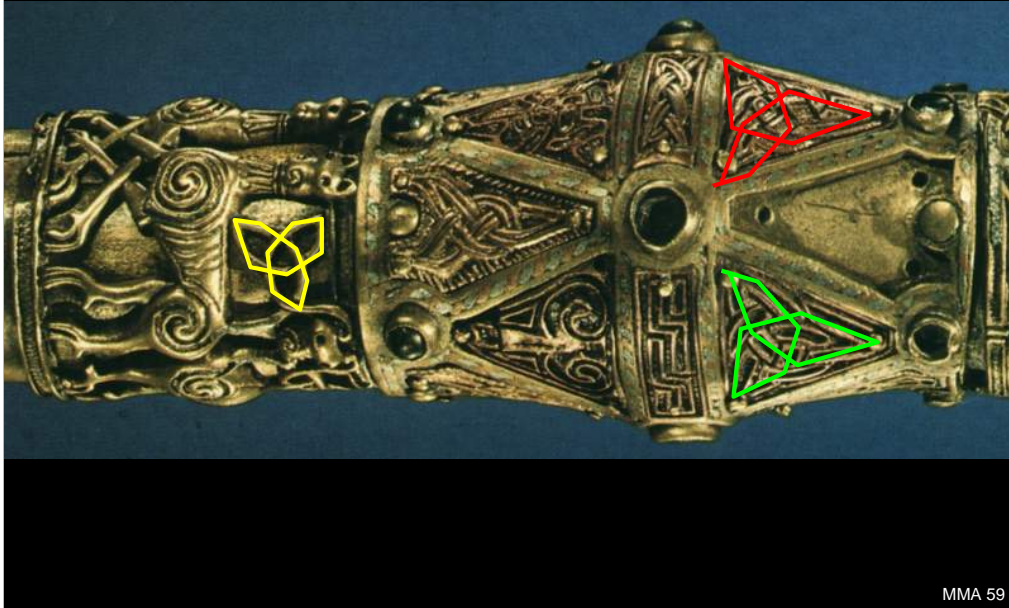
Celtic: Lindisfarne Gospel illumination



Meehan 79

For example, the two-dog pattern shown below, from the Lindisfarne Gospels, is radially symmetrical, in that rotating one dog 180 degrees results in it being nearly identical to the other dog. Note, also, that the shapes and detailing of the heads is slightly different than what we saw in Viking art.

Celtic: Crozier of Clonmacnoise, Ireland

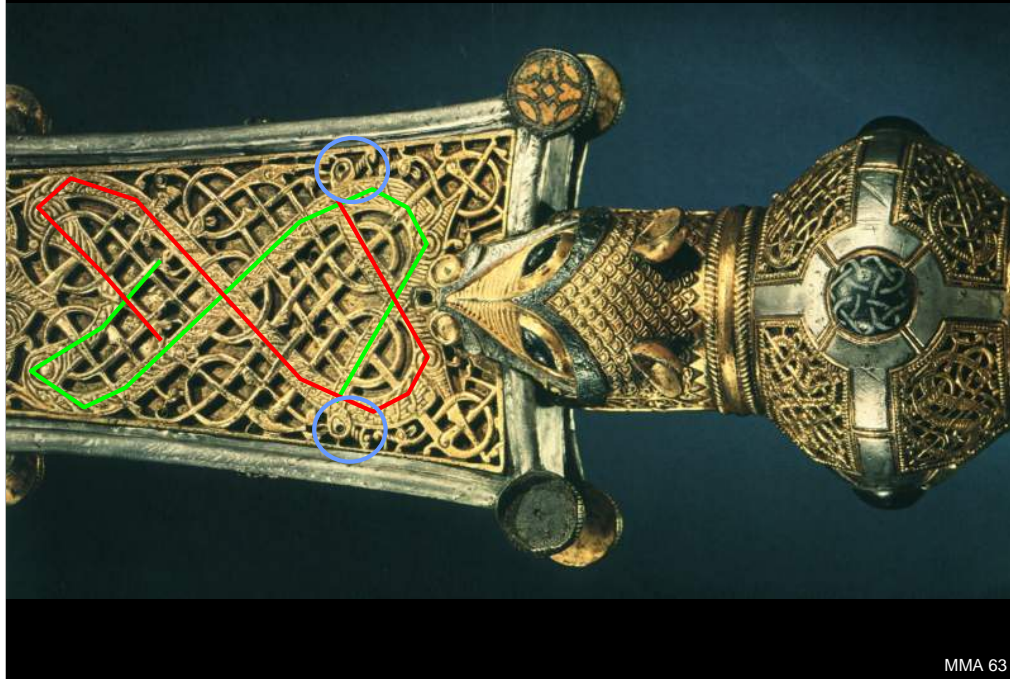


MMA 59

Remembering the Crozier of Clonmacnoise, we now look at the base of the crook.

Note the panels of knotwork, key patterns, and the beasts with trefoil tails, all very symmetrical and repeating in nature. These motifs are all typical of Celtic art.

Celtic: Cross of Cong, Ireland



MMA 63

This detail of the Cross of Cong, also from the early 12th C, shown Celtic animals with some Viking influence.

While the animals and interlacing are symmetrical in standard Celtic fashion, they show Jelling body texturing and the overall impression is very similar to the Urnes style. Much the same can be said of the interlaced animals on the decorative knob, shown on the right side of this photo.

What style is this: arm ring from Öland, SW



WOV 2948

To finish up, I will show a few artifacts that defy classification.

This arm ring from Sweden is classified as Ringerike style, probably because of the date of the find, though I would interpret it as a throwback to Jelling style.

What style is this: brooch from Hålsingland, SW



This brooch from Sweden defies classification. Does anyone have any comments or suggestions?

My own thoughts are that the animal heads are reminiscent of Jelling style, though the body texture is Oseberg or Mammen. The beasts on the center boss and outer rim are gripping in the Borre style. I think this is simply a unique piece, by an artist who decided to deviate from the existing fashions.

What style is this: mount from Gotland, SW

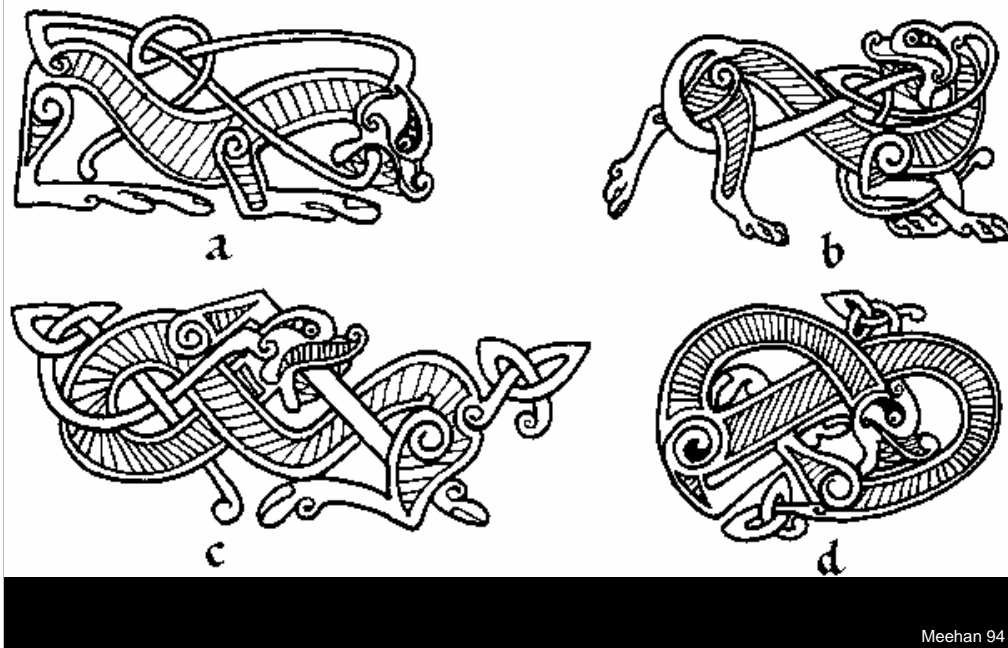


This mount from Gotland also defies classification. It has Oseberg surface decoration, large-headed beasts gripping each other in the Borre style, large eyes, curled noses and ribbon bodies reminiscent of the Jelling style, and thin tendrils similar to the Urnes style.

The overall impression, to me, is a style I have named “preschool Viking.” The beasts look happier and more friendly than most Viking art, and therefore give the same feel as many modern-day cartoons.

I show these “exceptions” artifacts as an example of how the rules do not always work, and to prove that not all art in period fit neatly into our classification methods. Therefore, your art is also not required to fit if you choose otherwise.

What Style is This: various motifs from Ireland



Meehan 94

Does anyone want to identify the style of these motifs?

I threw this in as a “trick question” -- these are Irish Celtic. They bear some resemblance to the Jelling style for the decoration, and the Mammen style for the animal body shapes, but the heads and eyes are very Celtic.

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I hope you have enjoyed seeing these examples, and that it helps you to understand the Norse culture, select the artwork appropriate to your persona, or to create your own original artwork in a particular style. Thank you.