

An Introduction to
Viking Art



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This guide is a visual and informative entry point into the world of Viking art and its deep roots in earlier Scandinavian traditions. Inside, you'll find: a timeline tracing the Scandinavian style periods from the Migration Period through the end of the Viking Age, and an overview of each style period with defining characteristics and illustrated examples of the art.

While the Viking Age itself begins in the 8th century, the cultural and artistic styles that define it were already taking shape centuries earlier, beginning with the division of the Roman Empire and the Migration Period. By tracing these developments, we can see how Viking art is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a long continuum of Scandinavian expression.

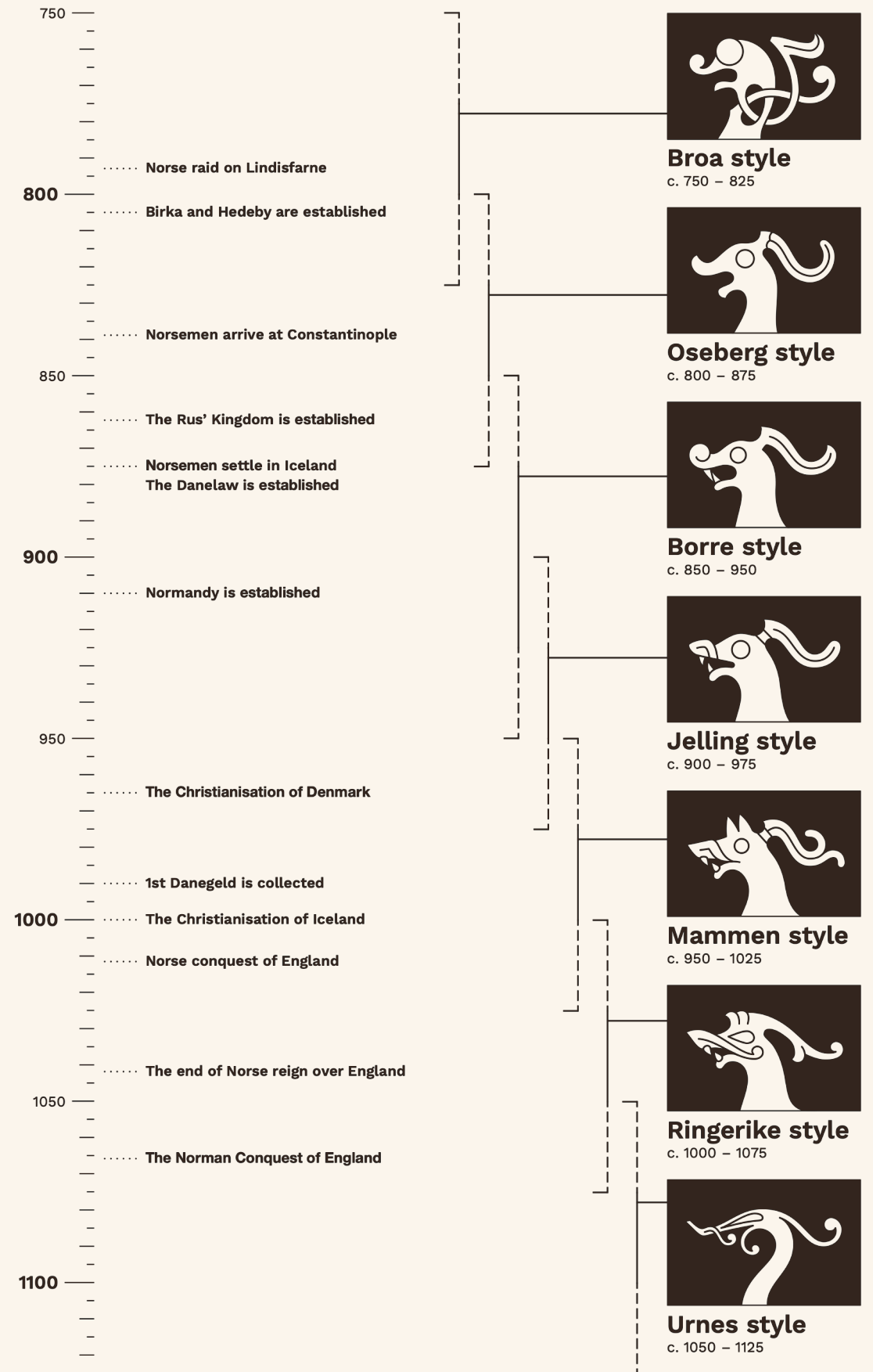
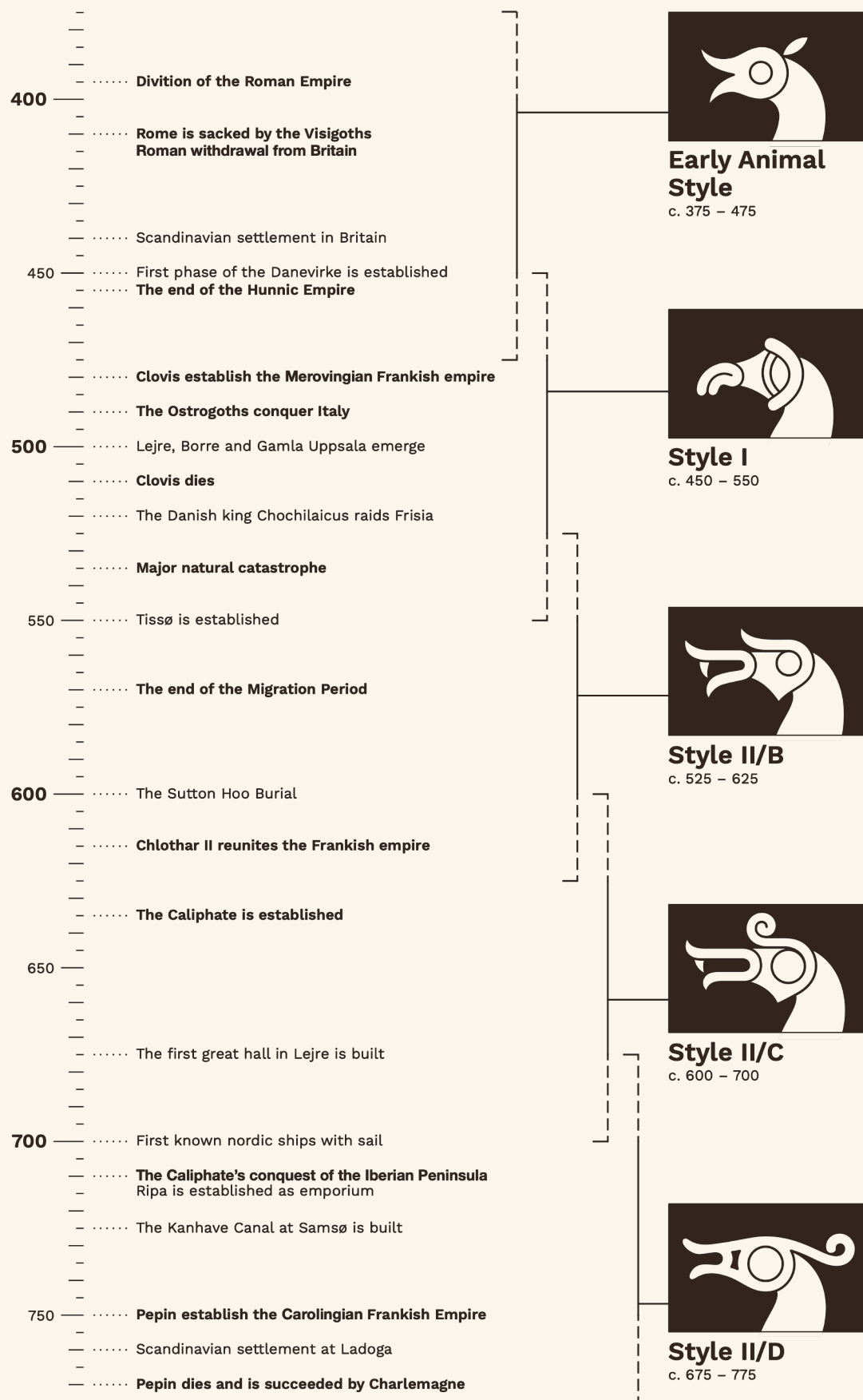
All items and examples presented in this introduction can be found on Gelmir.com by searching for them in the Compendium section. There you'll discover extended information about each artefact, along with many more examples of Viking art across different styles and contexts.

Beyond the compendium, Gelmir.com offers much more: deep-dives into the style periods, practical resources for artists and educators, and ongoing coverage of discoveries and research in Viking studies.

Gelmir is your go-to platform for knowledge and resources about the Viking Age and Early Medieval Scandinavia. Our mission is clear: to offer an academically grounded perspective on the Viking Age, free from the distortions of white supremacist narratives, while fostering a supportive and creative community around this fascinating history.



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c. 375 – 475

Early Animal Style



1. Geometric ornamentation: triquetras/triskelions, arches, circles, triangles and dots.
2. Heads in Profile
3. Round Eyes
4. Open outwards-curling jaws
5. Pointy chin.
6. Boat-shaped ears.
7. Simple, almost almond-shaped hips.
8. Feet with toe-fronds.



← Sösdala Horse Tack

Horse gear adorned with pelta shapes, animal-head terminals, and punch decoration.

Sösdala, Skåne, Sweden.

↙ Nydam Swords and Sheaths

Featuring pelta motifs, punch decoration, and some of the earliest ribbon-animal designs.

Nydam, Als, Denmark.

↓ Bow Brooches

European-inspired brooches, blending geometric motifs with animal carpet-pattern ornament.

L: Skerne, Falster, Denmark.

R: Lunde, Agder, Norway.



c. 450 – 550

Style I



1. Spirals and spiral patterns.
2. Striation/Hatching patterns.
3. Striated pellets for joints.
4. Heads in profile.
5. Heads facing forward.
6. Boat-shaped eyes.
7. Open mouth with long jaws and curling lips.
8. Short, downwards-curving mouth.
9. Crescent-shaped eyebrow-bow.
10. Almond-shaped hips.
11. Leaf-like feet with curved outlines.
12. Feet with toe-fronds.
13. Curled-up back-toes occur.



← Bow Brooches

Square- and radial-headed brooches with animal-head terminals and geometric ornament.

L: Hove Mølle, Sjælland, Denmark.

C: Grönby, Skåne, Sweden.

R: Falkum, Telemark, Norway.

↙ Cups

Decorated with folded human figures, crisscrossed limbs, and dense compositions.

Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden.

↙ Swords

Elite swords with ring hilts, featuring the same dense animal and geometric motifs.

Snartemo, Agder, Norway.

↓ Gold Bracteates

Stamped gold pendants with Roman-inspired motifs, runes, and powerful amuletic imagery.

L: Fyn, Denmark.

C: Sletner, Viken, Norway.

R: Källemosen, Västergötland, Sweden.

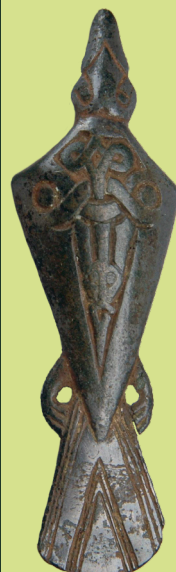


c. 550 – 650

Style II/B



1. Spirals.
2. Animal heads in profile.
3. Human heads facing forward (inside hips).
4. Eyebrow bow framing the eye.
5. Round Eyes.
6. Long straight or curling jaws.
7. Teeth occur.
8. Pointy chin.
9. Head lappet.
10. Almond-shaped hips.
11. Feather-like feet.
12. Curled-up spiral back-toes.



← Buckles

Adorned with mirrored animal heads, often birds of prey with spiral beaks.

Åker, Innlandet, Norway.

↑ Gold Foil Figures

Tiny stamped gold sheets of human figures, often votive offerings at sacred sites.

L: Helgö, Uppland, Sweden.

C: Sorte Muld, Bornholm, Denmark.

R: Sorte Muld, Bornholm, Denmark.

↗ Helmets

Prestige helmets with stamped plates depicting Odinic warriors, and shapeshifting rituals.

Vendel, Uppland, Sweden.

↘ Swords

Exquisite swords with animal-shaped pommels, decorated in dense animal motifs.

Vendel, Uppland, Sweden.

↙ Bird-shaped Brooches

Brooches showing birds from above with pointed beak, wings and tail; minimal knotwork; sometimes a man's face.

L: Gärdslösa, Öland, Sweden.

C: Sättra, Öland, Sweden.

R: Egeslökkegård, Bornholm, Denmark.



c. 600 – 700

Style II/c



1. Visible background between the ribbon body outlines.
2. Spirals.
3. Head in profile.
4. Round Eyes.
5. Elongated jaws with curved lips.
6. Teeth occur frequently.
7. Pointy chin.
8. Head-lappets occur.
9. Almond-shaped hips with an outlined sphere in the centre.
10. Open leaf-like feet with curved outlines.
11. Curled-up spiral back-toes occur.



← Horse Tack

Prestige harness mounts with S-shaped animals interlaced in continuous flowing ribbon patterns.
Vendel, Uppland, Sweden.

↗ Rectangular Brooches

Brooches with 2-fold symmetrical S-curve animals, rivet-like hips and eyes obscuring anatomy.
Arnestad, Vestland, Norway.

↑ Bird-shaped Brooches

Birds seen from above, with wings and tails varied, featuring simple knotwork patterns.

L: Holter, Viken, Norway.

C: Gaalaas, Innlandet, Norway.

R: Berg, Innlandet, Norway.

→ Swords

Decorated with abstracted ribbon animals blending seamlessly into knotwork compositions.

Ultuna, Uppland, Sweden.



c. 675 – 775

Style II/D



1. Lappets with double or triple tendril frond terminals.
2. Angled transition between neck and body ribbon occur.
3. Head in profile.
4. Round eyes.
5. Oval and boat-shaped Eyes.
6. Short open frond-like jaws.
7. Downward-curving and closed beak-like jaws.
8. Pointy chin.
9. Head-lappets occur.
10. Almond-shaped hips with a sphere in the centre.
11. Feather-like feet with toe-fronds.
12. Open leaf-like feet with curved outlines.
13. Curled-up spiral back-toes occur.



← Horse Tack

Lavish harness mounts with ribbon-animal ornament, strap-ends, and openwork animal motifs.

Vendel, Uppland, Sweden.

↗ Animal-shaped Openwork Brooches

Horses or predatory animals seizing serpents, rendered in striking openwork designs.

T: Sandegård, Bornholm, Denmark.

B: Björkö, Uppland, Sweden.



↓ Oval Animal-shaped Brooches

Distinctive brooches where main beasts dissolve into ribbons, knots, and abstract forms.

L: Brønnøy, Nordland, Norway.

CL: Söderby, Åland, Finland.

CR: Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden.

R: Lousgaard, Bornholm, Denmark.

↘ Bird-shaped Brooches

Birds seen from above, abstracted into geometric forms with striations and circles accentuating body parts.

L: Denmark.

C: Bederslev, Fyn, Denmark.

R: Gjesval, Viken, Norway.



c. 750 – 825

Broa Style



1. Lappets with double- or triple-tendrill frond terminals.
2. Tightly curled tendrill terminals.
3. Head in profile.
4. Round eye.
5. Round, tightly curled snout.
6. Small and slightly curved mouth.
7. Neck tendrils.
8. Limbs rendered as extremely elongated tendrils.
9. Open hips dissolving into looping tendrill interlacing.



← Broa Horse Tack

Harness mounts from Broa that gave the style its name, mixing ribbon animals and gripping beasts.

Broa, Gotland, Sweden.

→ Disc-on-bow Brooches

Brooches with interlaced elongated ribbon animals juxtaposed with compact gripping beasts in bold designs.

Othemars, Gotland, Sweden.

↓ Oseberg Woodcarvings

Carvings by the “Academician,” showing Broa-style traits and foreshadowing later Oseberg ornament.

Oseberg, Vestfold, Norway.



c. 800 – 875

Oseberg Style



Equally-sized squat animals:

1. Frond-like terminals.
2. Round eyes.
3. Feet grip surrounds.

An interplay of geometric and zoomorphic patterns:

4. Limbs segmented into ornamental elements.

Three main animal types:

5. Birds:
 - Head in profile.
 - Beaked.
6. Mask A:
 - Head facing forward.
 - Fronds protruding from either side of the head.
7. Mask B:
 - Head facing forward.
 - Top of head terminates in fronds.



↙ Oseberg Woodcarvings

Eclectic carvings from the Oseberg ship burial, which gave the style its name, mixing ribbon animals and gripping beasts in structured and free designs.

Oseberg, Vestfold, Norway.

↑ Equal-armed Brooches

Brooches showing animal heads in both profile and en face, a defining trait of Oseberg style.

L: Markestad, Innlandet, Norway.

C: Frøisaa, Agder, Norway.

R: Stronglandshals, Troms, Norway.

↘ Oval Brooches

Oval brooches with animal heads in profile and en face, blending geometric frameworks with free-flowing animal knotwork.

L: Kil Søndre, Trøndelag, Norway.

C: Gutdalen, Vestland, Norway.

R: Gerlev-Dråby, Sjælland, Denmark.

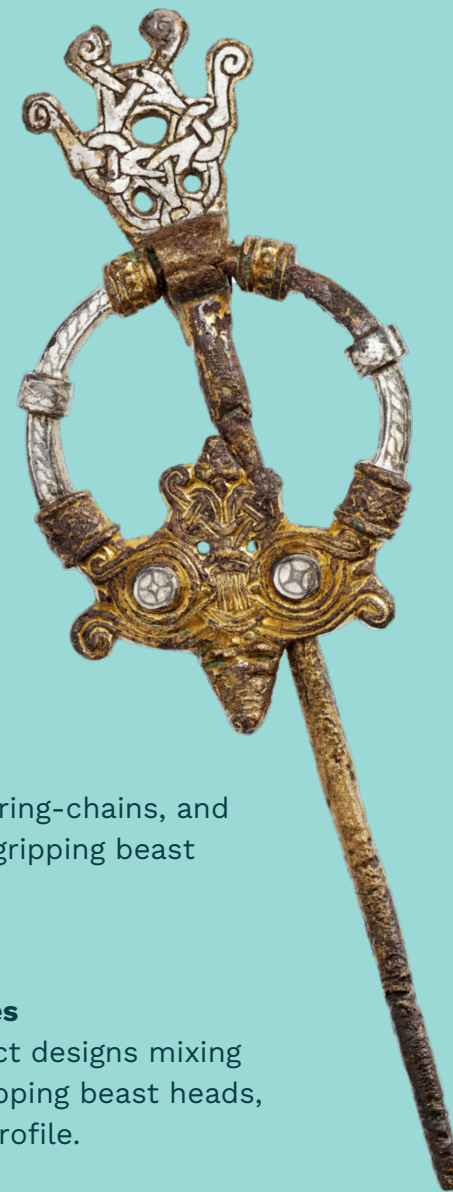


c. 850 – 950

Borre Style



1. Tight, knot-like interlacing.
2. Equal-sided geometric figures (circles and squares).
3. Spirals.
4. Triangular head facing forward.
5. Round or almond-shaped eyes.
6. Protruding ears.
7. Oval snout.
8. Short and squat proportions.
9. Slim and elongated legs.



↖ Borre Horse Tack

Harness mounts with ring-chains, and knotwork comprising gripping beast bodies.

Borre, Vestfold, Norway.

↗ Penannular Brooches

Brooches with compact designs mixing ring-chains, knots, gripping beast heads, and animal heads in profile.

L: Björkö, Uppland, Sweden.

C: Alkvie, Gotland, Sweden.

R: Björkö, Uppland, Sweden.

→ Gripping Beast Pendants

Pendants of beasts in pretzel-knot forms, clutching their limbs and frames with four gripping paws.

T: Träslöv, Halland, Sweden.

B: Vårby, Södermanland, Sweden.



← Gokstad Woodcarvings

Exquisite woodcarvings with animal head motifs from the Gokstad ship burial.

Gokstad, Vestfold, Norway.

c. 900 – 975

Jelling Style



1. Head in profile.
2. Round or almond-shaped eye.
3. Curled lip lappet.
4. Neck tendril.
5. Solid body.
6. Spirals representing hip joints.
7. Pellets intersecting limbs at joints.



⚡ Jelling Cup

Silver cup with ribbon-bodied beasts in simple S-shaped layouts, foundation of later Viking ornament. Jelling, Jylland, Denmark.

← Round Brooches

Brooches reusing Borre layouts but with ribbon animals, profile heads, and curling neck tendrils.

L: Fæsted, Jylland, Denmark.

C: Tråen, Viken, Norway.

R: Nonnebakken, Fyn Denmark.

↓ Horse-Harness Bows

Animal-head terminals, figurative ornament, animal heads with curled lip-lappets, and neck tendrils.

Søllested, Lolland, Denmark.



c. 950 – 1025

Mammen Style



1. Long and wavy S-shaped tendrils.
2. Loosely scrolled tendril terminals.
3. Spirals as tendril terminals.
4. Pellets intersecting ribbons.
5. Concave indents.
6. Head in profile.
7. Round or almond-shaped eye.
8. Spiral hip joints.



← Mammen Axe

Decorated axe blending semi-naturalistic animals with curling foliate ornament, from a princely grave in Denmark.

Mammen, Jylland, Denmark.

↙ Reliquary Shrines

Shrines with panels mixing Viking ornament and Christian imagery of the evangelists.

Kamień Pomorski, Poland.

↓ The Greater Jelling Stone

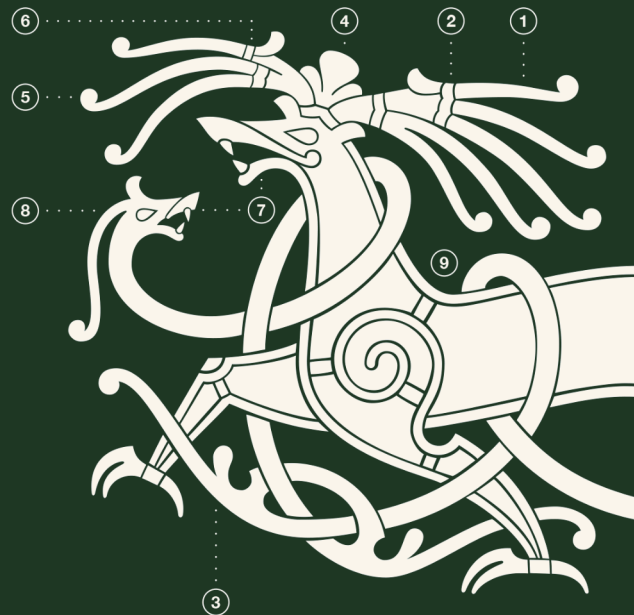
Rune stone of Harald Bluetooth with the first great beast battling a serpent, shaping Viking art.

Jelling, Jylland, Denmark.



c. 1000 – 1075

Ringerike Style



1. Slim, short tendrils.
2. Clusters of fanned-out tendrils.
3. Tendrils with a single lobe.
4. Lobes with alternating side lobes.
5. Tightly scrolled tendril terminals.
6. Pellets intersecting ribbons.
7. Head in profile.
8. Almond-shaped eye.
9. Spirals representing hip joints.



↙ Runestones

The only Viking Age style not named after a find spot, but after Ringerike near Oslo, source of sandstone for many runestones, featuring animal motifs and rich foliate ornamentation.

L: Vang, Oppland, Norway.

R: Hunnestad, Skåne, Sweden.



↑ Weather Vanes

Ship prow adornments turned church vanes, with bold silhouettes and intricate animal ornament, rare Viking maritime art.

L: Källunge, Gotland, Sweden.

R: Söderala, Hälsingland, Sweden.



→ Bird-shaped Brooches

Brooches with acanthus leaf-shaped wings and knotwork motifs set within the tails.

T: Hillerslev, Jylland, Denmark.

C: Øster Vandet, Jylland, Denmark.

B: Trellerupgaard, Fyn, Denmark.



c. 1050 – 1125

Urnes Style



1. Extremely elongated proportions (head almost reduced to a ribbon terminal)
2. Tendrils usually without offshoots
3. Tightly scrolled tendril terminals
4. Tendrils with a single lobe
5. Head in profile
6. Almond-shaped eye
7. Upper and lower lip-lappets
8. Neck tendril
9. Spirals representing hip joints



→ Urnes Stave Church

Famous for its wood carvings, this church gave its name to the Urnes style, renowned for its elegant animal interlace.

Urnes, Vestland, Norway.

↑ Openwork Brooches

Brooches with great beast motifs in figure-eight loops, battling one or two serpents.

L: Oslo, Norway.

C: Östervär, Östergötland, Sweden.

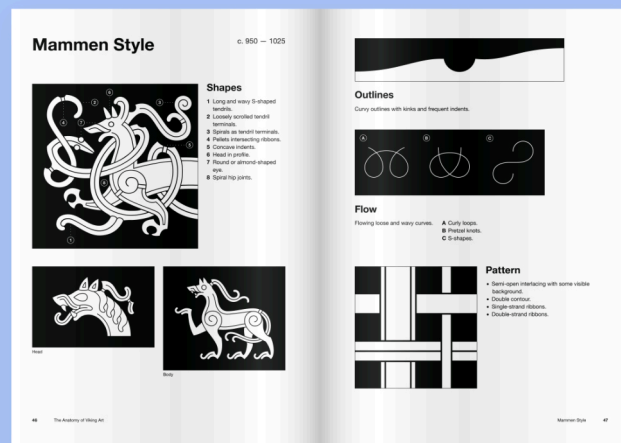
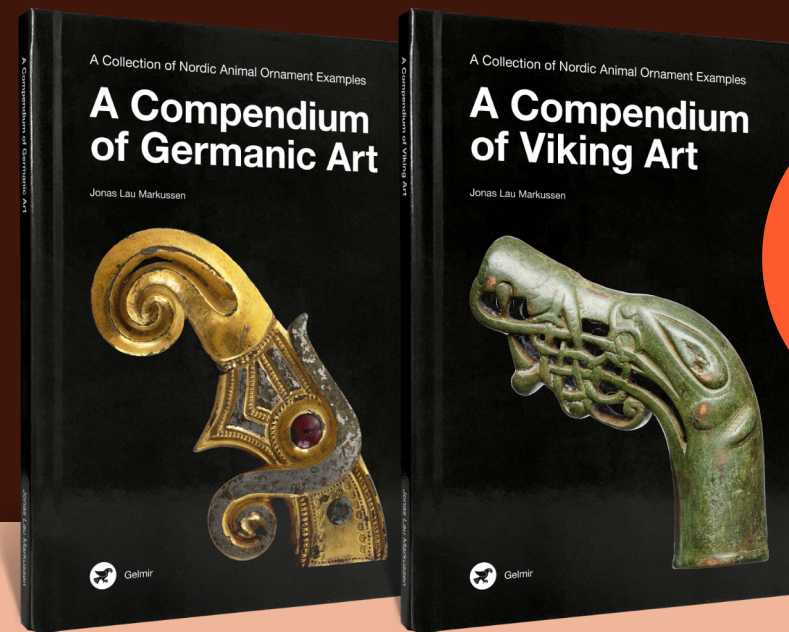
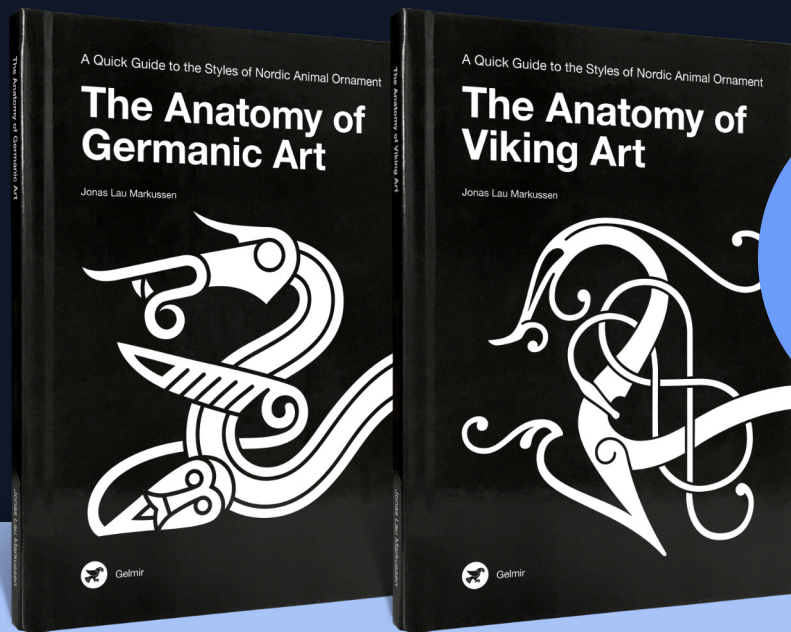
R: Bejsebakken, Jylland, Denmark.

← Runestones

Urnes-style runestones feature slender ribbon animals and serpents in tight interlace, widely represented across Scandinavia.

Skillsta, Uppland, Sweden.





The Anatomy Books Understanding the Characteristics of Viking Art

The Anatomy books break down the visual language of Viking and Germanic art into its core elements.

More than catalogues, they are teaching tools showing how patterns are built, how animals and knots interlace, and how ornamentation evolved.

Whether you're an artist, student, or history enthusiast, the Anatomy series offers clear insight into the artistry behind these ornaments.

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