



# Beyond The Book of Kells: Ripping Off Celtic Motifs

By Eve Harris  
March 2010

# Overview

- A discussion of the major 7-8th century works of insular illumination (Lindisfarne, Kells, Durrow etc.), including their socio-political basis, followed by a discussion of the primary illumination motifs and conventions and the dialogue among Celtic and related art forms
- Examples of illumination by the teacher utilizing these motifs will be on display
- A brief practical on simple knotwork will ensue

# What is an insular manuscript?

- For the purpose of this presentation insular manuscripts are those produced in the British Isles during the 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> centuries
- During this period literacy was concentrated in Christian monasteries
- According to the Venerable Bede, Christianity came to the Isles in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. However, traces of Christianity and literacy would have remained from the Roman occupation that ended c. 5<sup>th</sup> century
- Many beautiful manuscripts were created expressly as treasure objects, to gain prestige for the home monastery and increase standing
- This motivation was balanced by the belief that creating exegetical works and making the Word of God “flesh” were in themselves holy acts and, given the long, arduous work and sacrifice involved, pilgrimages in their own right

# Artistic Environment

- Insular illumination is generally considered to be “Celtic” in inspiration, specifically using the Celtic La Tène style
- However it also shares stylistic elements with Pictish, Migration art (e.g. Frankish and Ostrogothic) and Scandinavian art

# What is “Celtic” art?

- Arising from the Celtic barbarian migration c. 500 BCE, Celtic art is basically a shared European aesthetic that was preserved within the British Isles, particularly Ireland, until at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE (Dillon & Chadwick, 287)
- One of the major Celtic art movements is “La Tène”, named for a site in Switzerland where it was first identified
- La Tène draws “heavily on Greek/Etruscan motifs, with an admixture of Oriental, even Scythian elements” (UNC link)

# Celtic art - examples

- Metalwork: Tara Brooch, Hunterston Brooch, Ardagh Chalice, Derrynaflan Chalice
- Stone: Irish high crosses, e.g. Clonmacnoise
- Insular illumination such as the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels
- Later Celtic art (early 12<sup>th</sup> c.) includes the Lismore Crosier, the Cross of Cong and St. Patrick's Bell Shrine

# Some major insular manuscripts

## Work

- Book of Durrow
- Lindisfarne Gospels
- Book of Mulling
- Lichfield Gospels
- Book of Kells
- Echternach Gospels

## Date

After 660

c. 710-725

early 8<sup>th</sup> century

8<sup>th</sup> century

(possibly 730)

c. 750-800

8<sup>th</sup> century

# Colour palette of insular ms

- Red, yellow, green
- Gold (gilding or shell-gold) in some instances
- Lindisfarne and Kells both had extended palettes including blue and violet (through shading) which strongly suggests exposure to Mediterranean-produced books e.g. Roman exemplars (Brown, 275)



# Common Celtic motifs in insular ms

- Pelta: “crescent with a cusped interior curve, derived from the profile of an ancient Greek shield” (Brown, 273)
- Spirals and trumpet spirals
- Vine scrolls, sometimes inhabited
- Triskele
- Knotwork (borders or major motifs)
- Gripping beasts
- Red dots, used in rows, grids or to render motifs, a convention adopted from Coptic ms (Cahill, 180)

# Layout elements in insular Gospel ms

- Carpet and/or cross-carpet pages, completely filled with ornamentation. The intensity of the ornamentation almost attains “*horror vacui*” (Dillon & Chadwick, 288)
- Incipit “title” pages for each Gospel, with a large decorated principal initial, partial page border, and descending initials including the Apostle’s names and the opening words of the text
- Apostle portrait pages or their symbol
- Body text with illuminated initials

# Book of Kells, c. 750-800



Chi-Rho page, folio 34r

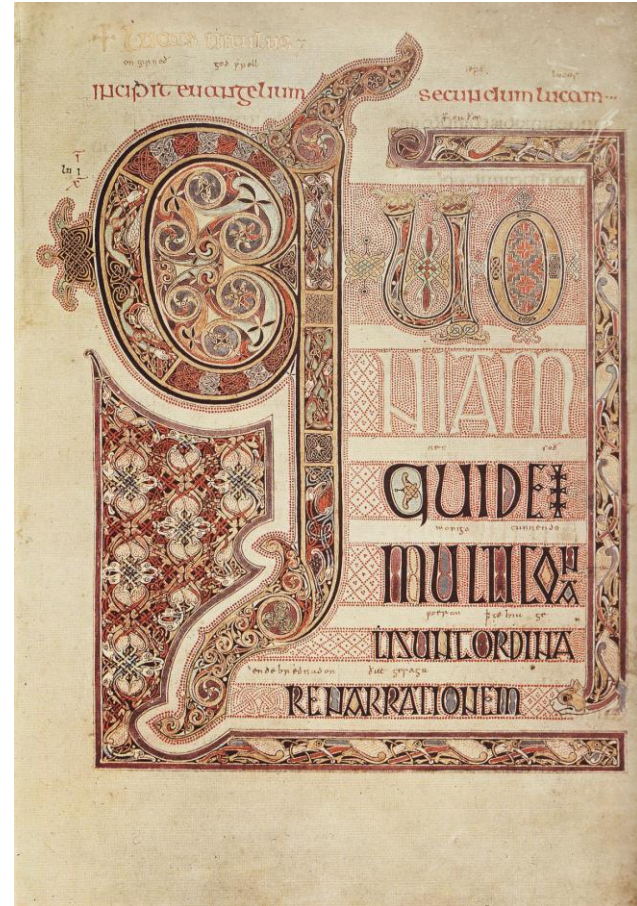
Trinity College Dublin

18 Mar. 2010

<http://www.bookofkells.ie/book-of-kells/>



# Lindisfarne Gospels, c. 710-725



- Cross-carpet page and St. Luke's incipit page (Zaczek 37 and 39)
  - The artwork represents a "synthesis of art influences across Europe", including Celtic metal working and stonework – a mix and match of Celtic, Germanic and Pictish stylistic elements of the 6th-8th centuries" (Brown, 46)
- 8-Apr-10

# Book of Durrow, after 660



Folio 192v  
Carpet page (Zaczek, 31)

One of the earliest great insular manuscripts

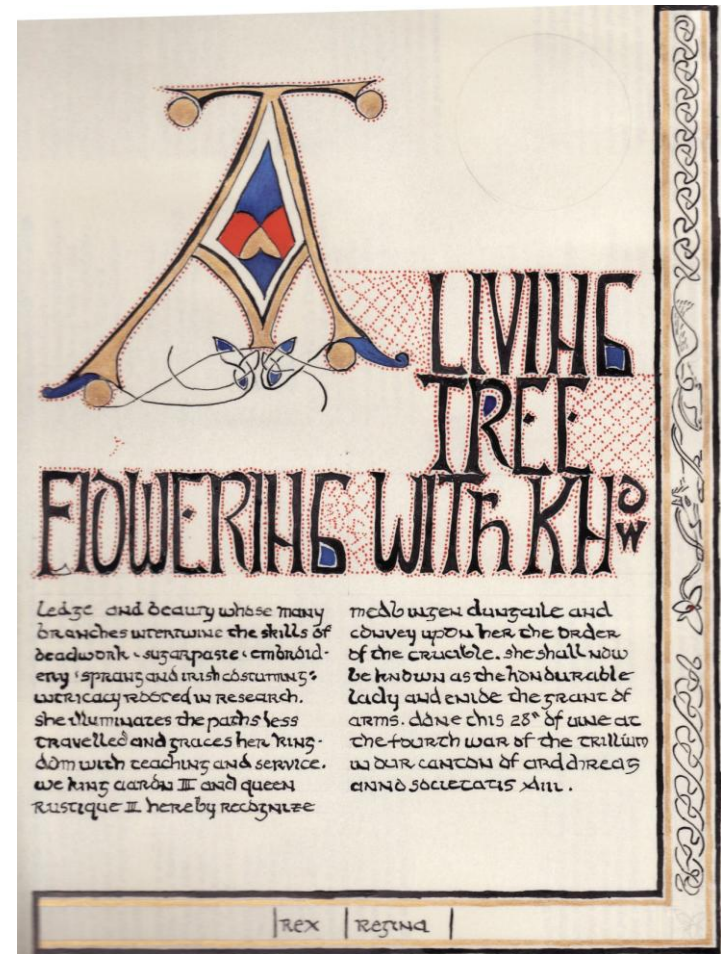
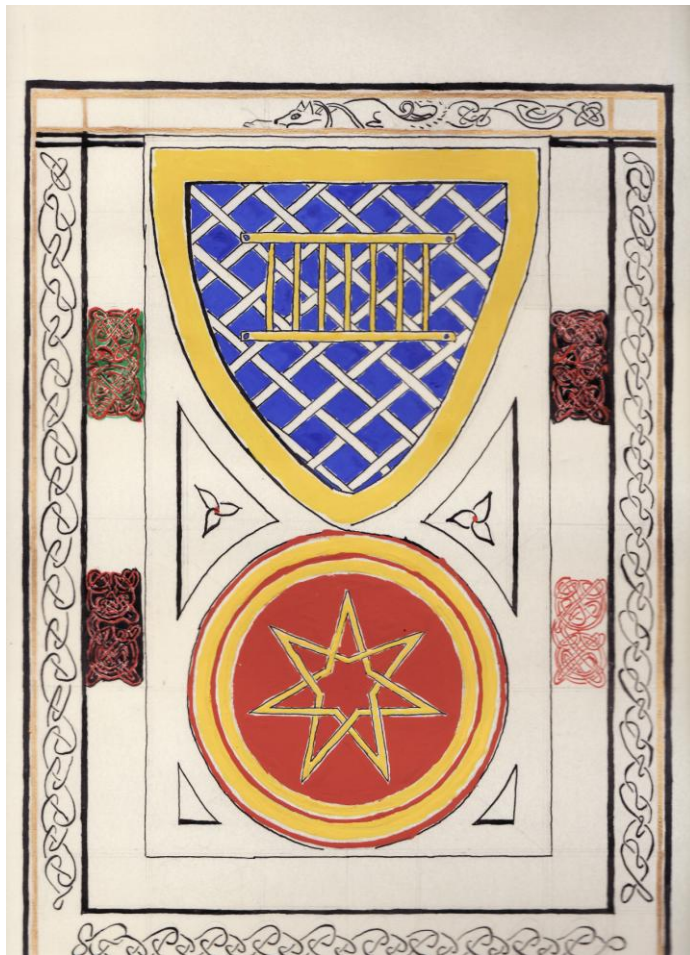


# Adaptations of Lindisfarne style





# Adaptations of Lindisfarne style



# Challenges of insular ms

- Insular illumination highly sophisticated
- Design and execution very difficult and demanding
- Best examples take the style to ultimate extreme
- Cross-carpet pages absolutely solid with ornament
- Very intricate embedded knotwork
- Splendid but discouraging for beginner and intermediate illuminators



# When imitating insular ms

- Easy to become discouraged
- Limited number of insular ms to draw upon for inspiration
- Border work tedious
- Difficult to deconstruct carpet and incipit pages for useful motifs
- Attempts to imitate the apogee of illumination yield mediocre results

# Finding inspiration in Celtic metalwork

- Strong, simpler shapes, often in gold, with red, black, blue and white accents
- Easy to identify pleasing shapes and stand-alone motifs
- Compelling imagery that feels fresher than a painfully derivative knotwork border

# Characteristics of Celtic metalwork

- millefiori or chequy glass studs
- polychrome enamel
- cloisonné with glass or garnet chips
- Studding with semi-precious stones
- Filigree
- Stepwork
- Zoomorphs / gripping beasts
- Abstract rather than naturalistic

# Tara Brooch, early 8<sup>th</sup> c.



- Allegedly found on the seashore near Laytown, Co. Meath.
- Gold, millefiori glass studs, detailed pelta/triskele shapes similar to Lindisfarne Gospels

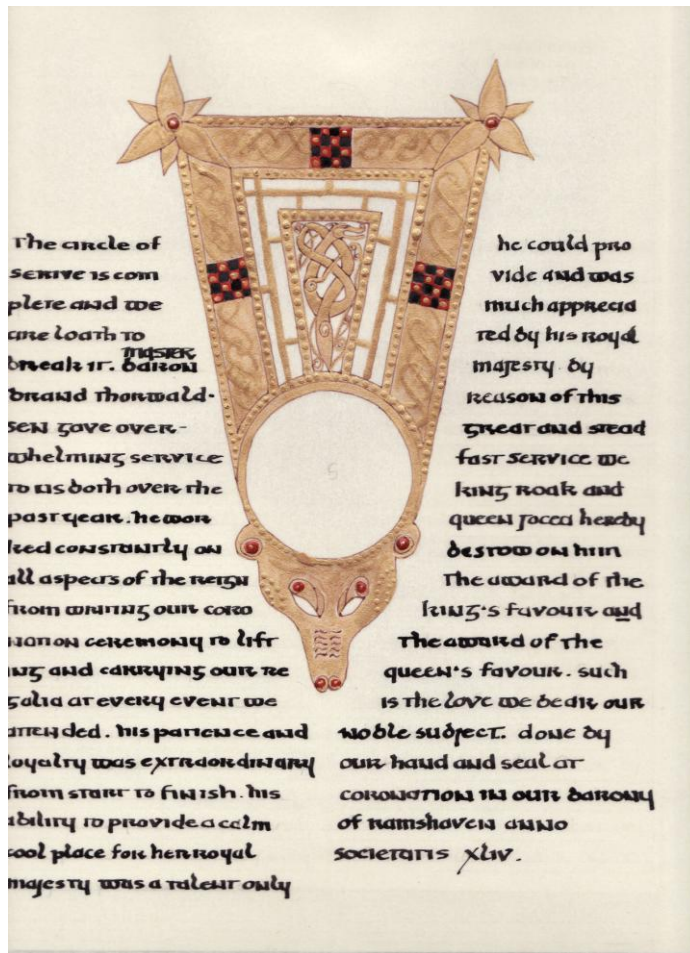
- 19 Mar. 2010
- [http://www.uni-due.de/DI/Architecture\\_Art.htm](http://www.uni-due.de/DI/Architecture_Art.htm)

# Tara Brooch, detail



- Note central gripping dragon motif
- Inlays damaged or missing as are some of the gold filigree work
- (Duane, 57)

# Illuminations based on Celtic art



- Motif derived from the pin head of the Tara Brooch (Duane, 57)
- Cloisonné cells adapted from the Lismore Crosier, c. 1100 (Sullivan, 85)
- Illumination by Eve Harris, 2009

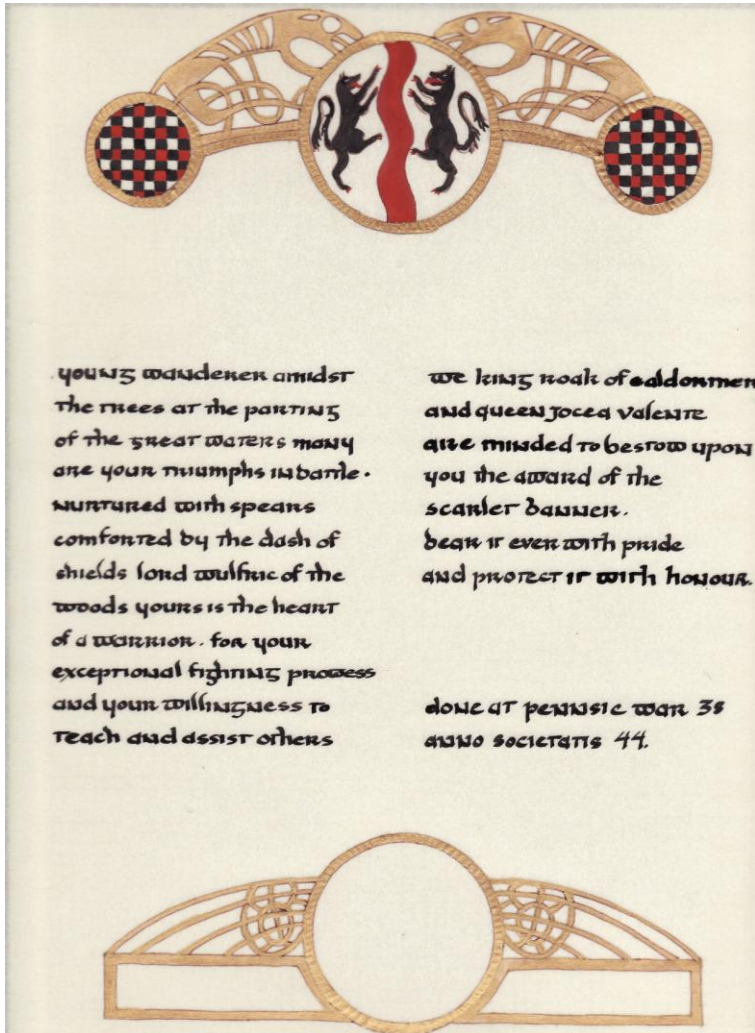


# Lismore Crosier, c. 1100



- Bronze bishop's crook in the shape of a seahorse
- Several millefiori glass studs
- Gold filigree plaques are now missing
- (Duane, 72 and 74)

# Illuminations based on Celtic art



- Gold gripping wolves and millefiori studs adapted from the Lismore Crosier, c. 1100 (Sullivan, 85)
- Illumination by Eve Harris, 2009



# Ardagh Chalice, c. 700



# St. Patrick's Bell Shrine, c. 1091-1105



- Created in Armagh
- Disjointed spiral motifs and a lack of unity on the body of the reliquary points to the decay of Celtic art, however the roof demonstrates beautiful knotwork
- (Duane, 72-73)



# Illuminations based on Celtic Art



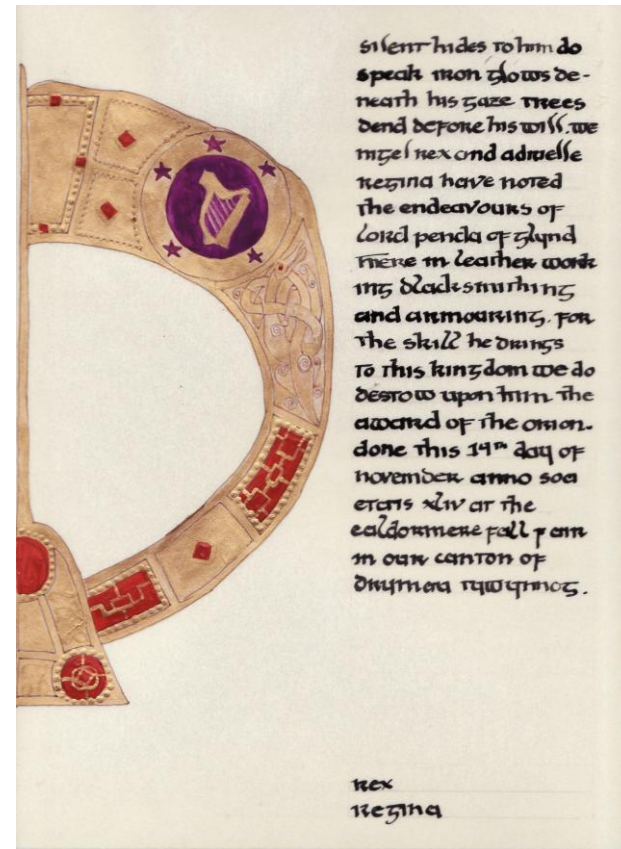
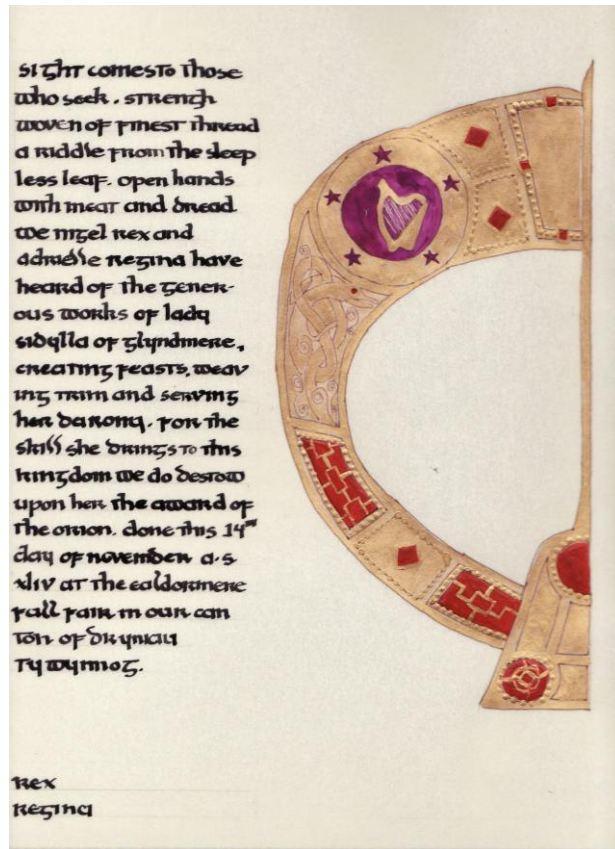
- Gold knotwork shape adapted from the roof of the house-shaped St. Patrick's Bell Shrine Reliquary, c. 1091-1105 (bronze with gold filigree) (Sullivan, 82)
- Millefiori studs adapted from the Ardagh Chalice (Duane, 60)
- Illumination by Eve Harris, 2009

# Hunterston Brooch, c. 700



- Silver pennanular brooch “with insets of gold, silver and amber”
- Held by the Royal Museum at Edinburgh
- (Sullivan, 50-53)

# Illuminations based on Celtic art



- Split pennanular shapes based on the Hunterston Brooch, c. 700 (Sullivan, 52-53)
- Abstracted dragon taken from pin head of Tara Brooch (Duane, 57)
- 8-Illuminations by Eve Harris, 2009



# Anglo-Saxon Art

- Sutton Hoo, 6<sup>th</sup>-early 7<sup>th</sup> c.
- Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.
- Boss Hall Brooch, 7<sup>th</sup> c.
- St. Cuthbert's pectoral cross, second half of 7<sup>th</sup> c. (Brown, 59)

# Sutton Hoo, 6<sup>th</sup>-early 7<sup>th</sup> c.



- Matched pair of shoulder clasps in gold with garnet and millefiori cloisonné, interlinked boar motif and filigree work
- AN79872001
- © The Trustees of the British Museum
- **Department:** Prehistory and Europe
- **Registration number:** 1939,1010.4
- **Bibliographic reference**  
[Tait 1976 197](#)  
[Tait 1986a 242](#)  
[Speake 1980 3](#)  
[Bruce-Mitford 1978 Fig.386](#)
- **Location:** G41/dc50/no7
- [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=86877&partId=1&searchText=sutton+hoo+shoulder+clasp&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\\_id=79872](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=86877&partId=1&searchText=sutton+hoo+shoulder+clasp&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset_id=79872)

# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

- Collection of Anglo-Saxon metal objects
- “Originally discovered by metal detectorist Terry Herbert in July 2009 and subsequently excavated by Birmingham University Archaeology Unit and Staffordshire County Council.”  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/finds/sets/72157622378376316/>
- Chiefly gold pieces with garnet chips mounted in stepwork, “false cloisonné”



# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

- Note similarities to border pattern on Book of Durrow carpet page



Gold hilt fitting with inlaid garnets

Press quality photo

Finds number NLM 449

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

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# Illumination based on Staffordshire Hoard



- Border art based on gold hilt fitting and pyramid sword fitting from the Staffordshire Hoard
- Illumination by Eve Harris, 2010

# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

- Note stepwork in 1<sup>st</sup> mount
- 2<sup>nd</sup> mount seems to show an armoured man's head, a very rare representation



Pyramid sword fittings

Press quality photo

Finds number NLM 462 and 451

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# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

- Note similarities to millefiori studs on Ardagh Chalice, Tara Brooch, (much earlier) Battersea Shield and the (much later) Lismore Crozier



Millefiori stud with black and white checkered pattern  
Press quality photo  
Finds number NLM 545

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# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.



- Note similarity to gripping beast borders in Lindisfarne and Durrow

Gold dagger hilt  
Press quality photo  
Finds number NLM 567

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

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# Staffordshire Hoard, 7<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> c.

- Gripping beast border motif
- Probably of horses

Gold helmet cheek piece

Press quality photo

Finds number NLM 453

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

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nc/2.0/">CC BY-NC 2.0</a></div>

8-Apr-10



# Anglo-Saxon Brooches, 7<sup>th</sup> c.



- Boss Hall Brooch © Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service
- “Elaborate 7<sup>th</sup> century gold and garnet brooch from a lady's burial at Boss Hall, Sproughton beside the River Gipping. Now on display at Ipswich Museum.”
- <http://www.culture24.org.uk/history+%2526+heritage/time/viking+and+anglo%252dsaxon/art66803>
- *Visited March 19, 2010*



- Disk Brooch, Early 7<sup>th</sup> c.
- Description: Top plate: gold-wrought sheet; settings-garnets (cabochon, patterned foil), gypsum backing; cells-garnets (patterned foil, gold), glass (blue); wire-beaded. Base plate: silver: border-inlaid (niello), gilt.
- <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/anglosaxons.html>
- *Visited March 18, 2010*

# Other Sources: Migration Period

- The Migration period took place over 300-700 CE in Europe and was conducted in two phases, representing such peoples as the Goths (Visi- and Ostrogoths), Vandals, Franks and other Germanic and Slavic tribes
- The Ostrogoths contributed many splendid examples of gold adornments paved and inlaid with semi-precious stones (particularly garnets)
- Anglo-Saxon metalwork such as the Sutton Hoo shoulder clasps, Staffordshire Hoard and St. Cuthbert's pectoral cross have a lot in common with Ostrogothic jewellery



# Migration Brooches



Gold disc brooch, mid 7<sup>th</sup> c. (Gregoriotti, 141)



Bow brooch, 7<sup>th</sup> c. (Gregoriotti, 138)

# Ostrogothic eagle motifs



Polychrome bird-shaped brooch from Saragossa, Barbarian, c. 585-620. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid.

(Gregoriotti, 147)



Illum. (Harris, 2010)

- Popular motif used in earrings, pendants, brooches etc., said to be based on the Roman imperial eagle
- May also be related to the spread of Christianity, as the eagle was often used as John the Baptist's evangelist symbol
- Note use of polychrome



# Eagle motifs, insular ms



Book of Durrow, 7<sup>th</sup> c.  
Symbol of St. John the Baptist  
(Sullivan, 70-71)



Book of Dimma, 7<sup>th</sup> c.  
Symbol of St. John the Baptist  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Shakko>

# Ostrogothic collar pendant



- Late 5th-early 6th century
- Gold, garnet, glass

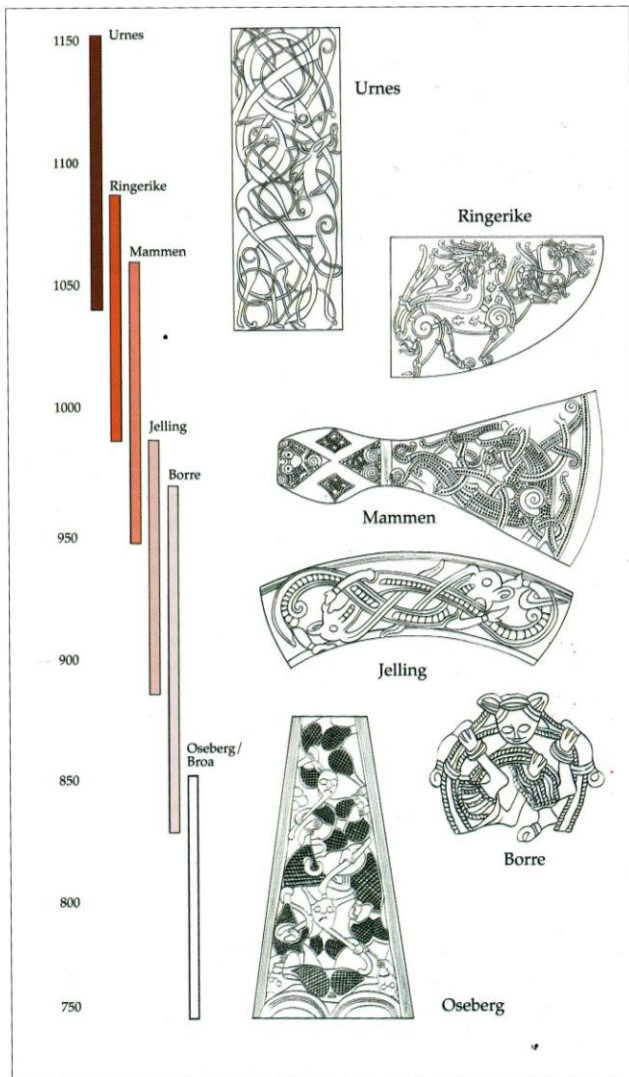
Collar Pendant [Domagnano, Republic of San Marino] (17.190.698)". In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000 ndash; [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho\\_17.190.698.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho_17.190.698.htm) (October 2006)

[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho\\_17.190.698.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho_17.190.698.htm)

*Visited March 18, 2010*

# Scandinavian art

- **Art Timeline from Gräslund in Fitzhugh, 66**
- While generic Scandinavian decoration often consists of very simple repetitive patterns (lines, triangles with dots, triple dots, etc.), “curvilinear animal-style decoration dominated Viking art....some styles had ties with Celtic art, others with circumpolar art” (Gräslund in Fitzhugh, 66)
- Fine examples include the Mammen axe and embroidery find, bronze weathervanes, Oseberg animal posts, Urnes stave church



## VIKING ART STYLES

Curvilinear animal-style decoration dominated Viking art as diverse as jewelry, runestones, and ship burial furniture. Its evolution from 750 to 1100 is identified stylistically with sites where objects were found—Broa/Oseberg, Borre, Jelling, Mammen, Ringerike, and Urnes. Some styles had ties with Celtic art, others with circumpolar art.



# Paths for Norse illumination

- Silver gouache
- Following examples of inlaid axe heads and sword hilts, create a “niello” inlay effect with black on a silver ground

# Illumination Tools

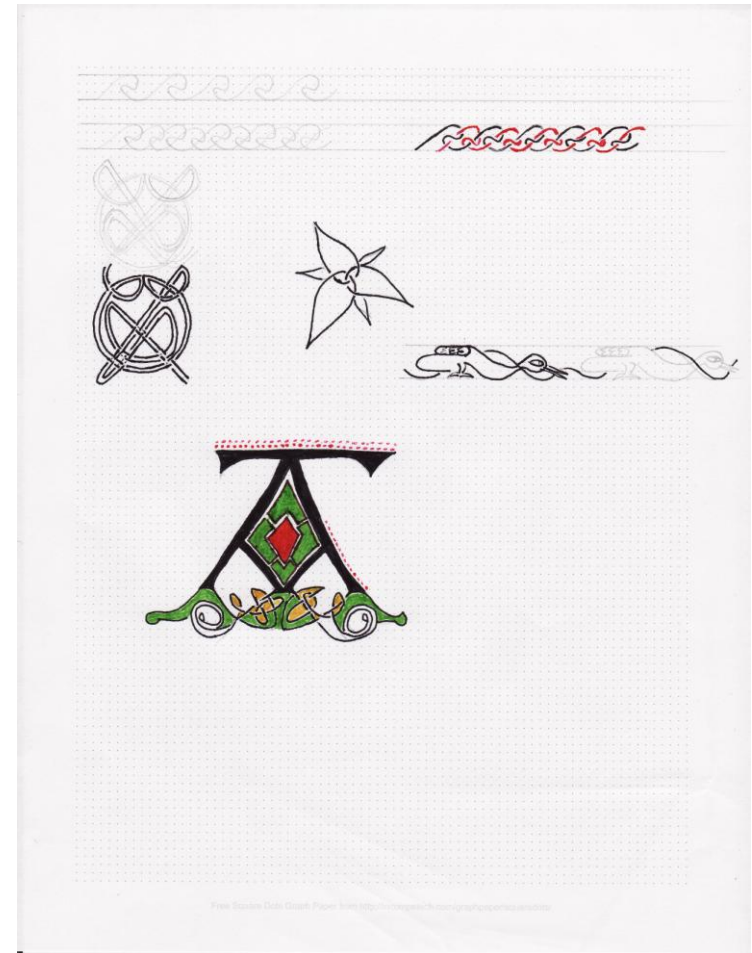
- Gouaches, including gold
- Pencils
- Microline pens (brown and black)
- 000 brushes for fine detail, 0 and 00 for infills
- Compass
- Ruler
- Pergamenata paper

# Illumination Techniques

- Use multiple layers of paint to achieve a more realistic, 3-D appearance
- Dropping watered gouache into a stepwork or cloisonné cell gives depth to enamel or jewel depictions
- Dropping watered gold gouache in patterns can mimic embossing or stippling

# Knotwork Practical

- Knotwork is used to help fill figures, as termini on letters and to help fill border bars
- When trying to analyze knotwork, one can be stymied by the thickness of the line
- Visualize the knotwork as a thin line and then widen it
- Simple knotwork can be created by taking a sine wave and putting a kink in it, then duplicating the image
- The actual knotwork effect is created by alternately going over and under the lines



# Works Cited

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- Zaczek, Iain. *The Treasury of Decorative Art: Celtic Art and Design*. London: Studio Editions Ltd., 1995.



# List of Artefacts

*Anglo-Saxon Disk Brooch*. Early 7th c. 18 Mar. 2010.

<<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/anglosaxons.html>>

*Ardagh Chalice*. Irish metalwork. C. 700. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Duane, 58 and 60.

*Boss Hall burial finds*. Woman's brooch. 7th c. Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service. 19 Mar. 2010.

<<http://www.culture24.org.uk/history+%2526+heritage/time/viking+and+anglo%252dsaxon/art66803>>

*Brooch of gold, silver and enamel*. Barbarian, Wittislingen. 7th c. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Gregoriotti, 138.

*Dimma, Book of*. Insular ms. 7th c. 19 Mar. 2010. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Shakko>

*Durrow, Book of*. Insular ms. Mid-late 7th c. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Zaczek, 31 and Sullivan, 70-71.

*Gold disc brooch*. Barbarian, Wittislingen. Mid 7th c. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Gregoriotti, 141.

# List of Artefacts (cont'd)

*Hunterston Brooch*. Penannular brooch. C. 700. Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. Sullivan, 50-53.

*Kells, Book of*. Illuminated manuscript. c. 800. Trinity College Dublin MS 58. 18 Mar. 2010.  
<<http://www.bookofkells.ie/book-of-kells/>>

*Lindisfarne Gospels*. Insular ms. c. 710-725. Zaczek, 37 and 39.

*Lismore Crosier*. Bishop's crook. C. 1100. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Duane, 72 and 74.

*Ostrogothic Collar Pendant*. Domagnano, Republic of San Marino. 17.190.698. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. 18 Mar. 2010.  
<[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho\\_17.190.698.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/05/eust/ho_17.190.698.htm)>

*Polychrome bird-shaped brooch*. Barbarian, Saragossa. C. 585-620. Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid. Gregoriotti, 147.

*St. Patrick's Bell Shrine*. House-shaped reliquary. C. 1091-1105. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. Duane, 73.

# List of Artefacts (cont'd)

Staffordshire Hoard. Gold hilt fitting with inlaid garnets. 7th-early 8th c. Finds number NLM 449. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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Staffordshire Hoard. Millefiori stud with black and white checkered pattern. 7th-early 8th c. Finds number NLM 545. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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Staffordshire Hoard. Pyramid sword fittings. 7th-early 8th c. Finds number NLM 462 and 451. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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Staffordshire Hoard. Gold dagger hilt. 7th-early 8th c. Finds number NLM 567. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

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```

# List of Artefacts (cont'd)

*Sutton Hoo mound*. Shoulder clasp. 7<sup>th</sup>-early 6<sup>th</sup> c. British Museum. 18 Mar. 2010.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=86877&partId=1&searchText=sutton+hoo+shoulder+clasp&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\\_id=79872](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=86877&partId=1&searchText=sutton+hoo+shoulder+clasp&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset_id=79872)

*Tara Brooch*. Irish metalwork. Early 8th c. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. 18 Mar. 2010.

[http://www.uni-due.de/DI/Architecture\\_Art.htm](http://www.uni-due.de/DI/Architecture_Art.htm)

*Tara Brooch*, detail. Duane, 57.

# Illuminations by Eve Harris

*Scroll of Honour*. Lindisfarne style. 2008.

*Bird illumination and myth*. Lindisfarne style. 2009.

*Order of the Crucible diptych*. Carpet and incipit page. 2008.

*King's & Queen's Favour*. Based on the Tara Brooch and Lismore Crosier. 2009.

*Award of the Scarlet Banner*. Based on the Tara Brooch. 2009.

*Court Baronetcy Scroll*. Based on the St. Patrick's Bell Shrine. 2009.

*Award of the Orion* (pair). Based on the Hunterston and Tara Brooches. 2009.

*Award of Arms*, detail. Based on the Staffordshire Hoard. 2010.

*Award of Arms*, detail. Based on Migration bird fibulae. 2010.