



# Anglo-Saxon Art

## A New History

**Leslie Webster**

The seven centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period in England (roughly AD 400-1100) were a time of extraordinary and profound transformation in almost every aspect of its culture, producing an explosion of artistic creativity. Settled by northern European tribal groupings of pagan and illiterate warriors and farmers in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, by the eleventh century England had acquired all the trappings of medieval statehood, including a remarkable and highly influential artistic heritage, which had impact far beyond England itself.

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### Key Sales points

- From the jewellery discovered on the great ship burial at Sutton Hoo to the Bayeux Tapestry, Anglo-Saxon art represents a unique high point of medieval creativity
- An authoritative reference book that traces the changing nature of art throughout the extraordinary Anglo-Saxon period. Explores the significance of art to Anglo-Saxon culture, and the various ways it both reflected and influenced the world in which it was created
- First new introduction to the subject for twenty-five years, particularly timely in the wake of the discovery of the Staffordshire Hoard
- Reveals the character, leitmotifs and underlying continuities of Anglo-Saxon art, through a wealth of stunning illustrations
- Offers a comprehensive introduction to the whole field of Anglo-Saxon culture, including art, history, literature and archaeology

### Contents

Introduction: Anglo-Saxon art: a cultural exploration • 1. Reading the image, Seeing the text • 2. Rome reinvented I: the early inheritance • 3. Rome reinvented II: the impact of Christianity • 4. Celtic connections, Eastern influences • 5. Art and power, 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries • 6. Icons of Salvation, images of devotion: mission and reform, 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries • 7. The Viking impact, and after • Epilogue

### Author

**Leslie Webster** was formerly Keeper of the Department of Prehistory and Europe at the British Museum. She is the author of *The Franks Casket* (British Museum Press, forthcoming) and co-editor of *The Transformation of the Roman World*, *The Making of England* and *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*.

All information is provisional and subject to change

Anglo-Saxon art is the art of England between roughly the years 600 and 1100, although dates will vary depending on individual focus. Some scholars prefer to see "Anglo-Saxon" art as something that could exist only from the period of King Alfred in the late 9th century onward; others will see it as something that could not exist after the Norman Conquest of 1066. In both cases the period is defined tacitly by external political events rather than the internal development of the art forms themselves. The term "Insular" is applied to Anglo-Saxon art and architecture now only survives fragmentarily and even what remains is not necessarily representative of what once existed. Our view of architecture, for example, is distorted by the near-total loss of all wooden buildings and by the Norman destruction of all pre-Conquest cathedrals.

Anglo-Saxon art survives mostly in illuminated manuscripts, Anglo-Saxon architecture, a number of very fine ivory carvings, and some works in metal and other materials. Opus Anglicanum ("English work") was already recognised as the finest embroidery in Europe, although only a few pieces from the Anglo-Saxon period remain - the Bayeux Tapestry is a rather different sort of embroidery, on a far larger scale. Anglo-Saxon art and architecture now only survives fragmentarily and even what remains is not necessarily representative of what once existed. Our view of architecture, for example, is distorted by the near-total loss of all wooden buildings and by the Norman destruction of all pre-Conquest cathedrals. Anglo Saxon art can be divided into two phases; one occurring before the Danish invasion and one after. It can also be divided by its producers: monks on the one hand, and the Angles and Saxons themselves. The art movement is characterized by illuminated manuscripts and metalwork and carvings that were densely decorated with symbolism and visual riddles. Though we think of