

DATASHEET 43

Viking-Age Scandinavian art styles and their appearance in the British Isles Part 2: Late Viking-Age art styles

by

Jane Kershaw

*Randall-MacIver Student in Archaeology
The Queen's College, University of Oxford, High Street, Oxford OX1 4AW*

This is the second of two datasheets devoted to Viking-Age Scandinavian art styles in the British Isles. Following on directly from the consideration of early Viking-Age art styles in Datasheet 42, this paper focuses on the late Viking-Age styles of Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes, current from the late tenth to early twelfth centuries. It identifies the diagnostic features of each style, paying particularly close attention to their manifestation on artefacts found within the British Isles, and outlines their chronologies.

The Mammen style *Stylistic features*

The Mammen style, most recently reviewed by Signe Horn Fuglesang (1991; 2001), is named after the ornament which adorns a double-sided silver-inlaid axehead from a chamber grave at Mammen, Denmark (Figure 1; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, Pls. 52-53).

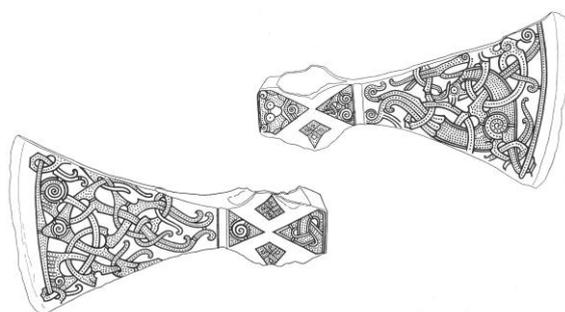


Figure 1 Silver-inlaid axehead from Mammen, Jutland. Actual length: 178mm (drawn by Bertil Centerwall, after Magnus Petersen in Arbman 1962)

Whilst retaining several Jelling-style characteristics, including S-shaped animals with spiral hips and lip-lappets (see Datasheet 42), Mammen compositions break with tradition via their asymmetry and centrifugal motion (Fuglesang 2001, 160). They bring to the fore a suite of semi-naturalistic animal and plant motifs: prominent animals, including lions, bird-like creatures and snakes, with pelleted bodies and backwards-thrown heads, enveloped in loosely-interlacing, asymmetrical tendrils and scroll.

Datasheets are distributed to members of *The Finds Research Group AD 700-1700*. Details of membership are available from the Group's Membership Secretary: Katey Goodwin, Four Winds, 8 St Anne's Vale, Brown Edge, Staffs ST6 8TA; jandkgoodwin@talktalk.net. Correspondence concerning the contents of individual *Datasheets* should be addressed to the author. Datasheet 43 © Jane Kershaw 2010. Figure acknowledgements are given in the accompanying captions. All efforts have been made to seek appropriate permissions for reproduced illustrations, and for original drawings where these have been made with reference to existing published work. Where references are made to the *Portable Antiquities Scheme's* online database (www.finds.org.uk), the object's unique find ID number is given in parentheses.

Mammen-style scroll has a fleshy appearance and features hooked ends and semi-circular indentations, as on the memorial stone from Jelling (Fuglesang 1991, cat. no. 1). The style's repertoire also incorporates anthropomorphic motifs, including a bearded and moustached triangular mask. Examples with emanating tendrils adorn the ivory casket from Bamberg, and also appear in sculptural art, as well as on the axehead from Mammen itself (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 125, Pl. 54; Fuglesang 1991, cat. nos. 3, 6, 7).

In the British Isles

The Mammen style is a rare, yet geographically widespread, Viking-Age art form, appearing on a small number of objects and monuments from Scandinavia, Iceland, Spain, Germany, the Ukraine and the British Isles (Fuglesang 1991; Roesdahl 2010). In Insular contexts it is best preserved on stone sculpture from the Isle of Man, particularly on two stone crosses from Kirk Braddan, with S-shaped, tendril-entwined Mammen beasts (Figure 2; Wilson 2008a, 63, 67-70, figs. 28, 29).



Figure 2 Mammen-style ornament on a memorial cross, Kirk Braddan, Isle of Man. Actual length: 1.45m (Wilson 2008, fig. 28)

These creatures find close parallels in the ornament engraved on the ball terminals of four silver thistle brooches from the Skaill hoard, Orkney, on which Mammen-style birds and snakes intertwine with lappets and non-axial tendrils. Indeed, the ornament is so similar that it has been suggested that the Skaill brooches were produced in the Irish Sea region, most likely in Man itself (Graham-Campbell 1995, 41-43, fig. 21).

Within the British Isles, the Mammen style also appears on a bone disc and iron spearhead, both from the Thames in London, as well as on a wooden animal-head terminal from Dublin and a bone carving from Yorkshire (Fuglesang 1991, cat. nos. 22, 29; Lang 1988, 16, fig. 20, 45; Roesdahl et al. 1981, cat. no. E9). The current tally of Mammen-style finds is nonetheless small, and the style is identified (merged with some Ringerike traits) on just two rectangular brooches, both depicting a bird (Hinton 1974, no. 35; Hattatt 1987, 384, no. 1426, in both cases misidentified as the Jelling style). Mammen's low profile in metalwork is not surprising, however, and need not be correlated with an absence of documented Scandinavian activity in England, as recently suggested (Richards and Naylor 2010, 350). The style is rare in metalwork even within Scandinavia, coinciding as it did with the end of mass-produced cast ornaments on which the earlier Borre and Jelling styles flourished (Fuglesang 1991, 85-6).

Chronology

Mammen was current in the British Isles from the mid to late tenth century. Current academic thinking dates the Skaill hoard, with a relatively young phase of the style, to 960-80 on account on its associated coins (Graham-Campbell, pers. comm.). This bracket fits well with evidence from Dublin, where a carving with a more mature Mammen style was excavated in an archaeological layer containing a coin of Aethelred *c* 980 (Lang 1988, 45, cat. no. DW12).

The Danish grave that yielded the Mammen axehead has been dendrochronologically-dated to 970/1, providing a *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of the fully-developed style within Scandinavia (Roesdahl 1994, 108). This chimes with the date range of 960-985 attributed to the Jelling memorial stone on account of its inscription, and fits comfortably with the late tenth-century date proposed for the latest phase of the style (Fuglesang 1991, 103; Wilson 1995, 137).

The Ringerike style

Stylistic features

The Ringerike style, originally surveyed and recently reviewed by Signe Horn Fuglesang (1980; 1981; 2001), is named after a district in Norway which is home to a type of red sandstone used in stone carvings decorated with the style. It has a ragged, yet balanced appearance and is composed of three main motifs: a quadruped, descended from the semi-naturalistic Mammen beast; a snake, which often encircles the decorative plane; and long, taut, fleshy tendrils, often with tightly-scrolled ends, which envelop both creatures (Fuglesang 1980).

The Ringerike style is perhaps best seen on a standing stone from Vang, Norway, on which clusters of tightly-scrolled foliates emerge from two, interlacing central stems in an asymmetrical fashion (Figure 3; Wilson 1995, fig. 136). On the upper part of the composition, tendrils alternate with pear shapes: a typical feature of the style's foliates. A prominent, striding quadruped, with a double-contoured body, large spiral hips and a lobed tail, is encountered above; this beast find parallels on the memorial stone from Jelling, demonstrating Ringerike's close relationship with the Mammen style.



Figure 3 Runestone with classic Ringerike-style ornament, Vang, Norway. Actual height: 2.15m . Drawn by Nick Griffiths, after Wilson 1995, bild 169)

In the British Isles

In the British Isles, the Ringerike style was applied to a wide range of media, its popularity no doubt reflecting its artistic affinities with the contemporary Anglo-Saxon Winchester style, with which it occasionally merged (for instance, on the Sutton, Isle of Ely, disc brooch) (Kershaw 2008, 265; Backhouse *et al.* 1984, no., 105). The pure, Scandinavian style is best seen on stone carvings from London. An imposing Ringerike-style quadruped with a characteristic almond-shaped eye and head lappets appears together with clustered, scrolled tendrils on a runic-inscribed tombstone from St Paul's Cathedral, one of three Ringerike stone carvings from the city (Figure 4; Fuglesang 1980, 63-4, cat. nos. 87-89).



Figure 4 Ringerike ornament on a carved stone from St Paul's Churchyard, London (colour reconstructed). Actual height: 46.8cm (Wilson 1995, bild 166)

Southern England has yielded classic Ringerike-style bone implements, in addition to items of metalwork, some of which introduce atypical style elements (*ibid.*, 47-51, 67-9).

A number of objects also attest the local adaption and modification of the Ringerike style, both in England and Ireland. In Ireland, Ringerike appears in a highly developed, less ragged, form which appears to privilege foliate ornament over zoomorphic motifs. Irish Ringerike is encountered on illuminated manuscripts and ecclesiastical metalwork, such as on the gilded side panels of the shrine of the Cathach, on which two looping animals appear with Ringerike foliates in a typically asymmetrical composition (Fuglesang 1980, 51-54, 75-76; Ó Floinn 2001, fig. 5). The style also flourished in a secular milieu, appearing on wood and bone motif pieces from Dublin (Lang 1988, 18; O'Meadhra 1979, figs. 114-29). A distinct English Ringerike style is also attributable to a rapidly expanding corpus of metalwork, mainly composed of horse trappings such as bridle bits, stirrup-strap mounts, harness pendants, buckles and strap-ends (Figure 5; Williams 1997, 9-11; Thomas 2001). Although not formally identified, this version of Ringerike is distinguished by elongated, thin and somewhat stylised tendrils, which lack the grouping characteristic of the true, Scandinavian style (Fuglesang 1980, 49).

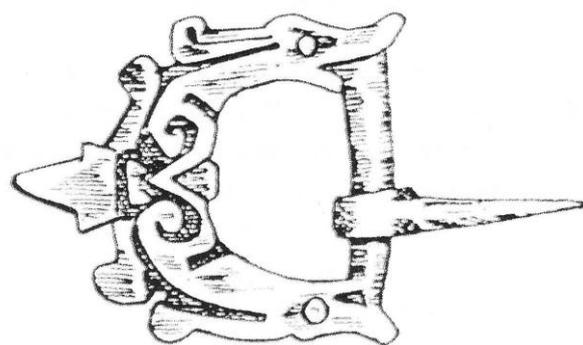


Figure 5 Copper-alloy buckle in the 'English' Ringerike style, Upper Thames Street, London. Dimensions: 31 by 28mm (drawn by Matt McCall, after Thomas 2001, fig. 1)

Although not formally identified, this version of Ringerike is distinguished by elongated, thin and somewhat stylised tendrils, which lack the grouping characteristic of the true, Scandinavian style (Fuglesang 1980, 49).

In Scotland the occurrence of the Ringerike style, or more precisely local versions thereof, is restricted to a handful of artefacts, including an unusual diamond-shaped bronze strap-end from Jarlshof, Shetland, and a stone slab from Port Ellen, Islay, on which clustered tendrils with tightly-curved ends flank a wheel-headed cross (Fuglesang 1980, cat. no. 55; Stevenson 1958-59, pl 11, 2). Recent excavations at Bornais, Uist, have added a further Scottish example of the style, in the form of a striding quadruped carved into a bone cylinder (Sharples 2004, 269, fig. 8). However, while this beast incorporates tightly scrolled tendrils representative of Ringerike, its 'amateurish' appearance places it outside of the mainstream Ringerike style as defined here.

Chronology

Within Scandinavia, the Ringerike style is usually assigned to the late tenth and first half of the eleventh century on account of its inclusion in coin-dated hoards of this date (Wilson 1995, 182-83). The style was broadly contemporary in England, where it is likely to have been introduced following the accession

of the Danish King Cnut in 1016. An early eleventh-century date is supported by the appearance of the style in the Winchcombe Psalter, dated to the 1020s or 30s, while the appearance of debased Ringerike ornament on a disc brooch from Sutton, Isle of Ely, likely to date to the first half of the eleventh century, provides an end-date for the style (*ibid.*, 181; Backhouse et al. 1984, no. 105). The developed form of Irish Ringerike reflects the late date of objects with this ornament. Although first encountered in Ireland in the early eleventh century, inscribed objects in the style indicate a *floruit* for Irish Ringerike in the second part of the eleventh century (Lang 1988, 18, 46; Fuglesang 1980, 54).

The Urnes style

Stylistic features

The Urnes style is identified with the elegant wood carvings on Urnes stave-church in Sogn, Norway, which feature standing, biting quadrupeds and more sinuous bipeds encased in thin, looping snakes with foliate tails (Figure 6).

The quadrupeds maintain the prominent spiral hips, almond-shaped eyes and curved upper-lip lappets of earlier animals, but differ from their predecessors in their elongated form, tapering legs and feet, and hooked lower jaw (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 147). They are locked in biting poses with gently swelling snake-like bipeds, with an extended, looping foreleg and an angular hip leading to a shorter hind leg. Thin snakes with foliate terminals interlace with both creatures. Incorporating dual, broad and thin line-widths, the snakes, as well as the bipeds, form fluent, balanced looping patterns, often in the form of a figure-of-eight (Fuglesang 2001, 173). In doing so, they create a sense of rhythm and harmony not previously encountered in Viking-Age art.

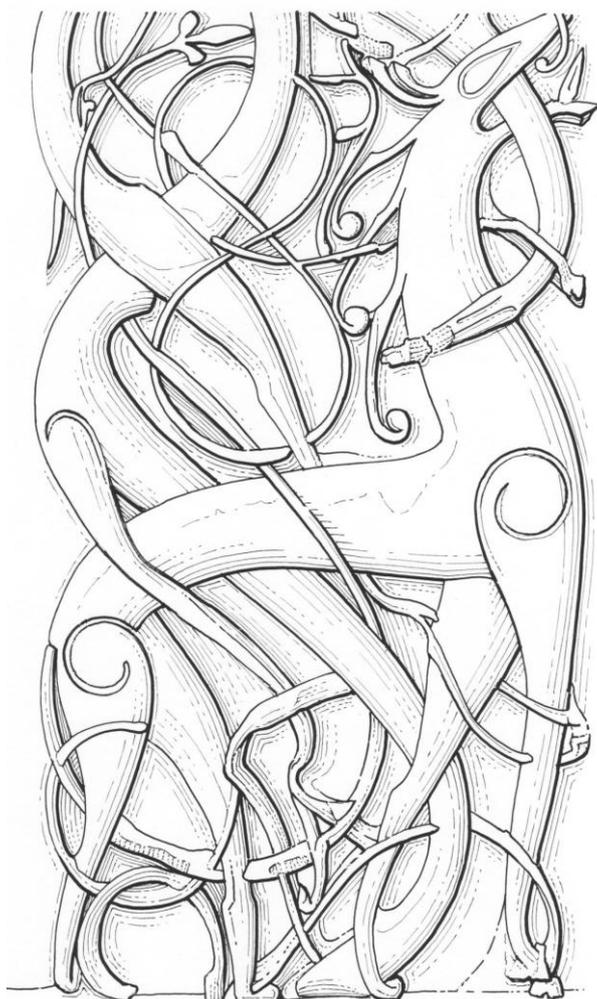


Figure 6 Detail of Urnes-style wood carvings adorning a stave church in Urnes, Norway (drawn by Nick Griffiths)

In the British Isles

Within Scandinavia, the Urnes style is most closely associated with the ornament on runestones, although a few surviving wood carvings in the style, including those from Urnes itself, hint at another impressive medium in which the style is likely to have once flourished (Fuglesang 1980, 23; Wilson 2008b, 335). The true Scandinavian style is, however, rare in the British Isles, where it appears on just a handful of metal items (Owen 2001, 205-6). These include two recently-discovered openwork brooches in the form of an Urnes-style beast, a type well known from southern Scandinavia (PAS 'Find-ID' NLM7007; Suffolk HER SLY 056-MSF1388; Bertelsen 1994).

More common in Insular contexts is the appearance of the style in reworked, local versions. The Urnes style flourished in Ireland, where, influenced by native art styles, it appeared in symmetrical and less lively forms, principally on items of ecclesiastical metalwork such as the crozier of the Abbots of Clonmacnoise and the magnificent Cross of Cong, but also in ivory carving and sculpture (Ó Floinn 1983; Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, pls. 67, 76, 74, a-b). An 'English Urnes Style' has also been identified on small items of metalwork, including stirrup strap mounts, buckles and openwork disc brooches, as well as in sculpture (Owen 2001).

This local version of Urnes is distinguished by a number of stylistic traits, some, but not all, of which are seen on an openwork brooch from Wisbech, Cambridgeshire (Figure 7). Its creatures are more naturalistic than their Scandinavian counterparts, and do not appear in looping or combative poses; they lack the prominent spiral hips and have larger heads and smaller, almond-shaped eyes. Furthermore, English Urnes tendrils are inanimate and do not make use of the dual, wide and thin line widths common in Scandinavia; consequently, the compositions are less balanced and less elegant than their Scandinavian counterparts.

Chronology

The Urnes style flourished in Scandinavia from the mid-eleventh to the early twelfth century, being adopted in England at a similar, post-Conquest date (Wilson 1995, 217-8; Fuglesang 1998; Owen 2001, 205). This chronological range is supported by a number of coin-dated hoards from Scandinavia, as well as by dendrochronological dates obtained for select objects in the style, including a church wall plate from Hørning, Jutland, dated to 1060-70 (Krogh and Voss 1961, Pl. 1; Roesdahl 1994, 108). The application of English Urnes to a capital from Norwich Cathedral, dated to c. 1130, indicates the continued use of the style in England into the first decades of the twelfth century (Owen 2001, 217-8, pl. 11.8b). In Ireland, the Urnes style is likely to have been introduced at a somewhat later date, at around the turn of the twelfth century. An inscription on the Cross of Cong, on which the Irish Urnes style is at its best, dates this piece to 1123. It is around this date that the Urnes style makes its last appearance within Scandinavia, appearing alongside Romanesque ornament on the Lisbjerg altar, dendrochronologically dated to the 1130s (Roesdahl 1994, 108). Urnes lingered in Ireland, appearing in debased forms into the second half of the twelfth century (Wilson and Klindt-Jensen 1966, 160).

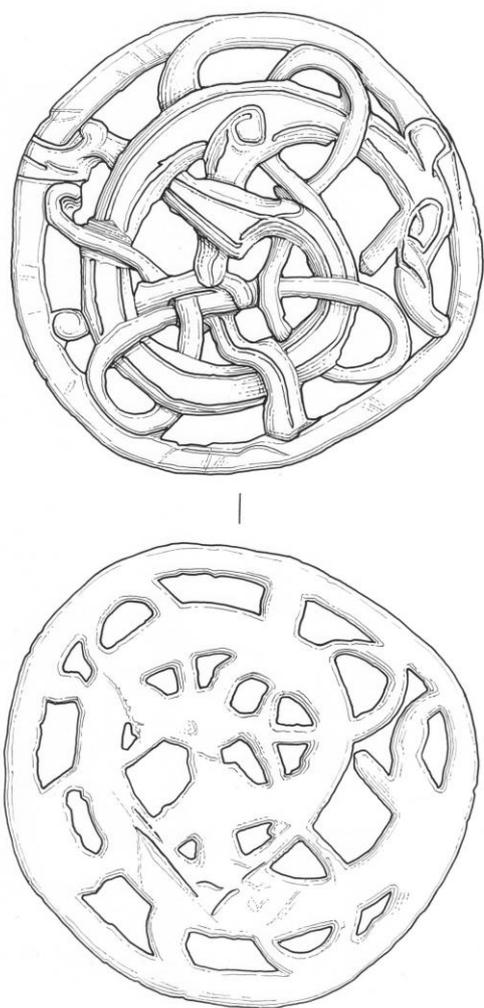


Figure 7 The Wisbech Brooch. Maximum diameter 42mm. (drawn by Nick Griffiths)

Bibliography

- Arbman, H, 1962 *Vikingarna: härnadståg, handelsvägar, kultur*, Stockholm: Bonnier
- Backhouse, J, Turner, D H, and Webster, L E (eds) 1984 *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066*, London: British Museum Press
- Bertelsen, L G, 1994 Urnesfibler i Danmark, *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* 1992: 345-70
- Fuglesang, S H, 1980 *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style: a Phase of 11th Century Scandinavian Art*, Odense: Odense University Press
- Fuglesang, S H, 1981 Stylistic groups in late Viking and early Romanesque art, *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia. Series altera in* **8** (1): 79-125
- Fuglesang, S H, 1991 The axehead from Mammen and the Mammen Style, in M Iversen (ed.), *Mammen: Grav, Kunst og Samfund i Vikingetid*, Højbjerg: Jysk arkeologisk selskab, 83-107
- Fuglesang, S H, 1998 Swedish runestones of the eleventh century: ornament and dating, in K Düwel & S Nowak (eds), *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung: Abhandlungen des Vierten Internationalen Symposiums über Runen und Runeninschriften in Göttingen vom 4.-9. August 1995*, Göttingen: Walter de Gruyter, 197-218
- Fuglesang, S H, 2001 Animal ornament: the late viking period, in M Müller-Wille & L O Larsson (eds.), *Tiere, Menschen, Götter: Wikingerzeitliche Kunststile und ihre Neuzeitliche Rezeption*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 157-94
- Graham-Campbell, J, 1995 *The Viking-Age Gold and Silver of Scotland (AD 850-1100)*, Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland
- Hattatt, R, 1987 *Brooches of Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxbow
- Hinton, D A, 1974 *A Catalogue of the Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork in the Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Kershaw, J, 2008 The Distribution of the 'Winchester' Style in Late Saxon England: Metalwork Finds from the Danelaw, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* **15**: 254-69
- Krogh, K J, and Voss, O, 1961 Fra hedenskab til kristendom i Hørning, *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark* 1961, Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 5-34
- Lang, J T, 1988 *Viking-age decorated wood: a study of its ornament and style*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy
- Ó Floinn , R, 1983 Viking and Romanesque influence 1000 AD- 1169 AD, in M Ryan (ed.), *Treasures of Ireland: Irish art 3000 BC – 1500 AD*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 58-69
- Ó Floinn , R, 2001 Irish and Scandinavian Art in the Early Medieval Period, in A-C Larsen (ed.), *The Vikings in Ireland*, Roskilde: Viking Ship Museum, 87- 98
- O'Meadhra, U, 1979 *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque art: motif-pieces from Ireland*, Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International

Owen, O, 2001 The strange beast that is the English Urnes style, in J Graham-Campbell *et al* (eds.), *Vikings and the Danelaw. Selected Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress*, Oxford: Oxbow, 203-222

Richards, J D, and Naylor, J, 2010 The metal detector and the Viking Age in England, in J Sheehan & D Ó Corráin (eds.), *The Viking Age. Ireland and the West. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 338-352

Roesdahl, E, 1994 Dendrochronology and Viking studies in Denmark, with a note on the beginning of the Viking Age, in B Ambrosiani & H Clarke (eds.), *Developments Around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age*, Stockholm: Birka Project for Riksantikvarieämbetet and Statens Historiska Museer, 106-116

Roesdahl, E, 2010 From Scandinavia to Spain: a Viking-Age reliquary in León and its significance, in J Sheehan & D Ó Corráin (eds.), *The Viking Age. Ireland and the West. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Viking Congress*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 353-360

Roesdahl, E, Graham-Campbell, J, Conner, P and Pearson, K 1981 *The Vikings in England: and in their Danish homeland*, London: Anglo-Danish Viking Project.

Sharples, N, 2004 A Find of Ringerike Art from Bornais in the Outer Hebrides, in J Hines, A Lane & M Redknap (eds.), *Land, Sea and Home, Settlement in the Viking Period. Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*, Leeds: Maney, 255-272

Stevenson, R B K, 1958-59, The Inchyra Stone and some other unpublished Early Christian Monuments, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, **92**: 33-55

Thomas, G, 2001 Vikings in the City: a Ringerike-style buckle and related artefacts from London, *London Archaeologist* **9** (8): 228-231

Williams, D, 1997 *Late Saxon Stirrup-Strap Mounts*, York: Council for British Archaeology

Wilson, D M, 1995 *Vikingtidens Konst*, Lund: Bokforlaget Signum

Wilson, D M, 2008a *The Vikings in the Isle of Man*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press

Wilson, D M, 2008b The development of Viking art, in S Brink with N Price (eds), *The Viking World*, London: Routledge, 323-38

Wilson, D M, and Klindt-Jensen, O, 1966 *Viking Art*, Ithaca, N Y: Cornell University Press