Tracing their Tracks

Tracing their Tracks: Identification of Nordic Styles from the Early Middle Ages to the End of the Viking Period

By

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In the 1980s I had the pleasure of meeting Professor Dr Klaus Düwel at the University of Göttingen. As a philologist and runologist he shared a wealth of information with me and inspired me to investigate further the visual artistic world of early medieval Northern Europe.

When I undertook this research into Old Norse artefacts, Professor Margaret Clunies Ross at the University of Sydney was my supervisor and with her immense knowledge of Old Norse literature she guided me into a world of the past as if it still existed and could still be explored.

Many hours of discussion with Professor Dr Rudi Simek from the University of Bonn supported my research and added life to it, particularly by placing and comparing the subject matter within an everyday context.

It was my wife Ute Herzog, a psychologist, who brought to my attention that humans observe the world not simply randomly but using certain principles, those of visual perception, that are necessary to recognise the world visually. As a foundation for surveying objects from Old Norse culture, it is of immense value to apply these principles consciously.

However, I am particularly indebted to Gabrielle Singleton who has spent many hours editing this text and transforming my Teutonic grammar into a respectable English text.

Introduction

Tracing the tracks of Old Norse Styles

The ability to read and interpret tracks has always been of great importance for humans. Tracks told people what kind of creature walked along, in which direction it went, if it were fast or slow, and if it were big or small. The shape of tracks could tell them if danger were to be expected, if the creator of the tracks could or should be attacked, or if a friendly encounter could be expected. The reading of marks left by others gives us clues about their nature, intentions, and values.

Since prehistory, mankind has left marks on rocky surfaces. Some rock art is painted, such as the famous cave paintings at Lascaux in France which are assumed to have been created in approximately 13000 BC. Other rock art was carved, such as on the curbstone from Newgrange, Ireland, believed to have been created in the third millennium BC.

Artefacts from past cultures are fascinating because they give us a valuable insight into the life, values, and perceptions that people had in certain periods and at various locations even where no written materials or records survive. A knowledge of images, signs, and symbols that were important to early Northern European society allows us to understand why certain shapes matter to us today. Applying the principles of visual perception, we are able to see shapes that were initially hidden, enabling us better to understand the world of our ancient relatives.

Confronted with designs on artefacts from distant times, we are sometimes challenged to determine their significance. In many instances traditional archaeological and historical investigation can identify age and origin as well as whatever was depicted. In some cases, however, details can be missed and aspects misinterpreted because of certain limitations of analysis undertaken by traditional practices only. It is, for example, not always easy to conclude if certain shapes are only decorative ornaments or if they are signs, or even symbols representing aspects of things of much greater complexity.

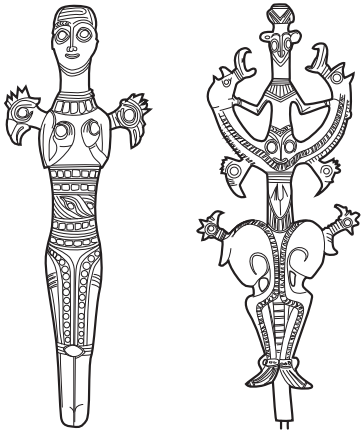
Images from Old Norse cultures are often fascinating just for their sheer beauty. Their simplicity of form, combined with perfection of proportion, has the same impact on us now as have objects created by our own contemporary artists. Archaeologists and historians in particular, but also the general public, are interested in what images and ornamentations on artefacts convey. In many cases an image can be identified because it refers to scenarios that are known from history, legend, and mythology.

If such objects as are discussed here are found today, the identification of their particular styles allows a viewer to determine, at least to a certain extent, where and at what time they were created. However, a change of style did not occur because a new decade or century

demanded a new fashion. Changes of style reflect new social and/or cultural influences on a society.

Stylistic peculiarities are a great source for identifying the origin of an item geographically and chronologically. Influences arrived from foreign regions and cultures during the Migration Period and the early Middle Ages as they do today. Since the Migration Period brought peoples from the Asian steppes to Central and Western Europe, encouraging on their march others to join the journey to the west, we must assume that imagery depicting objects of importance to these peoples was introduced through them to cultures in the West.

László (1974) believed that the Germanic Animal Style had Scythian (Central Eurasian) and Roman antecedents. He further considered that the Germanic animal ornament represents the Great Goddess and to an extent the divine male ancestor. He referred to these two Luristan bronze figures which date back to the turn of the first millennium BC. One of the figures depicts Ashti, the goddess of fertility, who was created with rooster heads emerging from her shoulders. The second figure depicts Sraosha, the God of Justice. This figure, too, combines human and animal features. Its birds also are very similar to roosters. László speculated that the roosters might have been replaced by birds of prey in subsequent periods.

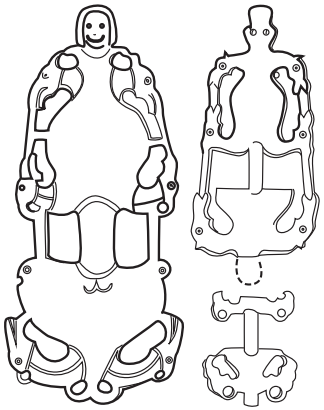


Luristan bronze figures

Germanic and Slavic fibulae from the Ukraine and Romania show

an approach to combining animals and humanoid figures similar to that seen in the Luristan figures. László compared these fibulae with the Avar illustrations of the Tree of Life, which also was depicted in combination with animals. He concluded that this would be a subsequent development from the Luristan and Greek Great Goddesses. László referred to Tacitus (c. 56-117 AD) who observed the belief of Germanic peoples in the female's sacred strength and power of prophecy which would have led them to worship Nerthus, Mother Earth. For them it would have been unusual to represent the gods in human form.

As László suggests, the personal representations of Germanic deities were vaguely defined and every god had an animal attendant. This provided the opportunity of symbolising each god by its particular animal such as Freyja's cat, Freyr's boar, or Óðinn's raven. Ornamentation featuring these animals would consequently symbolise the divine world of the post-Migration Period.



Ukrainian and Romanian fibulae

Another reason why animal representations may have had some relevance in Northern Europe is that shamanism was (and still is) practised there. The shaman – diviner and medicine man – is able through a state of ecstasy to contact the supernatural world symbolised by its animals.

The animals that were of such importance to the Germanic peoples at this time should be recognised in their complexity, that of wild untamed animals possessing physical and supernatural powers which could be considered analogous to our great engines and electronics today, exemplified by the much admired designs of cars during the

1950s, which emerged in shapes inspired by rockets with their large fins, albeit with no practical purpose, and the electronically driven cars of later years.

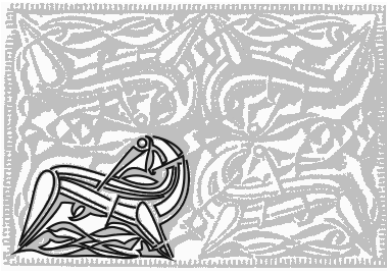
Recognition of historical development

The distinctive styles of early Northern European artefacts were recorded in the early years of the twentieth century by Bernhard Salin (1904) in *Die Altgermanische Thierornamentik.* The passage of time, as one can well imagine, is of the greatest importance for the evolution of artefact forms. In approximately 475 AD, towards the end of the Migration Period, early representations of what Salin called the Animal Style appeared and these lasted to the end of the sixth century AD. Salin called this Style I.

Animal Style I from Galsted

This Style I was further categorised by Haseloff (1981) as Styles A, B, C, D, and E. Style II, which still depicted animals but featured predominantly a plaited ribbon ornament in which were embedded other depictions such as masks, according to Haseloff emerged

in the mid-sixth century AD and was introduced into Central Europe by the Langobards. The Langobards (long beards), also known as Lombards, originated in southern Sweden and migrated to Italy where they ruled until 774, when the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne conquered their kingdom and incorporated it with his empire. The region's name, Lombardy, is still a reminder of the period when the 'Northerners' ruled there.



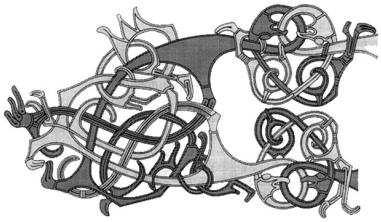
Animal Style II from Välsgärde

It appears that figurative art was important to Central European Celts, whereas abstract ornamentation and animal designs were favoured in Northern Europe.

Impression of stone carving from Msecke Zehrovice, c. 100 BC

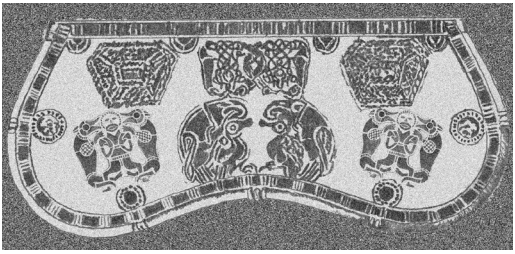
Book of Durrow, Carpet Page (650 AD -700 AD)

Due to the Scandinavians' (both settlers and Vikings) many contacts with Irish culture in the late eighth century, Irish Celtic styles influenced Scandinavian craftsmen and the Irish abstract knot pattern merged with the

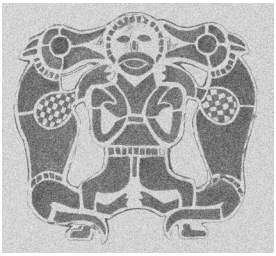


Carving of the Academician's head post of the Oseberg Ship (835 AD)

Animal Style originally introduced from the East. The resulting objects and images are of outstanding beauty.



Purse cover from Sutton Hoo



Purse cover detail

The seventh century burial site at Sutton Hoo, excavated in 1939, is one of the most impressive archeological finds in England. The most significant artefacts are those in the burial chamber. They include a suite of metalwork dress-fittings in gold, a ceremonial helmet, a shield and sword, a lyre and, along with other pieces, a purse cover now held by the British Museum, created in typical Animal Style II which is a great example of this stylistic expansion. Birds similar to those depicted in the centre appear on several other objects of Old Norse culture.

Chapter 1

Culture-specific symbolism

Every culture has its own variety of symbols. They are realised linguistically or pictorially; if pictorially they are called 'icons'. The creation of artefacts in Germanic culture started during the early fifth century AD. It is not known in detail to what extent Germanic peoples were influenced by Roman culture. However, the adoption of some imagery (such as dolphins) from Roman iconography indicates the possibility of a flexible approach. In about 375 AD the Huns conquered the eastern part of Western Europe. This caused the Visigoths to move into Roman territory where they were incorporated with the Roman confederation. In the year 410 AD the Visigoths finally conquered Rome. Because this struggle engaged the Romans in their own country, they were less protected in the northern provinces of their empire. This gave the Langobards and later the Franks, originally from what is now North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, the opportunity to move into Gaul, and the Saxons together with the Angles, who initially lived in what we now know as northern Germany and Denmark, the opportunity to conquer Britain.

Childerich's sword handle & scabbard fitting (BnF)

It was within this newly developed position of power that the Germanic peoples probably developed a new identity and the creation of arts and crafts began to develop more continuously. This development did not take place everywhere simultaneously. The Goths spread their particular style, influenced by Hellenistic and Oriental arts, into the Danube area, Italy, Gaul, and Spain. Evidence of this can be found in objects placed in the grave at Tournai of Childerich, King of the Franks, who died in 482 AD.

A second birthplace for Germanic art was Jylland and the area north of Schleswig (where the Angles originated) and particularly Scandinavia. It was here that the art of the Germanic Migration Period could fully blossom.

From the end of the Migration Period (600 AD) to the end of the Viking Period (1000 AD) artists and craftsmen in Scandinavia produced a wealth of stunning artefacts: stone engravings with and without runic inscriptions, fibulae, bracteates (amulets worn as pendants), brooches, rings, necklaces, arm rings, pendants, *guldgubber* (tiny gold and silver foils on which images are embossed), wood carvings, mounts on horse bridles, sword grips, scabbards, and other items.

Much is known and written about the development of styles of Northern European artefacts by authors such as Wilson and Klindt-Jensen (1966), Haseloff (1981), Roth (1986), Axboe (1999), and Müller-Wille (2001), to recognise a few. Apart from chronological differences, geographically defined developments were also recognised and categorised as being of distinctive styles. The best known styles are named after Broa, Borre, Jelling, Mammen, Ringerike, and Urnes, places where objects crafted in distinctive styles were found, a further well-known style being 'the Gripping Beast' which was widespread. The Urnes Style is regarded as the last typically Scandinavian style and was succeeded by the Central European Romanesque style.

We can assume that particular craftsmen, or workshops organised by these craftsmen, produced designs reflecting their own skill and taste. Considering a particular style impressive within their society, more and more folk needing objects to be crafted looked for the workshop in their area that had successfully produced attractive designs for previous customers. It was certainly helpful if these customers were of high social rank.

Many Nordic artefacts show images from myths and legends, as mentioned above. During the 1930s this greatly helped Sune Lindqvist identify the depictions on the Gotland picture stones.

Many of the images on bracteates and jewellery, while Nordic in theme, seem strongly inspired by Roman models, doubtless due to the close contacts that Germanic peoples once had with Roman culture, in war and in trade.

While some designs on bracteates and jewellery appear quite abstract, among those difficult to identify Günther Haseloff clarified many as figurative by extracting images from their surrounds so that they became recognisable even to the untrained eye. Added to this, in some instances applying the *figure/ground* principle of visual perception causes an additional, secondary, image to appear. This is explained in detail by examples on pages 119-124.

The importance of abstract shapes in ornamentation can be quite difficult to determine. A few dots or cross-hatching may be used as texture for differentiating background and foreground. However, in some instances such marks may signify something material or symbolic. This may be the case where space is limited. Where space is not limited, additional signs could be applied to provide a particular context for the main object, similar to the properties providing a context – luxury, poverty, city, country – for the main message of a film scene.

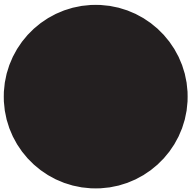
Bracteates' main depictions are of concrete images such as persons, portraits, animals, and fantasy creatures. Despite their small size, these too are accompanied by additional signs. Behr (1992) called these *Beizeichen*, associated signs. The abstract shapes from which these associated signs were chosen are dots (the most prevalent), either singly or in groups making triangles, squares, or circles, followed by crosses, triangles, triskeles, rosettes, circles, angles,

spirals, curves, and swastikas (the second most prevalent, generally oriented to the left, but sometimes to the right).

These signs or shapes are seen on several artefacts and the following paragraphs describe their range and possible significance.

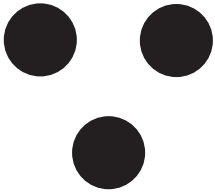
Dots

Dots are used on *guldgubber* to create frames, because dot-embossed metal appears to sparkle. Dots can be found as associated signs on bracteates. In this case, they may be interpreted as stars. In *Skáldskaparmál* by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) Óðinn placed the giant Þjazi's eyes in the sky where they shine as stars. According to Verstockt's interpretation (1982), the dot often symbolises fertility, seed, and sperm, and the divine principle. He stated that according to Proclus (fifth century AD) the dot has a "cosmic power and rank first in order among signs".



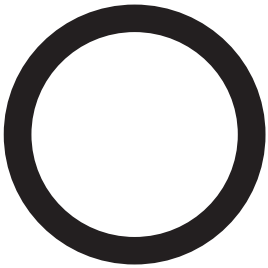
Three dots

Three dots, tattooed on the skin between the forefinger and the thumb are known in Sweden as 'hobo dots'. This configuration might be regarded as having protective attributes. Three circles in a triangular form were used in alchemy in the seventeenth century AD, as a sign for oil. On the other hand, of some relevance for bracteates may be Liungman's (1991) interpretation of the sign as being "an old sign for pawnbrokers and money lenders, still used today in the business world". A money lender is, compared to those who need money, situated in a powerful, quite wealthy, position.



Circles

A simple circle, according to Whittick (1960), usually represents the sun. A ring, however, as seen on the bracteate from Mauland (see page 91), specifically depicts Óðinn's arm ring Draupnir, in the hand of Baldr, arriving in the 'other world'. This ring, we read in Snorri's *Edda*, was placed on Baldr's funeral pyre. A ring in early Scandinavian society had also great importance as an object upon which an oath was sworn. In some cultures a circle symbolises eternity or perfection.



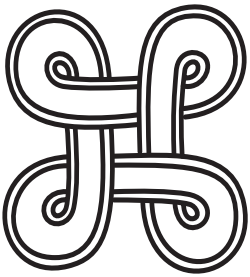
Frames

Murals and mosaics from Classical Antiquity are in most cases surrounded by an ornamental framework. Following this fashion, framing ornaments can be found also around the edge of many bracteates and *guldgubber*. A frame is a boundary between an image (painting, photograph, calligraphy, etc.) and its background. It acts as a neutralising area, to prevent the background from interfering with the main image. An appropriate frame traditionally signifies the elevated status of an artwork and/or its subject. This also may have been the reason for framing the images on early Scandinavian objects.

Horns

Three interlocked horn-like shapes, seen on various picture stones, may represent the great wisdom that Óðinn gained by drinking three draughts of the mead of poetry until then in the possession of the giants. In *Skáldskaparmál* Óðinn, disguised as Bǫlverk, had sexual intercourse with Gunnlǫð, daughter of the giant Suttungr, the guardian of the mead of poetry. This persuaded Gunnlǫð to give him three draughts of the mead. After this, Óðinn changed his appearance into that of an eagle and flew off.

Loops



The quatrefoil loop on the golden medallion from Lyngby, Jylland, Denmark (see page 99), in all probability is a magic symbol representing infinity or eternity. Ellmers (1986) regarded this sign as a stylised representation of Jǫrmungandr, the Midgard Serpent.

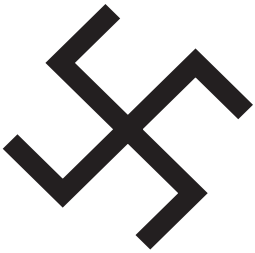
Spills

A drinking vessel shown with an associated shape on top, almost certainly represents a spill. The vessel appears filled so generously that it overflows. An interpretation could be (a) that so much wealth exists that it does not matter if some of the precious liquid is lost; or (b) that the person to whom the drink is offered is so highly regarded that as much as possible of the liquid is presented to him or her.

Rods

Some *guldgubber* depict a figure holding a rod in its hand. This may be a rod, staff, or sceptre. In Greek and Roman antiquity, gods and people of high rank were depicted carrying a rod. This, originally a hybrid between a walking stick and a farmer's or shepherd's crook, is still in use in some North African areas, such as the Algerian and Tunisian Sahara. The best known rod is probably that of the the Graeco-Roman god of medicine, Asklþpius or Aesculapius. In Anglo-Saxon England, according to Bruce-Mitford (1996), the sceptre was regarded as having magical properties and represented the king's responsibility for his people's prosperity. Liungman associated a vertical line with authority, power, and perfection. The sign also symbolises the interface between the lower and the higher.

Swastikas



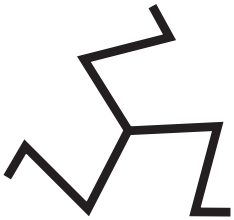
The swastika is described by Liungman as an ideogram derived from the sun god sign established in the Euphrates-Tigris region. There it represented the highest god, power, and life force. Liungman explained that the 'arms' of the swastika represent the 'outspread wings' of a four pointed star. However, the name swastika, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (ed. C. T. Onions 1966), derives from Sanskrit *svastika* from *sú* 'good' and *asti* 'being', thus wellbeing, good fortune, and good luck. Bruce-Mitford

(1996) mentioned that the swastika predates Hinduism. In India it would be associated with the sun and the wheel of birth and rebirth. The arms are angled clockwise. Anticlockwise the sign is known as *sauvastika* and is associated with negative attitudes.

The Hittites and ancient Greeks used the sign for decoration on coins, ceramics, and buildings. Liungman assumed that the Eastern, Buddhist, and Greek pagan associations of the swastika resulted in discontinuation of its use in early Christian Europe. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1996), however, Charlemagne (742-814 AD) did use the swastika as an attribute. Nevertheless, in Scandinavian cultures the swastika was continuously applied.

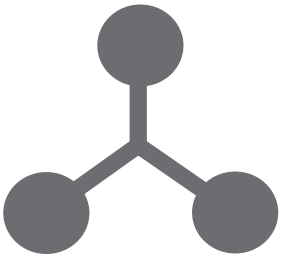
The Swedish industrial company ASEA (Allmänna Svenska Elektriska Aktiebolaget, now ABB) used the swastika as its logo until 1933 and the Finnish 'Whites' used the swastika as their sign, calling it the Cross of Freedom, in the civil war of 1918. The swastika appeared in early twentieth century Germany and Austria as an anti-semitic symbol and Hitler and his fascist government used it to represent their perverted racial ideas and inhumane politics.

Triskeles



On a number of bracteates, triskeles appear as a feature associated to the main image. The triskele was described by Bruce-Mitford as a sign representing good fortune. According to Whittick the triskele symbolises the sun and revival. He regarded this sign as similar to the swastika. The triskele can be found on many East Asian artefacts, representing, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, heaven, mankind, and earth. Liungman stated that the triskele was common in Greece

after 400 AD. That the three angled shapes of the triskele were quite often interpreted as three legs was explained by Whittick as due to ancient cultures' belief that the sun was dragged around by a hero. Whittick pointed to Greek culture where the sun was anthropomorphised into Apollo, Hercules, Orpheus, and others, whose legs might be understood in some triskeles. This variation (right) appears on some bracteates (see page 28).



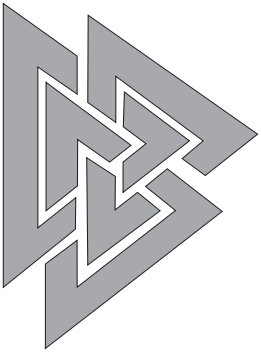
Swirls and spirals

Swirls and spirals on Gotland picture stones were regarded by Lindqvist (1945) and Ellmers as representing the sun, the earth, and the moon. Variations of swirls, with a smaller number of arms, as depicted on the picture stone *Sanda IV* (see page 97), remind one strongly of the image of the swastika. Swirls may indicate the inclusion of the changing seasons in the Old Norse symbolic interpretation of the world.

Spiral shapes appeared also on objects known from pre-history and Lindqvist as well as Ellmers suggested the symbols on the island of Gotland were inspired by decorations from Roman culture, similar to those on the stone slab from León on the river Duero in Spain (see page 85). As discussed above, images from Irish art,

such as the spirals on the Carpet Page of the *Book of Durrow*, also were apparently a strong influence.

Triangles



A sign comprising three interlocked triangles appears on several Gotland picture stones and may be identified with the symbol 'Hrungnir's heart'.

Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (17) mentions a triangular sign symbolising the giant Hrungnir:

"Hrungnir átti hjarta ðat er frægt er, af hǫrðum steini ok tindótt með ðrim hornum svá sem síðan er gert var ristubragð ðat er Hrungnis hjarta heitir".

"Hrungnir had a heart that is renowned, made of solid stone and spiky with three points just like the symbol for carving called Hrungnir's heart has ever since been made" (trans. Faulkes 1987).

Icons such as triskeles, triangles, swirls, and spirals appear repeatedly, hence are depicted and analysed in detail this early in this book.

Chapter 2

Reading the image

The following aspects may appear complex and academic. They are, however, exactly elements that are not necessarily consciously applied when artefacts from ancient cultures are analysed. Semiology and visual perception, nevertheless, are what all humans are confronted with and should definitely be taken into account when objects and artefacts are assessed, regardless of how old they are.

Information perceived by humans should be regarded as a "symbolic activity", because "each of your percepts is associated with some characteristic activity in your brain (hence we say that perceptual states are produced by brain states)" (Sekuler and Blake 1994, citing Frisby 1980). Therefore one may assume that the symbolic format enables the human brain to categorise perceived material and link or store it appropriately and fast.

When a message is formatted as a symbol, preferably as a picture, as assumed by Leonardo da Vinci (cited by Todorov 1982), the information will most likely be processed faster than information perceived in another (non symbolic) format. Because of the convenient assimilability of symbols, they may be stored in the memory, for the most part in their original form, and may not suffer as much as other information from changes due to accidental confusion or natural mutation. Gregory (1974) assumed there must be certain objects or patterns that are recognised by humans as symbols, while others do not have this signification. The symbolic visual information enables one to predict a more complex event. Gibson (1966) identified this as a visual 'surrogate'. He defined the term 'surrogate' as a "stimulus produced by another individual which is relatively specific to some object, place, or event not at present affecting the sense organs of the perceiving individual". According to

this definition, it may be that images or even only shapes create particular associations. Round shapes may create an association of warmth and cosiness, in contrast to sharp pointed shapes which may suggest hostility and coldness. Gibson stated that a surrogate must relate to an object in order to be identified. However, an abstract element, such as a simple line or unrealistic shape, can also act as a visual surrogate. Certain surrogates are culture-specific. Jung (1964) discussed the situation in which symbols may not be interpreted appropriately by cultures other than those to which they belong. They may, however, as Eibl-Eibersfeldt (1989) assumes, become an imprint in the minds of people of one specific culture and contribute to the evolution of following generations. Examples of aesthetic practices which were or are practised by different tribal cultures are recognisable, such as face painting or the tradition of wearing particular decorative items. Examples of cultural diversity are images and objects produced by craftsmen or artists who have been taught the application of shapes, colours, and materials by older generations. Because of the impossibility of interviewing newborn babies, it would be extremely difficult to determine whether they would perceive a particular shape, such as a pointed zigzag line, as indicating danger or aggression, and whether they would interpret rounded shapes as comfortable and non threatening. Adults, in all likelihood, would interpret these forms in this manner.

Art, particularly abstract art, applies symbolic expressions, not only of colours but also of shapes. Kandinsky (1979) described the square as balancing coldness and warmth equally. As such it could represent death. He defined the horizontal lines of a square as ‘above’ and ‘below’. ‘Above’ was interpreted as lightness, emancipation, and freedom. ‘Below’ represented condensation, heaviness, and constraint. The left vertical line of a square suggested “looseness,

a feeling of lightness, of emancipation and, finally, of freedom", terms which Kandinsky used similarly in describing 'above'. He stated that the left vertical line stands, metaphorically, with its weight behind 'above', but compared with 'below' it would weigh far less. Just as the 'left' was regarded by Kandinsky as strongly associated with 'above', so was 'right', in his opinion, strongly connected with the interpretation of 'below' (condensation, heaviness, and constraint). However, he considered that 'left' was weaker in these expressions than was 'below'. The shape of a circle, according to Kandinsky could be described as similar to that of a square. The terms 'above', 'below', 'left', and 'right' could also be related to a circle. However, he mentioned that the change of direction from one side to the other is gradual.

Because every painting begins with points and lines, Kandinsky regarded these elements as of great importance. Within a plane or in combination with planes, they are essential to create both compositions and signs to communicate. This perception relates not only to paintings, but can also be applied to a range of visual art and craftwork. Even though Kandinsky is predominantly known as an avant-garde artist who had an enormous influence on abstract art in the early twentieth century, his interpretations of basic elements such as point, line, and plane are relevant to works produced at any time, including the early medieval period when gold bracteates and *guldgubber* were created.

Kandinsky suggested investigating individual aspects in isolation, then observing their effect on each other in combination, and drawing conclusions and making interpretations from these observations.

According to him, it is important to be aware of the distance between a plane shape and a picture's border. Whenever a shape is created and placed in the middle of a picture, it remains as a solitary

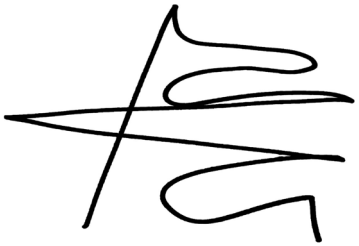
element. He called this a "lyrical sound to the construction". The closer a shape is placed to a picture's border, the more the tension increases in the composition, because the shape competes with the picture's border for dominance. This is what Kandinsky called "the dramatic sound of the construction". When a shape connects with the border, the tension weakens and the shape and the border become one unit. Angles of planes within a picture's border need further attention. As Kandinsky said, it is relatively easy to position a rectangular plane within a rectangular border. Tension and harmony can easily be increased or decreased according to the plane's positioning. However, when the plane within a border is not rectangular, or when several shapes together create a multi-angular plane, the composition becomes more complex. Kandinsky considered planes with a great number and variety of irregular angles on their outer edges as similar to the shape of the circle. The circle gains a great deal of its force from the centre which, from the very nature of the circle, is always equidistant from the perimeter.

Verstockt too investigated basic shapes, describing them by referring to commonly known interpretations and applications. A dot, according to Verstockt, can represent

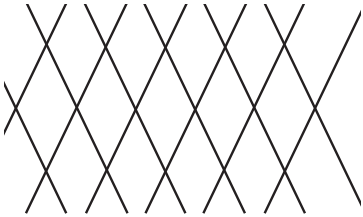
> the immovable centre
> the axis of the world
> fertility
> seed, sperm
> the divine principle
> nothing and everything
> a primeval form of glyphs.

As mentioned, Proclus, following Euclid, said the point has a "cosmic power and rank first in order among signs". Verstockt recalled Leibniz's position that a distinction has to be made

"between metaphysical points and geometrical points".



Verstockt presented a comprehensive analysis of lines. A line is the simplest way to create a mark, perhaps by scratching it into a surface. All forms other than a point are made by applying a line. The simplest shape is a line created by a short straight motion. When this motion is executed at an angle to another line, variety can be achieved by applying different angles. The strokes created at different angles can be overlaid cross-wise to create cross-hatching. Multiple short strokes create the illusion of a textured plane. One short or long stroke placed vertically over a horizontal short stroke results in a cross.



When short strokes are positioned to look like the gable of a house, they form the shape of an arrow. Whenever two of these 'v' shapes are drawn with their open sides opposed, a square or diamond is created (depending on their angle). Several of these 'v' shapes can create a range of new patterns, such as a horizontal or vertical zigzag line. Several adjoined 'v' shapes along a centre line, all pointing in the same direction, create a fishbone pattern. This is seen, for example, in branch runes, where short angular strokes on one side of a vertical centre line mark the line