Early Medieval Designs from Britain

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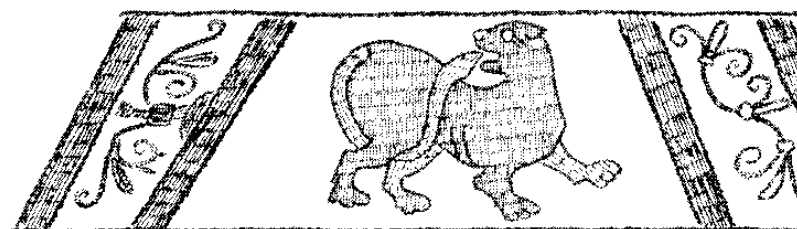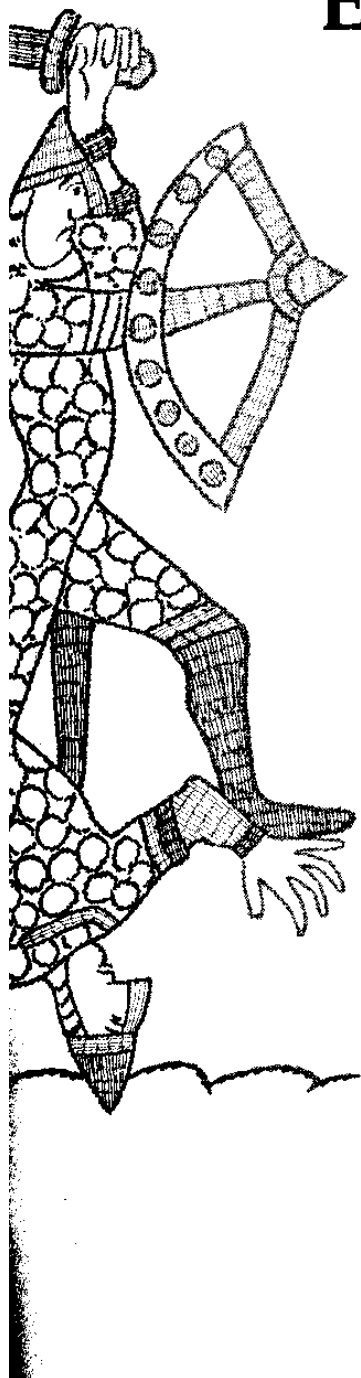
Introduction

Early medieval art records a period in which Britain, a pagan, practically illiterate country ruled over by warring chieftains and petty kings, was transformed into a united Christian European power. This art may be examined from several different points of view: to the archaeologist or historian its primary value is as evidence of the society which produced it; the art historian sees it in the context of the art of all of Europe and attempts to trace the influence which caused it to develop particular characteristics. Both approaches lead to important and illuminating discoveries about the history of Britain. Here, however, I have chosen to look at the early medieval art of Britain from the point of view of design.

I have selected patterns and designs which decorate a variety of objects, manuscripts, monuments and buildings produced in Britain during a period of a thousand years. These particular designs were chosen simply because I found them good—sometimes pleasingly simple, sometimes stunningly sophisticated, always of interest as solutions to design problems. The choice was confined to applied art, that is designs primarily intended as decoration, and excluded designs which illustrate stories or events. Geographically I have concentrated on England, though examples from the Celtic west and north are included when they seem relevant to an understanding of decorative art in England. Many of the patterns and designs illustrated here are taken from objects in the British Museum and from manuscripts in the British Library, some of which are on display.

The period broadly covers the growth of English art from its beginnings in the fifth century until the thirteenth century. The art which arrived in these islands with the Angles, Saxons and Jutes developed and changed under the influence of the indigenous Celtic art and the heritage of the Roman occupation. The establishment of Christianity brought closer contacts with the art of the Continent and the Mediterranean world, while the arrival of the Vikings from Scandinavia in the eighth and ninth centuries intro- duced another pagan, barbaric art. After the Norman Conquest British art effectively became part of the continental Romanesque style. The background to the period and to the development of its art is outlined in a little more detail in the next section.

The source material from which the patterns and designs are taken is very varied. The material from pagan England consists mainly of metalwork and pottery, found in graves which had been richly furnished with grave goods. They include weapons, vessels originally containing food and drink, ornaments from clothing, such as belt buckles and mounts, clasps and brooches, and personal ornaments like necklaces, bracelets and rings. Where the burial rites included cremation, only fragments of the grave goods survive among the ashes which were buried in pottery vessels. In these cases the urns themselves often provide examples of patterns and

designs. With the coming of Christianity and the introduction of different burial customs this type of material becomes less common. In its place there are magnificent manuscripts, carved stone monuments and grave memorials. Churches were decorated with sculpture and carvings and furnished with shrines, altars and richly-ornamented liturgical vessels.

It is not my intention to analyse the patterns and designs illustrated here, although some comments on individual designs are included in the 'Notes on the designs' (which also give information on materials and techniques). Although the designs are apparently diverse, and sometimes complex, they can be seen to follow a few basic principles which apply to all successful decorative designs. The most important is perhaps that whatever the size, function or material of the object to be decorated, the design must enhance it. There must be a point to the design: it must make the object more beautiful, impressive or interesting without taking away from its purpose. The merit of a pattern should be judged in its context—a simple pattern on a pot can be as good as a lavish and intricate pattern on a ceremonial sword. These are in part subjective qualities: designs are judged to be good or bad according to changes in fashion and taste. But there are also timeless qualities of basic good and well-balanced composition to which we can respond in designs from widely-separated times and places. It is possible for us to thrill to a daring and exciting solution to a design problem even though the elements and motifs are foreign to the styles of our own time.

The simplest patterns repeat a single element regularly over the surface to be decorated. These patterns are seldom very exciting and the skill of the pattern-maker lies in the variations on this simple formula. When motifs are set within this simple framework an almost infinite variety of possibilities may be produced.

In the patterns and designs illustrated here the elements and motifs belong to just a few groups—geometrical patterns, spirals, scrolls, plaits and other interlaced ribbon designs, and animal and plant motifs. The animal motifs, which occasionally include men, are usually highly stylised and are treated decoratively with little or no regard for naturalism. The plant motifs, which derive from the naturalistic art of the Mediterranean world, also develop into strictly decorative forms.

It is not possible to determine to what extent these motifs may have had a symbolic or magical significance apart from their purely decorative properties. Some representations of pagan gods and scenes from mythology occur in Anglo-Saxon art, but these lie outside the scope of this book, and little is known about symbolic or magical significance of the patterns and designs—although much imagination has been expended in attempts to identify such significance. It is likely, however, that there was this further dimension to their art which we cannot appreciate.

In some cases I have isolated elements or motifs in separate drawings alongside the original design (for example, **4,6,7**). This is done simply to point out details and constructions which are not immediately apparent. I have also analysed some of the intricate ribbon interlace, to demonstrate and clarify its complex structure. This is particularly true of the ribbon interlace from the Book of Durrow (**24–27**). In these borders part of the plaited and knotted ribbon was coloured (the colour is here represented by different screens) to produce new patterns which do not reflect the actual plait or knot. A particularly interesting example is illustrated in **25**, where the application of colour produced two different patterns on the same basic plait (see also 'Notes on the designs'). Other drawings suggest methods of constructing scroll, fret, key and interlace patterns (for example, **15,23,28**). These are my own methods and are not based on any knowledge of how these were originally constructed by the medieval craftsman.

In the Lindisfarne Gospels, markings on the back of the vellum in some instances indicate how the designs were marked out with lines, compass pricks and arcs prior to drawing. One such example is illustrated here (**14**). The complexity of the method is surprising considering the very small size of the square (approximately 20×20 mm). The reasons why this superb artist found it necessary to construct such a complex framework are difficult to understand and cannot have been purely practical. George Bain in *Celtic Art, The Methods of Construction* (1951) has worked out systems for the construction of many motifs and patterns, but his methods, like mine, are not based on any evidence that these were the methods used by the original artist.

When designing a pattern today it may seem that there is an unlimited choice at our disposal, but the motifs and their arrangement and combinations are not as numerous as they might appear to be. We have to use exactly the same basic rules as those which were followed by the pattern-makers of the past of whatever period and place. This is not to say that there are no new patterns or that it is necessary to copy old patterns but these are a useful source of inspiration and instruction. It does not detract from the originality of a pattern that it has its roots in the tradition of pattern-making in the past.

The Development of Anglo-Saxon Art

The illustrations in this book are intended to stand by themselves as patterns and designs. However, in this section, I shall outline briefly the historical events which most closely influenced the development of this art.

The Anglo-Saxons

The patterns and designs in this collection are mainly taken from the art of the Anglo-Saxons. This is the name given to the peoples who settled in Britain following the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century.

The Romans ruled over Britain for four centuries. When they left, the native Britons found themselves under attack from the neighbouring Celts, Picts and Irish living beyond the former Roman frontiers. Pagan Saxon mercenaries from Germany were invited to help, but they took advantage of the situation, and the lands which later became England were eventually conquered and settled by Angles, Saxons and Jutes from the Continent. They did not, however, exterminate the native Britons, but became their overlords, and the Anglo-Saxon language became the language used by all. Kingdoms under native British rule survived in the north and west, in Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

The Germanic invaders kept their separate identity under their tribal leaders, resulting in the establishment in the late sixth and seventh centuries of a number of often warring kingdoms, each with a royal dynasty. This was a society where kings and nobles treasured rich and gaudy possessions, a society which encouraged the patronage of craftsmen who could produce such things. As long as the Anglo-Saxons remained pagan, weapons, jewellery and many other objects were buried with the dead and have been retrieved from their graves by excavation.

During the Roman occupation, Roman tastes naturally dominated artistic expression in Britain. The Germanic invaders brought with them a very different taste in art and decoration. This was a barbaric style, typically expressed in designs of grotesque and fragmented animal and human motifs executed in a technique which in metalwork achieved a glittering, restless effect (4,5). The settlers quite literally brought examples of this art with them to Britain. For example, the illustrated brooch (4) was made in Denmark around 500 AD and was buried in a woman's grave in Kent half a century later. The worn condition of the brooch makes it probable that it was an heirloom in a family of Danish ancestry. The decoration shows a Scandinavian version of Germanic art using animals as the main motifs. This was the kind of object which directly influenced the Anglo-Saxon craftsmen.

They were also influenced by other art styles already present in Britain. Anglo-Saxon art developed in response to the stimulus of three sometimes conflicting artistic ideals: classical Mediterranean naturalism with its tendency to symmetry and balanced geometrical patterns, which was a legacy of the Roman occupation; the native Celtic art with its flowing spiral scrolls; and the barbaric, Germanic abstract art with its rejection of all naturalism. These elements did not, of course, meet for the first time in Britain: the Germanic peoples had been in close contact with the Roman world in their own homelands. But the fusion achieved by the Anglo-Saxon craftsman was particularly successful, and resulted in a rich and varied style which continued to build on these foundations for several centuries.

In about 625 an East Anglian king was buried at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. Excavations in 1939 revealed the fabulous riches of one of the rulers of these kingdoms; although no body was found and it is possible that this was a cenotaph, a memorial to a king who died abroad. The mound covered a ship, 27 m long, filled with a large collection of objects including domestic utensils, weapons, jewellery, a musical instrument and royal regalia. The range and quality of the craftsmanship testify to the superb skills displayed by the goldsmiths engaged in the king's workshops. They had already achieved a mastery of design which, in its own style, is unsurpassed (1,6,9–11). Other objects came from overseas; there are bronze and silver vessels of Mediterranean, Byzantine and Egyptian origins as well as a shield and a helmet from Central Sweden.

A striking element in the jewellery from Sutton Hoo is the use of garnets—semi-precious, deep-red stones—and coloured glass, set in cells made up of gold strips. Patterned gold foil was sometimes inserted underneath the garnets to increase their sparkle. This technique, known as 'cloisonné', was introduced into Kent and East Anglia from the Frankish area and was combined with the Germanic animal motifs to produce rich and colourful designs (1,8–11).

A large 'hanging-bowl' of Celtic workmanship, which was also found in the Sutton Hoo burial, illustrates another important element in Anglo-Saxon art. It is one of many bowls which were produced in the Celtic north and west. Their enamelled bronze mounts are decorated with spiral scroll designs which became important motifs in the manuscripts of the late seventh and eighth centuries (12–13).

The Advent of Christianity

The Anglo-Saxons were pagan and Christianity—which had been introduced to Britain by the Romans—disappeared in the areas where they settled. In the north and west there was still an active Celtic church, but it seems to have been unable—or unwilling—to make any major attempt to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Instead the main impetus came from Pope Gregory in Rome who sent Augustine to Britain in 596, and began the slow process of introducing Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons.

As a result, the pagan custom of burying the dead in their clothes with brooches, pins and other jewellery along with weapons and household articles gradually declined, and this type of material is no longer available for study. The Church brought ideas and learning from the Mediterranean world as well as writing, architecture, sculpture and painting, and we can therefore follow the changes in taste and art in these different media.

At the time of the conversion the Church needed books, and those which survive were produced at religious centres in Northumbria, which in the early days of Anglo-Saxon Christianity was the most important kingdom in England. Among the best known of

these early manuscript books are the Book of Durrow, written in the second half of the seventh century, the Lindisfarne Gospels, written about 700, and the Book of Kells, written perhaps in Iona about 800. These were based on illuminated manuscript books from the Mediterranean, but show few stylistic similarities with these. The spiral scrolls which are such an important element in the elaborately decorated initials (16–18) are derived from the art of the Irish and the native Britons. But the main decorative schemes of these books were derived from those of the Anglo-Saxon goldsmith—the ribbon interlace (24–27) and animal motifs (30–31, 36–37), also seen in the jewellery from Sutton Hoo. The idea of total coverage, typical of the Germanic art style, was applied to the so-called 'carpet pages' of the manuscripts (32–35) and continuous patterns in plain, unshaded colours (20) closely resemble the panels of interlocking garnets set in gold (10–11) and the enamelled designs found in Anglo-Saxon metalwork of the pagan period. The Book of Kells shows a particularly strong Irish/Celtic influence, especially in the decorative use of the human figure (38).

The superior skills of the craftsmen and scribes of England were recognised on the Continent. Some of them worked in Rome, Germany and France and influenced the art of these countries as well as that of their Celtic neighbours in the British Isles.

At the same time, the need to build churches and monasteries of stone, where previously buildings had been of wood, led to the arrival in England of foreign craftsmen, particularly masons and stone carvers. This exchange of contacts with the Continent also led to changes in the art, and by the end of the eighth century many of the old designs and motifs had been replaced by the vine-scroll motif, acanthus leaves and a new treatment of animal motifs.

The vine-scroll motif came from the Christian culture of the Mediterranean, and perhaps of the Near East; it represents Christ, who said (St John's Gospel XV,1): 'I am the true vine'. In Anglo-Saxon art the vine-scroll takes the form of a plant scroll or a tree with bunches of grapes or berries. Birds, animals, monsters or men are sometimes caught up in the scrolls and can at times merge with the scroll itself (40–45).

This motif is often used in architectural details of churches and on objects associated with the church. It is found on many stone crosses, tombstones and memorials. It has been suggested that large crosses were erected as focal points for Christian worship in communities which could not afford to build a church. The decoration of some of these large crosses also includes scenes from the Bible as well as from pagan mythology. Most of the designs carved on stone would originally have been painted. The carved design is therefore not complete, further details and features would have been added in colour.

The influence of the vine-scroll on designs unrelated to the needs

of the Church can be seen on swords, rings, brooches, strap-ends and the like, where plant motifs are used purely decoratively—sometimes in a highly stylised form—and where the animals' tails and ears turn into plant-like features (46–47).

The Arrival of the Vikings

Towards the end of the eighth century the great riches of monasteries and churches were threatened by the raids of Vikings from Scandinavia. They first appeared on the east coast of England and then penetrated into the Irish Sea and established bases on the coast of Ireland, of which Dublin became the most important. From such bases they plundered strongholds and monasteries in Ireland and along the coasts of Britain.

Although at first the raiders returned to their homelands with their loot, the Danes began to settle in England and took control of York in 866. The Scandinavians were in England to stay. They fought with the English and eventually came to control the land to the north and east of a line from Chester to London—an area which became known as the 'Danelaw'. The settlement was mainly agricultural, but the handful of towns which they fortified became centres of local administration and developed as markets and centres of crafts and trade. The Scandinavian settlers in the Danelaw became anglicised. They adopted Christianity and the Anglo-Saxon language and eventually accepted the re-conquest of the Danelaw by an English king. By the middle of the tenth century the old Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were at last unified under one English ruler and the Scandinavians remained as anglicised landowners.

But the Danish Vikings returned. These new large-scale raids were not at first concerned with settlement but with the extraction of huge sums of money—the so-called 'danegeld'—in return for protection against raiding and looting. However, in 1016, King Canute, who ruled over Denmark and Norway, also became the king of England. Danish rule was short-lived. Canute died in 1035 and was buried in Winchester. His son survived him by only a few years and was succeeded by Edward the Confessor in 1042.

There was no tradition of stone-carving in the Scandinavian homelands of the Viking settlers, but they embraced this new medium with enthusiasm. In the churchyards of the Danelaw and in other areas of settlement there are large numbers of stone crosses whose decoration proclaims that they were produced to suit the taste of Viking patrons (48–51). Most of these are of rather indifferent artistic quality. Some exceptions are the crosses in the Isle of Man (50–51) and the tombstone from St Paul's churchyard in London (53). Apart from its excellent design, this stone is of special interest because of the traces of paint which remain, allowing the reconstruction of its original appearance. Against a background of creamy white, the bodies of the two animals are black with white

spots, while the frame and the remaining ornament is a deep, rust red.

The Viking styles, which had developed from the same Germanic art which the Anglo-Saxons brought to Britain, became part of the repertoire of the English medieval craftsman and artist.

Pottery

I have not so far mentioned pottery, although it represents a very large part of the archaeological material. Throughout the period it was a lowly craft and its products are so much inferior in artistic quality and design, and so little reflect the sophistication of other crafts, that they seem almost out of place among the patterns and designs taken from metalwork, stone and bone carving or manuscripts. However, pottery was so much part of every day life that it cannot be completely ignored.

The art of throwing pottery on a fast wheel was lost in Britain with the departure of the Romans. The undecorated pottery produced by the pagan Anglo-Saxons for domestic use was hand-raised and fired in simple clamp kilns. But increasingly the urns for cremation burials were produced by specialist potters. Their products were of superior quality, and decorated with simple line or embossed patterns or with stamped decorations. The stamps were made of bone, wood or burnt clay. The simple variations in the application of the stamps are not without interest (86–89).

The use of the wheel and a more developed kiln were gradually introduced with increased contacts and trade with the Continent. The production of cooking pots, tableware, jars and pitchers, lamps and storage vessels, of competent quality but unremarkable design and decoration, was based in the towns. Both designs and techniques were probably introduced by immigrant potters: in the ninth and early tenth centuries from the Rhineland, and in the later tenth and eleventh centuries from northern France. The vigorous artistic imagination of the English craftsman, so abundantly displayed in other media, seems to have failed totally in pottery.

Continental Influence

In the south of England, Scandinavian influences became less important as artists turned to the Continent for models and inspiration. Most of the art of the tenth and eleventh centuries is to be found in manuscripts: those produced at Winchester and Canterbury achieved a particularly high artistic standard. Although many of the motifs used in these manuscripts are continental—acanthus in particular—their treatment retains the vigour of the Anglo-Saxon traditions. The design shown here (54–61 and, from the twelfth century, 64–71) are mainly taken from borders and decorative motifs which accompany Biblical scenes which lie outside the scope of this book.

The Bayeux Tapestry—which is not a tapestry but an embroidered wall-hanging worked in wool on coarse linen—is a rare example of

the embroiderer's art for which the English were apparently famous. It illustrates the history of the Norman Conquest in a series of scenes on a strip of linen, 70 m long and 50 cm wide. It is likely that the embroidery was commissioned by Bishop Odo of Bayeux shortly after the Conquest, for display in his new cathedral, dedicated in 1077. Such hangings were apparently not uncommon, although this is the only one to survive. The embroidery was probably carried out in England, perhaps in Canterbury. The design consists of scenes, set between borders, and often separated by ornamental trees, a device also seen in manuscript decoration (62–65). The figures have great vitality and are treated decoratively, often almost as caricatures. The colours are applied in unshaded blocks, with outlines in contrasting colour.

Close links with Normandy already existed before the Conquest. The reigns of William and his successors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries did not immediately cause great changes, the existing machinery of government was merely developed and improved. However, most responsible posts were now in the hands of Norman incomers. This was particularly the case with the Church, since the English clergy had actively supported Harold. Their replacement by churchmen from Normandy led to a great many churches and monasteries being built, and the development of the Anglo-Norman style in architecture and sculpture. This development can be seen as part of the wider artistic movement, known as the Romanesque, which embraced the whole of western and central Europe. The record of Anglo-Norman building is impressive, including masterpieces like the Cathedrals of Durham, Ely and Lincoln, which were as great in concept as any on the Continent.

The sculpture which decorates the architecture retains much of the character of the Viking-influenced, pre-Conquest sculpture in the north and the sophisticated Winchester style in the south (76–81). Some new motifs appeared: particularly fantastic creatures (half human, half animal or bird, 74–75) and narrative scenes, often religious in character, but also with secular subjects such as the signs of the Zodiac or animals from the Bestiaries and from everyday life. These motifs are taken from various sources, including Classical art and perhaps Oriental textiles. Pattern books were produced and gained wide circulation. The use of such books explains why similar subjects may be found in sculpture on churches throughout Europe.

In Anglo-Norman architecture the chevron or zig-zag and the 'beak-head' motifs became particularly common features (78–80). Both were partly based on the indigenous Anglo-Saxon art. Again, it is clear that most of the sculpture was originally painted.

By the early thirteenth century, however, vital changes took place as English art became part of the Continental Gothic movement. There was a gradual movement away from the linear style of the

decoration applied to porches, doorways and capitals of the Romanesque Anglo-Norman churches, which was ultimately based on the conventions of the art of the goldsmith and the manuscript painter. Sculpture became more three-dimensional and more integrated with the architecture, and figures played a leading role.

A Brief Revival   In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, there seems to have been a revival in one craft at least of the native traditions. The town-based pottery industry declined in the twelfth century and was replaced by many smaller-scale pottery-making centres. These brought about a proliferation of local, regional styles. Jugs and pitchers were lavishly decorated with designs in different coloured slips and applied decoration of faces, figures and animals. The vessels were often covered in thin lead glazes, mainly yellow, green or brown. Although the designs are crude and depended for their ideas on continental models, they nonetheless have great vitality and the material is well handled (**90–93**).

Earthenware floor tiles were also produced for royal palaces, churches and monastic buildings. This idea was introduced from the Continent, but the techniques, such as the use of slips and of lead glazes applied to the clay before firing, were adapted from the contemporary local pottery industry and are different from some of those used on the Continent. The patterns of the tile mosaics (**98–100**) and the designs on single tiles (**94–97**), however, reflect the continental repertoire. There is little trace in these designs of the vigorous Anglo-Saxon, Celtic or Viking heritage which no longer influenced the development of art in Britain.

Looking through these pages of designs from a thousand years of British craftsmanship it appears that a large proportion of them decorated exceptional art for the rich and powerful rather than the everyday objects of common man. Some reasons for the limitations of the material have been mentioned, such as changes in burial customs, but more important in creating this imbalance is the failure of some humbler materials like wood and textile to survive to the present day.

Most of the things in everyday use by ordinary people must have been made of wood and there is every reason to believe that wood-carving was a major craft of which little is now known, except for what can be deduced from carvings in bone—a similarly soft and textured material (**40, BOTTOM; 54, LEFT; 72–73; 82–85**)—and perhaps from stone-carvings like those from the Isle of Man, where wood-carving techniques were used to produce designs in the local slate (**50–51**).

While the highly sophisticated manuscript painting was an art form only seen by the few, it demonstrates a taste for bright colours

which was perhaps common to people at all levels of society. Wood-carvings and rough-cast plaster could have been painted—traces of paint have been found on stone-carvings (53).

Textiles are also poorly preserved, but from the small fragments of wool and linen cloth and braid which survive, it is clear that this too was a highly developed craft. The early medieval farmer and his family can, therefore, be envisaged as dressed in competently woven clothes fastened with brooches or pins. Their wooden houses may have had carved and painted details and, although their pottery was plain, some at least of their wooden tools and utensils could have been decorated with lively and intricate designs which satisfied the natural artistic flair expressed in other media in their decorative art.

Notes on the Designs

1 Detail from the design on a purse-lid. Garnets and coloured glass set in gold. Height 3.3 cm. Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. *British Museum c. 625.* The purse-lid found in the royal burial at Sutton Hoo, (p. 11) was decorated with seven plaques. The design of this plaque represents a man between two beasts, a motif known from contemporary Scandinavian art. The design of another plaque (11) represents a bird of prey holding a duck in its talons.

2 TOP Detail from bronze buckle inlaid with silver. Mucking, Essex, grave 117. *British Museum.* CENTRE Detail from the design on a fragmentary silver brooch. Diameter 6.8 cm. Howletts, Kent, grave 13. *British Museum.* BOTTOM LEFT Design on a bronze plate. 3.5 × 3.2 cm. Bishopstone, Bucks. *Aylesbury Museum.* BOTTOM RIGHT Details from the design on a silver brooch. Diameter 7.8 cm. *British Museum.* 5th century.

3 TOP Designs from bronze buckle plates of continental manufacture found in Kent; LEFT *British Museum,* CENTRE and RIGHT, *Liverpool Museum.* BELOW CENTRE Design from a gilt silver brooch. Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire. *Ashmolean Museum.*
CENTRE Designs on saucer brooches from Frilford, Berkshire, Berinsfield and Fairford, Gloucestershire. *Ashmolean Museum.* BELOW CENTRE Design on button-brooch. Chatham, Kent. *Ashmolean Museum.*
BOTTOM Designs on saucer brooches, LEFT and RIGHT Abingdon, Berkshire. *Ashmolean Museum.* CENTRE Horton Kirby, Kent. *Maidstone Museum.*
5th and 6th centuries.

4 Brooch of gilt silver. Length 13 cm. Bifrons, Kent, grave 41. *Maidstone Museum.* 6th century.
See p. 10 for discussion of this brooch.

5 TOP Detail from the design on a drinking-horn mount of gilt silver. Taplow, Buckinghamshire. *British Museum.* CENTRE Designs from two saucer brooches of bronze: Long Wittenham, Berkshire, *British Museum,* and Fairford, Gloucestershire, *Ashmolean Museum.* Detail from the design on a silver buckle plate. Gilton, Kent. *Maidstone Museum.* BOTTOM Details from the design on a gilt silver brooch. Bifrons, Kent, grave 63. *Maidstone Museum.* 6th and 7th centuries.

6 Gold buckle. Length 13.2 cm. Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. *British Museum. c. 625.*
The buckle has a carved design of interlaced animals and plaits. The animal designs are perfectly balanced, yet free of rigid symmetry. Details of the central panel and the circular design demonstrate how cunningly this is achieved. On the royal burial at Sutton Hoo, see p. 11.

7 Details from designs on gilt silver and gold buckles: TOP LEFT King's Field, Faversham, Kent, *British Museum;* RIGHT Sarre, Kent, grave 68, *Maidstone Museum.* BOTTOM LEFT, Gilton, Ash, Kent, *British Museum;* CENTRE Taplow, Buckinghamshire, *British Museum;* RIGHT Gilton, Kent, grave 23, *Liverpool Museum.* 6th and 7th centuries.

8 TOP Gilt silver disc brooch with garnet inlay. Diameter 4.2 cm. Faversham, Kent. *Ashmolean Museum.* CENTRE LEFT Detail from the design of a gilt silver disc brooch with garnet and blue glass inlay. Faversham, Kent.

British Museum. CENTRE RIGHT Detail of an incised design on the back of a gold and silver disc brooch. Faversham, Kent. *Fitzwilliam Museum.* BOTTOM Detail from the design on a gold disc brooch with ornament in gold filigree and garnet inlay. Kingston, Kent. *Liverpool Museum.* 6th and 7th centuries.

9 TOP and CENTRE Details from the design on gilt bronze shield mounts. BOTTOM Details of the design in garnet set in gold on a pair of shoulder-clasps. Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. *c. 625. British Museum.*
The designs on **8** and **9** are all based on the same motif, an animal biting its own back. It is seen most clearly in a simple, linear form on **8**, CENTRE RIGHT, and at its most abstract in gold filigree on **8**, BOTTOM (the motif is much enlarged here, the length of the smaller animal is only 7 mm).
On the royal burial at Sutton Hoo, see p. 11.

10 Patterns in cloisonné, i.e. garnets set in gold-walled cells. These patterns decorate various kinds of mounts. Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. *c. 625. British Museum.*
On the royal burial at Sutton Hoo, see p. 11.

11 TOP Gold pendant decorated with gold filigree and garnets. Diameter 11.4 cm; CENTRE Detail of the design on a gold brooch with garnet inlay. Faversham, Kent. *British Museum.* BOTTOM Detail from the design on a purse-lid. Garnets and coloured glass set in gold. Height 3.8 cm. Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. *c. 625. British Museum.*
See note 1.

12 Designs from hanging-bowl mounts of enamelled bronze: TOP Sutton Hoo, Suffolk; CENTRE Winchester, Hants; BOTTOM Barlaston, Staffs. *British Museum.* 7th century.

13 TOP and BOTTOM The Lindisfarne Gospels, *c. 700. British Library.* CENTRE The Book of Durrow, second half of 7th century. *Trinity College, Dublin.*
See also pp 11–12.

14 A reconstruction of the method used to make the pattern of a small square in the Lindisfarne Gospels (actual length of side 20 mm). It is based on lines, compass pricks and arcs seen on the back of the vellum page. (After R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford.)
See also p. 9.

15 The methods of constructing spirals and scrolls illustrated here are not based on evidence of the method originally used (see **14**). They only serve to demonstrate that there are simple ways of drawing such patterns.

16 TOP Detail from a decorated letter in St Chad's Gospel. *Lichfield Cathedral Library.* BOTTOM Decorated letters from the Book of Kells. *Trinity College, Dublin.* 7th and 8th centuries.

17 Decorated letters from the Lindisfarne Gospels, except for top right 'H' from MS Royal 2.A.XX. *British Library.*

18 Decorated letters from 7th century manuscripts: TOP LEFT The Book of Armagh, *Trinity College, Dublin;* TOP RIGHT and CENTRE LEFT, MS Harley 5431, *British Library;* CENTRE RIGHT, the Echternach Gospels, *Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris;* BOTTOM The Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library.*

19 The Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*. The distribution of colour is indicated by screens.

20 TOP ROW, LEFT The Book of Durrow; THIRD ROW The Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*. The rest from the Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*. The distribution of colour is indicated by screens.

21 SECOND ROW, RIGHT The Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*; BOTTOM RIGHT The Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*. The rest from the Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*.

22 TOP, THIRD ROW RIGHT and BOTTOM The Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*. The rest from the Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*.

23 The methods of constructing key and fret patterns illustrated here are not based on evidence of the methods originally used. They only serve as a guide to simple ways of drawing such patterns.

24 Borders from the Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*. The different screens indicate colour. It can be seen that the colour is applied to the plait or knot interlace in such a manner that the pattern we see does not reflect the way the interlace is constructed. See also pp. 9, 11–12.

25 Borders from the Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*. TOP The plait is made up of four strands (shown separately). By applying colour to different parts of the plait—indicated by screens—separate patterns are created. BOTTOM The interlace is made up of two strands and a closed loop (shown separately). By applying colour a rather different pattern is produced.

26 Ribbon interlace from the Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*. The pattern is produced by a combination of the underlying interlace and the applied colour—indicated by screens.

27 Ribbon interlace: TOP The Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*; BOTTOM The Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*.
The circular design: on the right, the screen separates out the two closed loops which make up the interlace. On the left, the screens indicate the different colours which complete the pattern.
The square design: on the right, the screen separates out one of the four identical closed loops which make up the interlace. On the left, the screen indicates how colour was applied to two of the quarters.

28 Knot patterns: the four examples from the top are from brooches; St Ninian's Isle, Shetland, Isle of Mull and Breadalbane, Scotland. *National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*. 8th century. The rest are from the Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*.

29 Knot patterns from Pictish stone crosses: TOP Invergowrie, Angus, *National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland*; CENTRE Aberlemno, Angus; BOTTOM Rossie Priory, Perthshire. 8th century.

30–31 Border designs from the Book of Durrow, *Trinity College, Dublin*. The screens indicate colours. The animals which make up the design are shown separately.

32–33 Repeat pattern from a 'carpet page' in the Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*.
The analytical drawing shows that the dog and the two birds are superimposed to make up this over-all repeat pattern.

34–35 Repeat pattern from a 'carpet page' in the Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*.
The analytical drawing shows that two pairs of identical birds superimposed make up this over-all repeat pattern.

36–37 Interlaced dogs and birds from the Lindisfarne Gospels, *British Library*.
These designs fit into panels and borders.

38 Designs from manuscripts using the human figure: TOP MS 1395, *St Gall Cathedral Library*; the rest from the Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*. 8th and 9th centuries.

39 Decorated letters and a border design from the Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*.
The letters which are made up of many different kinds of animals form the word ITA at the top and AI below.

40 TOP Vine-scroll design from a silver bowl, Ormside, Westmorland. *Yorkshire Museum*. BOTTOM Vine-scroll design from two panels of the Gandersheim Casket. Carved walrus ivory. *Landesmuseum Brunswick*. Late 8th century.

41 TOP LEFT Design from an English gilt bronze brooch found in Hillesøy, Lenvik, Norway. *Tromsø Museum*. BOTTOM LEFT Detail of a design on sheet bronze from an English bucket found in Birka, Sweden. *Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm*. RIGHT Reconstruction of the plant design on a gilt copper-alloy sheet. The metal strip was cut and used to make up part of the body of the Winchester Reliquary. *British Museum*. 8th century.

42–44 Vine-scroll designs on carved stone crosses. **42**, from crosses at Hexham, Northumberland. **43**, LEFT TO RIGHT from crosses at Britford, Wiltshire; Breedon, Leicestershire and Bakewell, Derbyshire. **44**, TOP LEFT from Croft, Yorkshire; BOTTOM LEFT from Breedon, Leicestershire and RIGHT from Ruthwell, Dumfries. 8th and 9th centuries.
Most stone carving was originally painted. It must be presumed that further details and features were added at this stage. Little is known about the colours used, but for a rare example of preserved colour, see note 53.

45 Vine-scroll and plant designs from manuscripts. TOP Gospel Book, Barb. Lat. 570, *Vatican Library, Rome*; CENTRE RIGHT Cotton Vespasian A. I., *British Library*; BOTTOM The Book of Kells, *Trinity College, Dublin*. CENTRE LEFT Design engraved on the back of the Alfred Jewel, *Ashmolean Museum*. 8th and 9th centuries.

46 FIRST AND SECOND ROW FROM THE TOP Designs from silver mounts on a sword from Abingdon, Berkshire, *Ashmolean Museum*. THIRD ROW LEFT Designs of two panels on a gold finger ring from Poslingford, Suffolk, *British Museum*; THIRD ROW RIGHT Two designs from a gilt bronze mount found at Komnes, Buskerud, Norway, but of English origins. FOURTH ROW

Designs on a silver mount and a pin from Trewhiddle, Cornwall, *British Museum*. BOTTOM Designs on a silver brooch, known as the Fuller brooch, no provenance, *British Museum*. 9th century.
All these designs are inlaid with niello, see note 47.

47 TOP Design on a gold finger ring, known as Ethelwulf's ring, *British Museum*. SECOND ROW LEFT AND BOTTOM Designs on a silver strap-end and mount from Trewhiddle, Cornwall, *British Museum*; SECOND ROW CENTRE AND RIGHT Designs from silver mounts on a sword from Abingdon, Berkshire, *Ashmolean Museum*. THIRD ROW Designs on a silver brooch, known as the Fuller brooch; no provenance, *British Museum*. 9th century. All these designs are inlaid with niello. Black niello was inlaid in silver or gold to provide a colour contrast. The pattern was first engraved, the bottom of the engraving was left rough to provide a key for the inlay. The niello—usually silver sulphide—was applied as a powder and burnished under slow heat. Later a mixture of silver and copper sulphide could be applied in molten form.

48 Cross from Middleton, Yorkshire. Height 106 cm. Reconstructed. 10th century.
See notes 42–44 and 53.

49 TOP Cross shaft from Kirkby Stephen, Westmorland. Height 65 cm. Reconstructed. BOTTOM LEFT Detail of the ornament on a cross shaft from St Alkmund's Church, Derby; BOTTOM RIGHT Design on a cross shaft from Collingham, Yorkshire. 10th century.
See notes 42–44 and 53.

50 LEFT 'Gaut's Cross', Kirk Michael, Isle of Man. Height 183 cm. RIGHT Interlaced designs from cross slabs in the Isle of Man: TOP LEFT Jurby; TOP RIGHT Kirk Michael, BOTTOM Ballaugh. 10th century.
See notes 42–44 and 53.

51 Designs from cross slabs in the Isle of Man. RIGHT AND LEFT Braddan; CENTRE BOTTOM Kirk Michael. 10th century.
See notes 42–44 and 53. CENTRE TOP Design on a copper-alloy strap-end from York. Length 4.9 cm. 10th century.

52 LEFT Design on a gilt bronze panel from Winchester, Hants. Length 28 cm. *Winchester Cathedral Library*. CENTRE Analytical drawing showing the two pairs of interlaced animals which are the main part of the design. RIGHT TOP Bronze mount from Sedgeford, Norfolk. Length 4.2 cm. *King's Lynn Museum*. RIGHT BOTTOM Design carved on a piece of bone from Dublin. *National Museum of Ireland*. Pieces of bone were apparently used by craftsmen to try out patterns and designs. 11th century.

53 TOP LEFT Gilt bronze brooch from Pitney, Somerset. Diameter 3.9 cm. *British Museum*; TOP RIGHT Analytical drawing of the design showing the two animals which make up the design. BOTTOM Tombstone from St Paul's churchyard, London. *Museum of London*. Reconstructed. 11th century.
This stone is of particular interest because it is one of the few instances where traces of paint have survived. It has therefore been possible to reconstruct its original appearance. The sandstone was covered by a thin layer of creamy white gesso (plaster) which survives on the background. The bodies of the two animals were painted black with white spots, while

the frame and the additional ornament was dark, rust red (indicated here by a screen).

54 LEFT Design on the lid of a pen-case, carved in walrus ivory. City of London. *British Museum.* RIGHT TOP Strap-end of bronze from Winchester, Hants. Length 7 cm. *Winchester City Museum;* RIGHT BOTTOM Border from manuscript, MS 183, *Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.* 10th and 11th centuries.

55 Decorated letters from manuscripts: TOP MS 200, *Lambeth Palace Library, London;* BOTTOM LEFT MS B.14.3, *Trinity College, Cambridge;* BOTTOM RIGHT Cotton Tiberius B.I, *British Library.* 10th and 11th centuries.

56 Decorated letters from manuscripts: TOP LEFT MS O.I.18; TOP RIGHT MS B.II.2; CENTRE MS 0.3.7; all at *Trinity College, Cambridge.* BOTTOM LEFT MS Junius 27, *Bodleian Library, Oxford;* BOTTOM RIGHT MS 183, *Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.* 10th century.

57 Decorated letters from manuscripts: TOP MS Add.37517, *British Library;* BOTTOM LEFT MS Junius 27; BOTTOM RIGHT MS Tanner 10 (S.C.27694), both at *Bodleian Library, Oxford.* 10th century.

58 Corner and border designs from manuscripts: TOP LEFT CORNER Benedictional of St Ethelwold, *British Library;* BOTTOM New Minster Charter, *British Library,* Winchester, 10th century. CENTRE Bury Psalter, *Vatican Library, Rome.* Canterbury, 11th century.

59 Corner and border designs from manuscripts: TOP RIGHT CORNER Benedictional of St Ethelwold, *British Library;* BOTTOM LEFT CORNER Gospel Lectionary, *College of Arms, London,* Winchester, 10th century.

60 Corner and border design and motif from manuscripts: TOP Hereford Gospels, *Pembroke College, Cambridge.* LEFT MS Cotton Tiberius C.VI, *British Library.* BOTTOM RIGHT CORNER MS Ff.I.23, *University Library, Cambridge.* 11th century.

61 Border design and motif from manuscripts: TOP MS Arundel 60, *British Library;* BOTTOM MS Stowe 2, *British Library.* Winchester, 11th century.

62–63 The Bayeux Tapestry. *Bayeux, France.* This embroidered wall-hanging is made up of strips of coarse linen, 70 m long and 50 cm wide. The embroidery is in coloured wool thread in laid and couched work with stem and outline stitches. The colours are red, several shades of green and blue, buff, yellow and black (pp. 14–15).

64 Stylised trees from manuscripts: TOP MS 619, *Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.* Winchester, 12th century. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT Two examples from the Shaftsbury Psalter, *British Library,* West Country, 12th century; two examples from St Albans Psalter, *St Godehard, Hildesheim,* St Albans Abbey, 12th century.

65 Stylised trees from manuscripts: TOP MS Thott 143 2°, *Royal Library Copenhagen.* Northern England, 12th century. BOTTOM, FROM LEFT Eadwine Psalter, *Trinity College, Cambridge;* MS Arundel 60, *British Library,* Winchester Psalter, *British Library.* 11th and 12th centuries.

66–69 Border designs from the Winchester Psalter, *British Library.* 12th century.

70–71 Decorated initials, border designs and motifs from the Winchester Bible, *Winchester Cathedral Library.* 12th century.

72 Design from panel carved in bone, possibly at Winchester. *Victoria and Albert Museum.* 12th century.

73 TOP Motif from panel carved in bone, possibly at Winchester. *Victoria and Albert Museum.* Carved borders: FROM TOP walrus ivory panel, English, *Museo Nazionale, Florence;* panel, School of St Albans, *British Museum;* ceremonial staff, narwhal horn, possibly at Lincoln, *Victoria and Albert Museum;* ivory panel, School of Herefordshire, *Victoria and Albert Museum.* 12th century.

74–75 Designs on capitals in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. *c.* 1120.

76 LEFT Plant scroll from the Prior's Doorway, Ely Cathedral, Cambridgeshire. *c.* 1140. RIGHT TOP Design and border, St Peter, Rowlstone, Herefordshire; BOTTOM border from wall painting, St John the Baptist, Clayton, Sussex. 12th century.

77 FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: border designs from St Peter's, Charney Basset, Berkshire; the Prior's Doorway, Ely Cathedral, Cambridgeshire; Malmesbury Abbey, Wiltshire; Leominster Priory, Herefordshire. 12th century.

78 Borders and designs carved in stone from Anglo-Norman architecture. FIRST AND SECOND FROM TOP LEFT Malmesbury Abbey, Wiltshire; TOP RIGHT St Albans, Herts; SECOND FROM TOP, RIGHT and THIRD FROM TOP, LEFT St Margaret's, Hales, Norfolk; THIRD FROM TOP, RIGHT All Saints, Wittering, Northants. BOTTOM Bristol Cathedral. 12th century.

79 Detail of door surround from St Peter's-in-the-East, Oxford. These motifs, the chevron, or zigzag, the 'beak-head' and the saltire cross are typical of Anglo-Norman architectural decoration (p. 15). 12th century.

80 Detail of door surround from St Mary and St David, Kilpeck, Herefordshire. 12th century.

81 TOP Design over door from St Mary and St David, Kilpeck, Herefordshire. BOTTOM Design from a stone font in St Mary Magdalen, Eardisley, Herefordshire. 12th century.

82–85 Chess pieces from the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides. Walrus ivory. Height approx. 8–10 cm. *British Museum.* 12th century.
Chess was originally an Indian game. It reached Europe in the early 11th century and was by the early 12th century the most popular game in Europe. These pieces are part of a find which contained pieces from four incomplete sets. It cannot be established if they were carved in the British Isles or in Scandinavia, but their style can be compared to Scandinavian carving of the 12th century.

86–89 Patterns from 7th century funerary urns. **86,** height of complete urn 30 cm, Sancton Yorkshire, *Hull Museum.* **87,** TOP Spong Hill, *Norwich Castle*

Museum, bottom Lackford, Suffolk, height of urn 31.2 cm, *Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography*. **88–89**, Spong Hill, Norfolk, *Norwich Castle Museum*.

These urns held the cremated bones and ashes in pagan burials. See p. 14.

90–93 Earthenware jugs with applied decoration. Reconstructed from drawings in the British Museum by G. C. Dunning. **90**, made in the London area, found in Bergen, Norway, height 40 cm. **91**, top Nottingham, height 25.5 cm, *Nottingham Castle Museum*; bottom Bristol, height 29 cm, *Bristol City Museum*. **92**, Nottingham, height 39 cm, *Nottingham Castle Museum*. **93**, top Winchester, Hants, height 24 cm; bottom Bramber Castle, Sussex, height 27 cm, *Bristol Museum*.

Most of the jugs were glazed with a thin lead glaze, sometimes over a white slip. The colours included yellow, spotted green or green, brown or near black.

94–97 Glazed earthenware floor tiles. After E. S. Eames. **94**, from Chertsey Abbey, Surrey; Clarendon Palace, Wilts; Great Shefford Church, Berks; Keynsham Abbey, Somerset and North Warnborough Church, Hants. **95**, from Chertsey Abbey, Surrey; Halesowen Abbey, North-West Midland; Harpsden Church, Oxon; Notley Abbey, Bucks; Lewis Priory, Sussex and Saltwood Church, Kent. **96**, from Clarendon Palace, Wilts; Eynsham Abbey, Oxon; Halesowen Abbey, North-West Midland and Whitefriars Chapel, Northampton. **97**, from (?) Burnham Abbey, Bucks; Clarendon Palace, Wilts; Harrietsham Church, Kent and Salisbury Cathedral, Wilts. *British Museum*. 13th and 14th centuries.

The patterns were stamped into the wet body of red clay. The cavity was filled with white clay and the top smoothed off. Lead glaze was applied to the dried tile before firing. The pale yellow colour of the glaze produced a pattern in yellow and brown.

98–100 Floor mosaic patterns of shaped, glazed earthenware tiles. Reconstructed panels from Rievaulx Abbey, Yorkshire. *British Museum*. After E. S. Eames. 13th century.

The floor designs were made up of panels, such as these, separated by straight borders. The colours were pale yellow, produced by lead glaze over a white slip and dark green, produced by lead glaze with added copper over the red clay body.
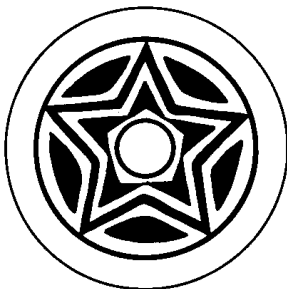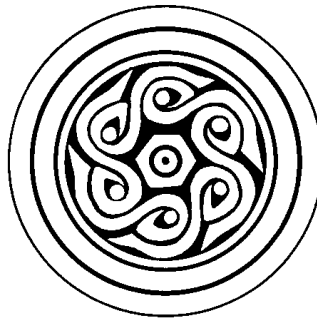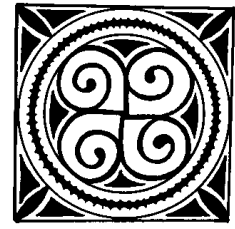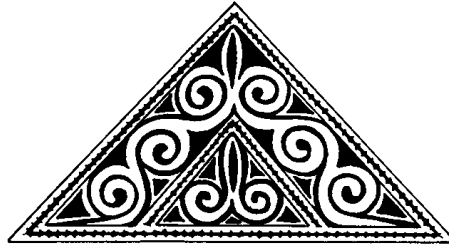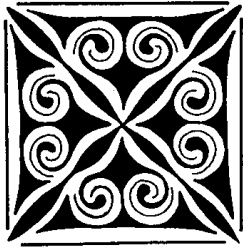
3 TOP Patterns from objects of continental manufacture found in English graves. BELOW Patterns from circular Anglo-Saxon brooches of the 5th and 6th centuries.
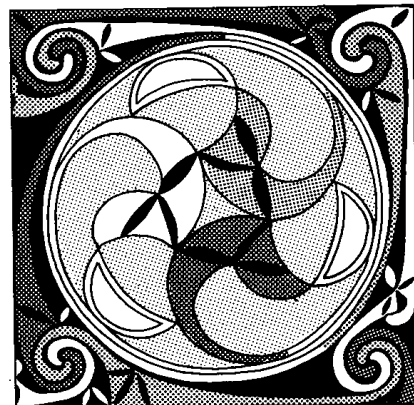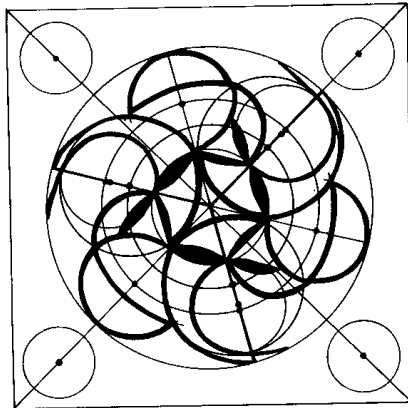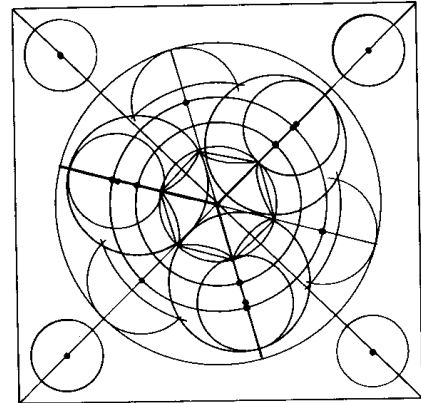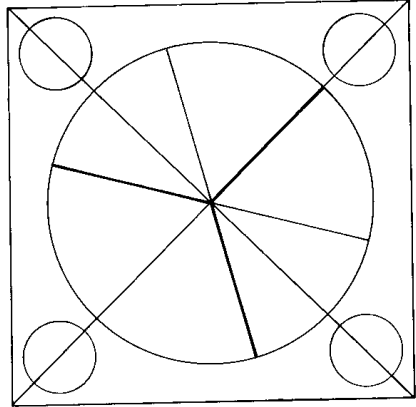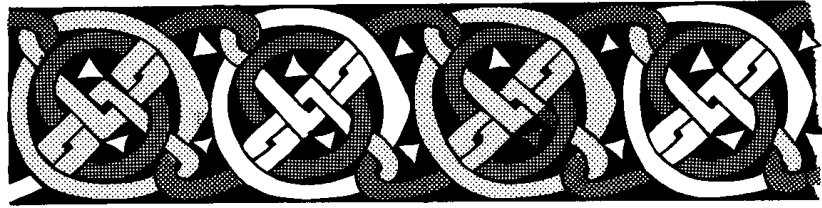
14 A reconstruction of the method used to construct a panel in the Lindisfarne Gospels, based on markings on the back of the page.
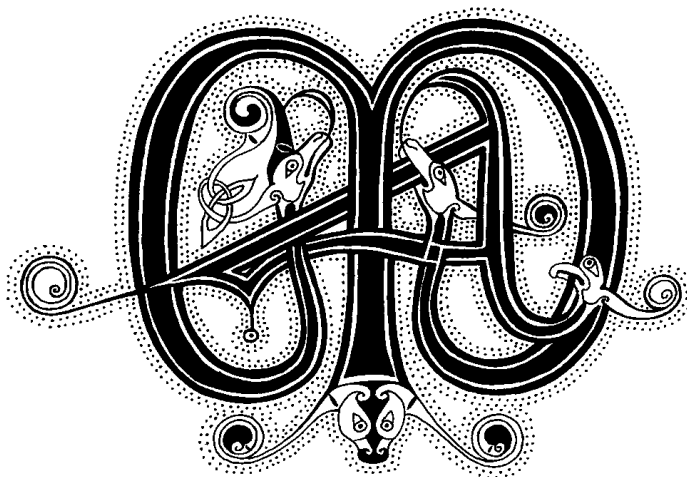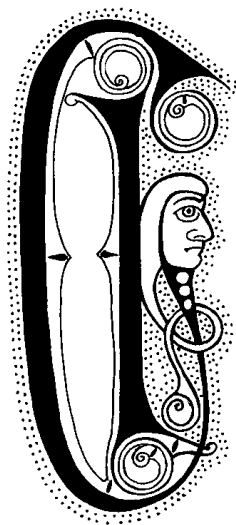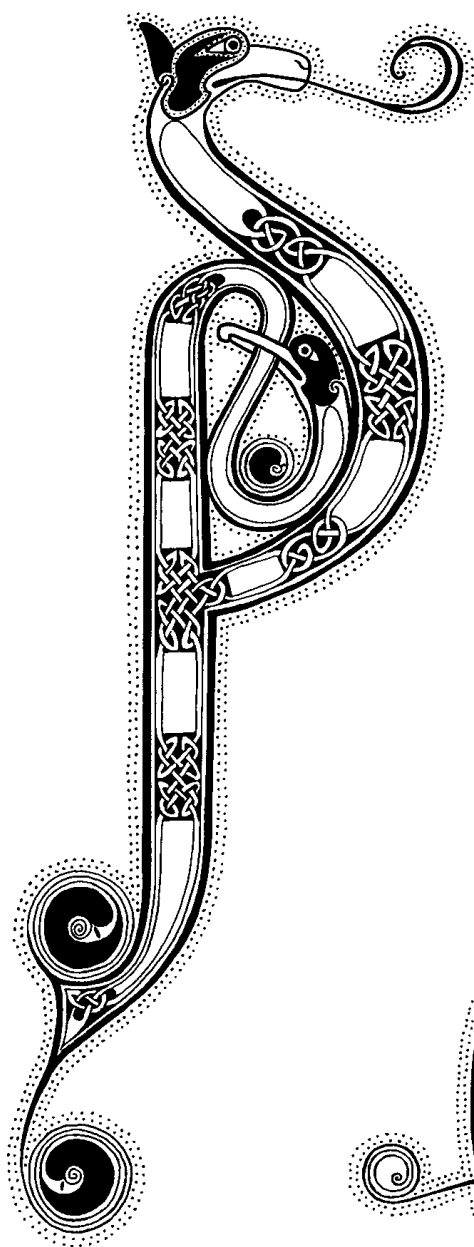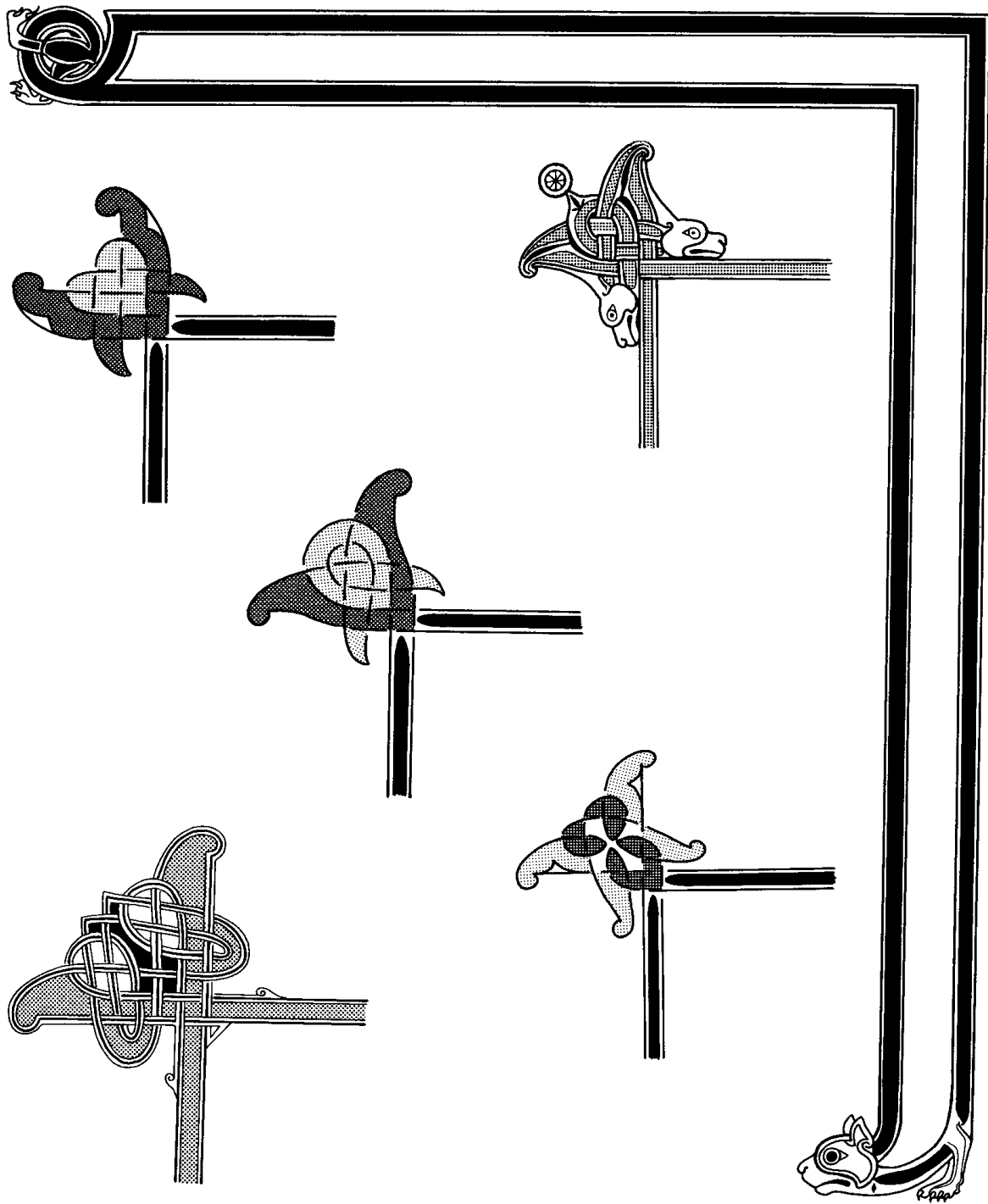
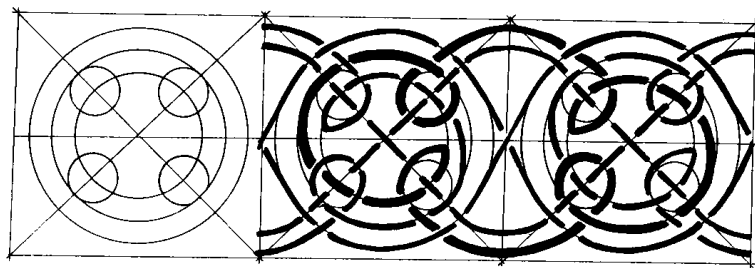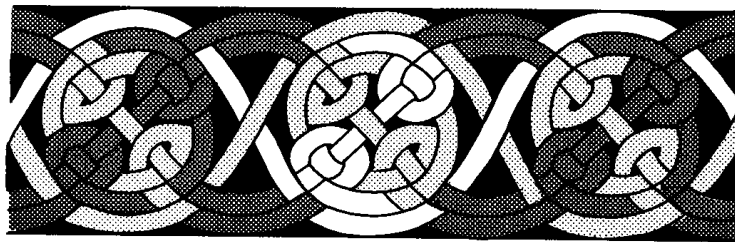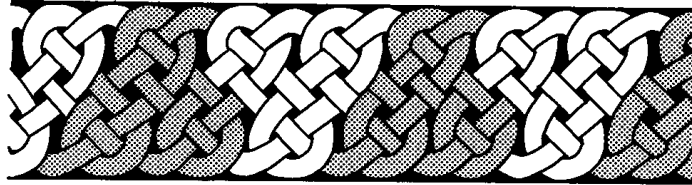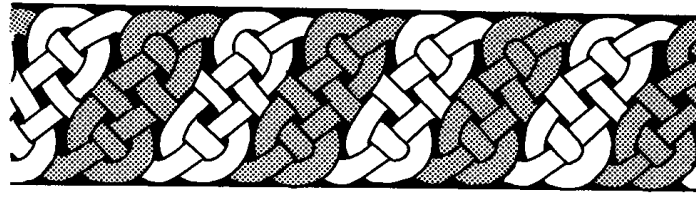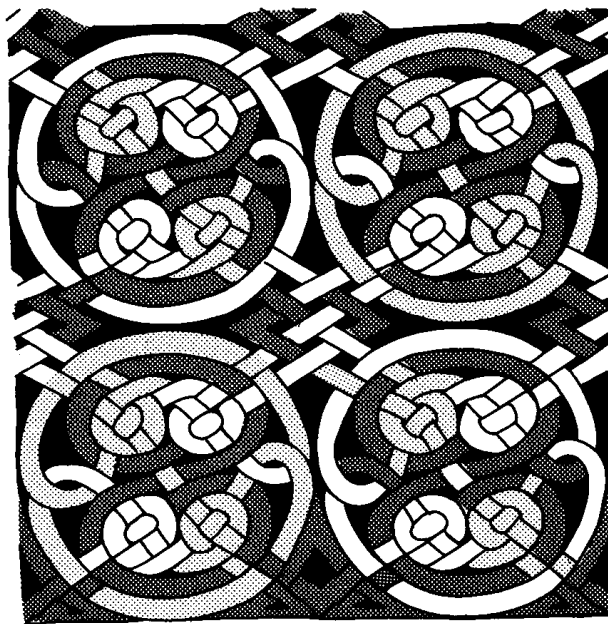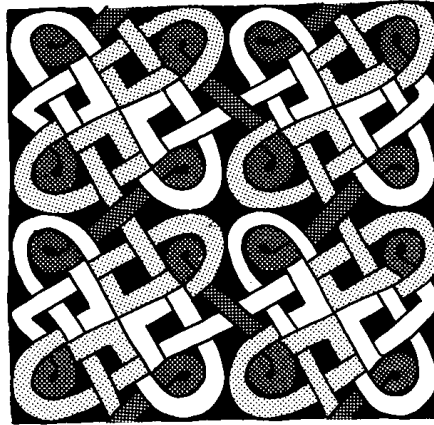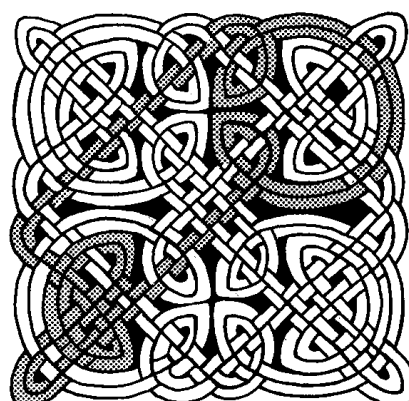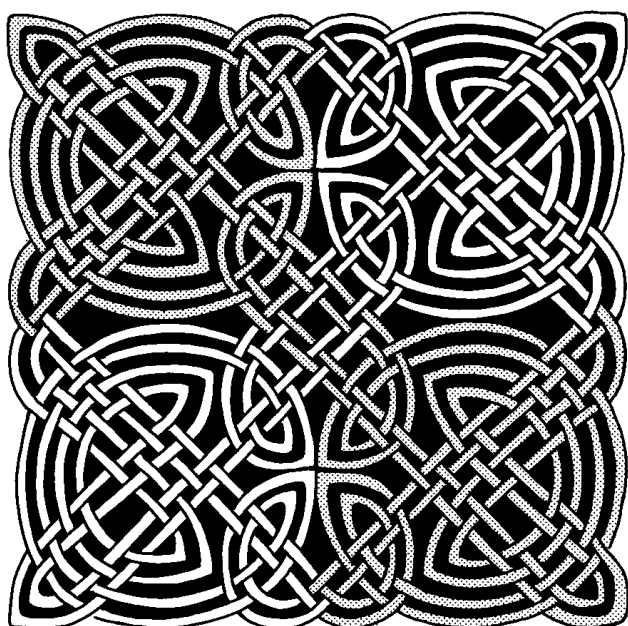**19** Border and corner designs from the Lindisfarne Gospels.
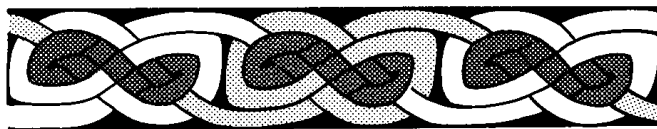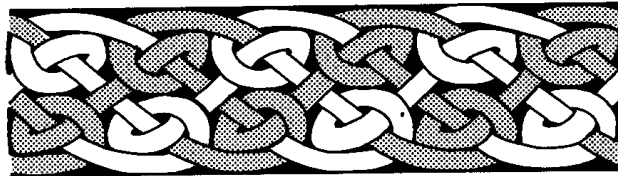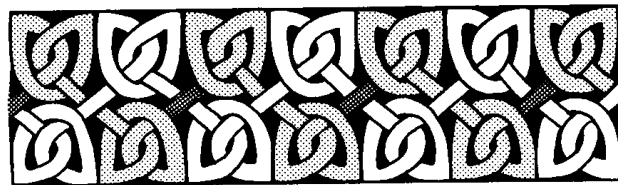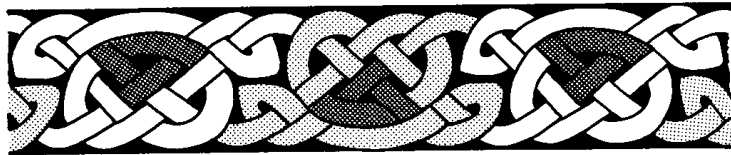
**24** Border patterns in coloured ribbon interlace from the Book of Durrow. 7th century.

25 Borders from the Book of Durrow. The basic designs of the ribbon interlace are shown separately. With the application of colour, different patterns are created.

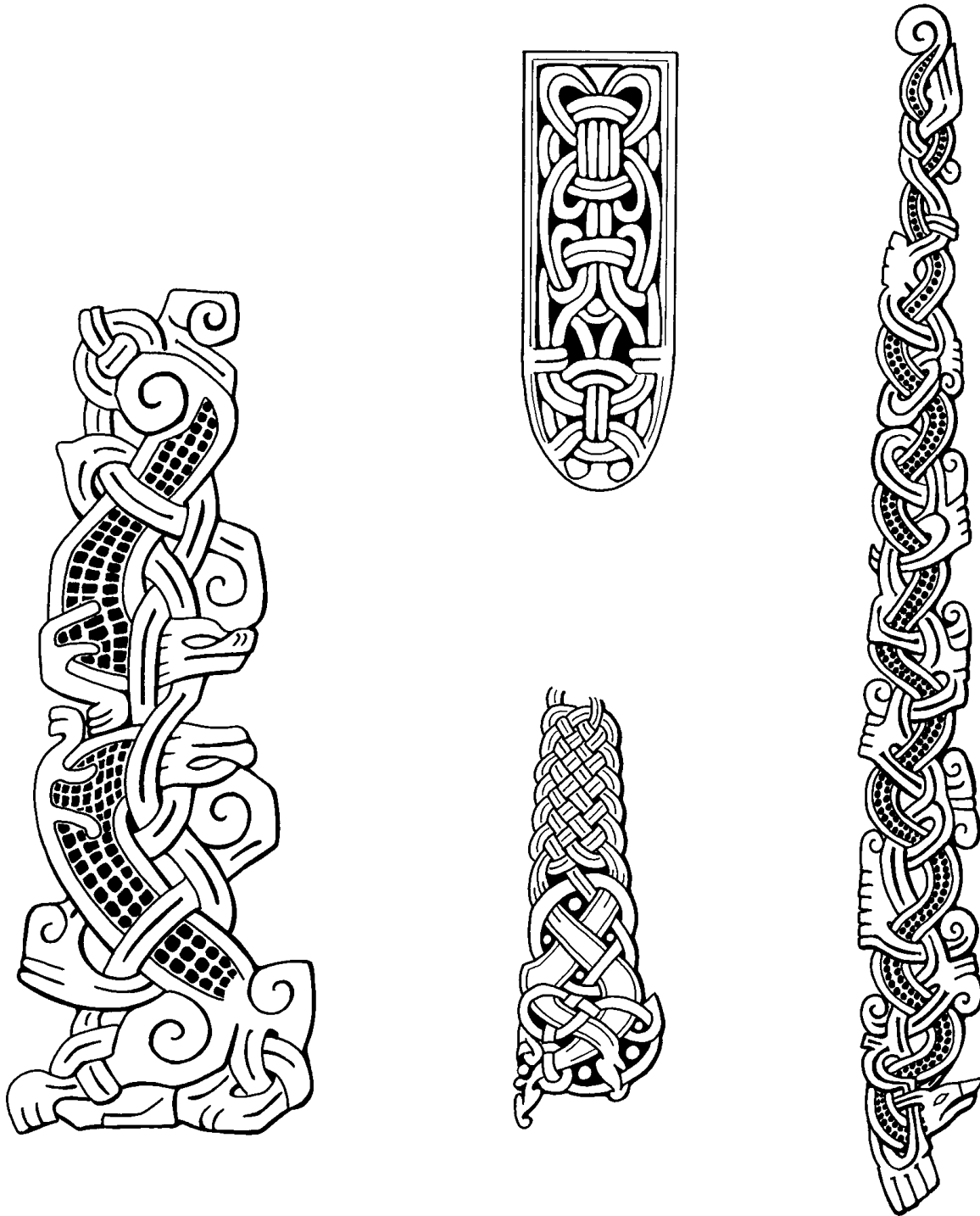26 Ribbon interlace from the Book of Durrow.
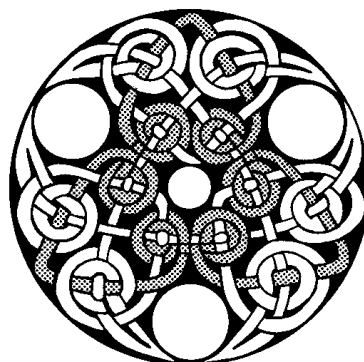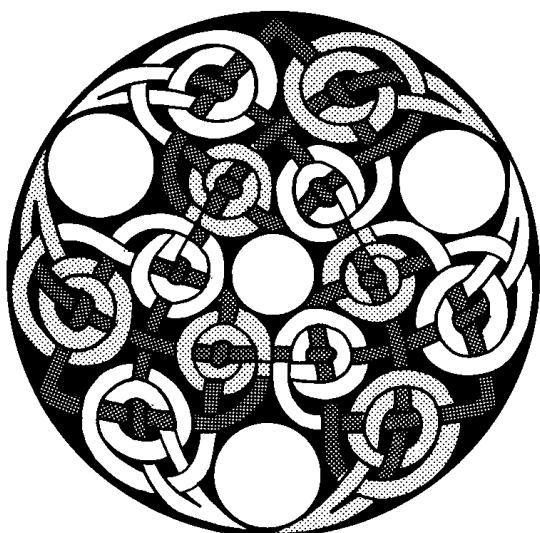
27 Ribbon interlace from the Book of Durrow (TOP) and the Lindisfarne Gospels (BELOW). On the left with applied colour, on the right showing the basic design.
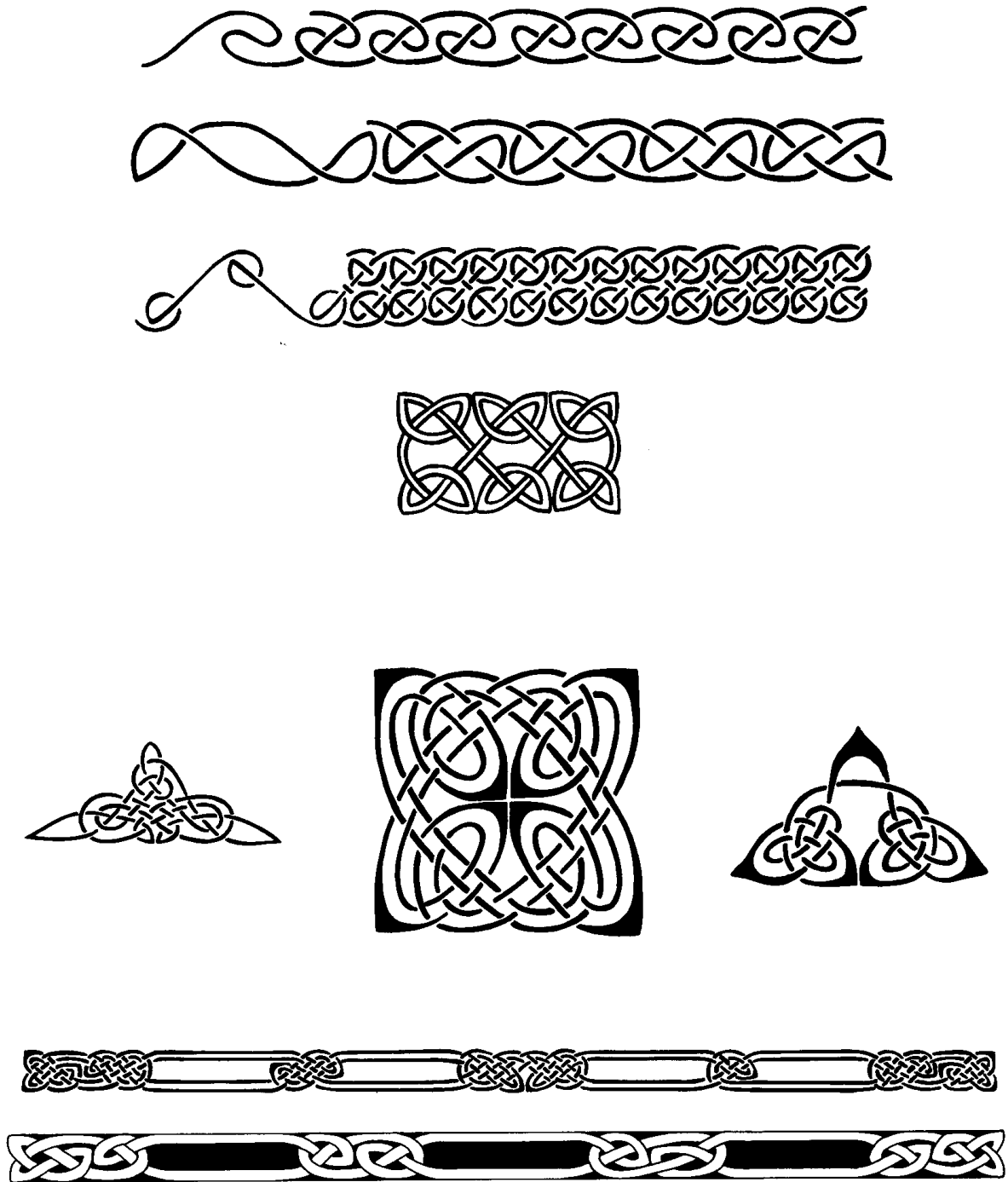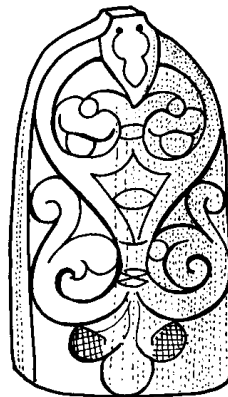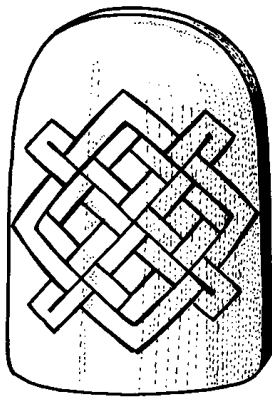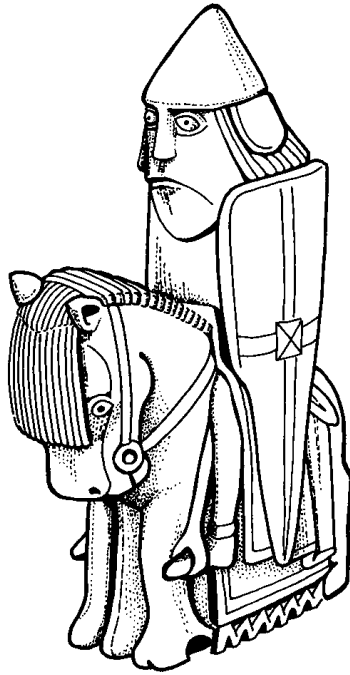
28 Knot patterns: TOP four examples from 8th century Pictish metalwork; BELOW from the Lindisfarne Gospels.
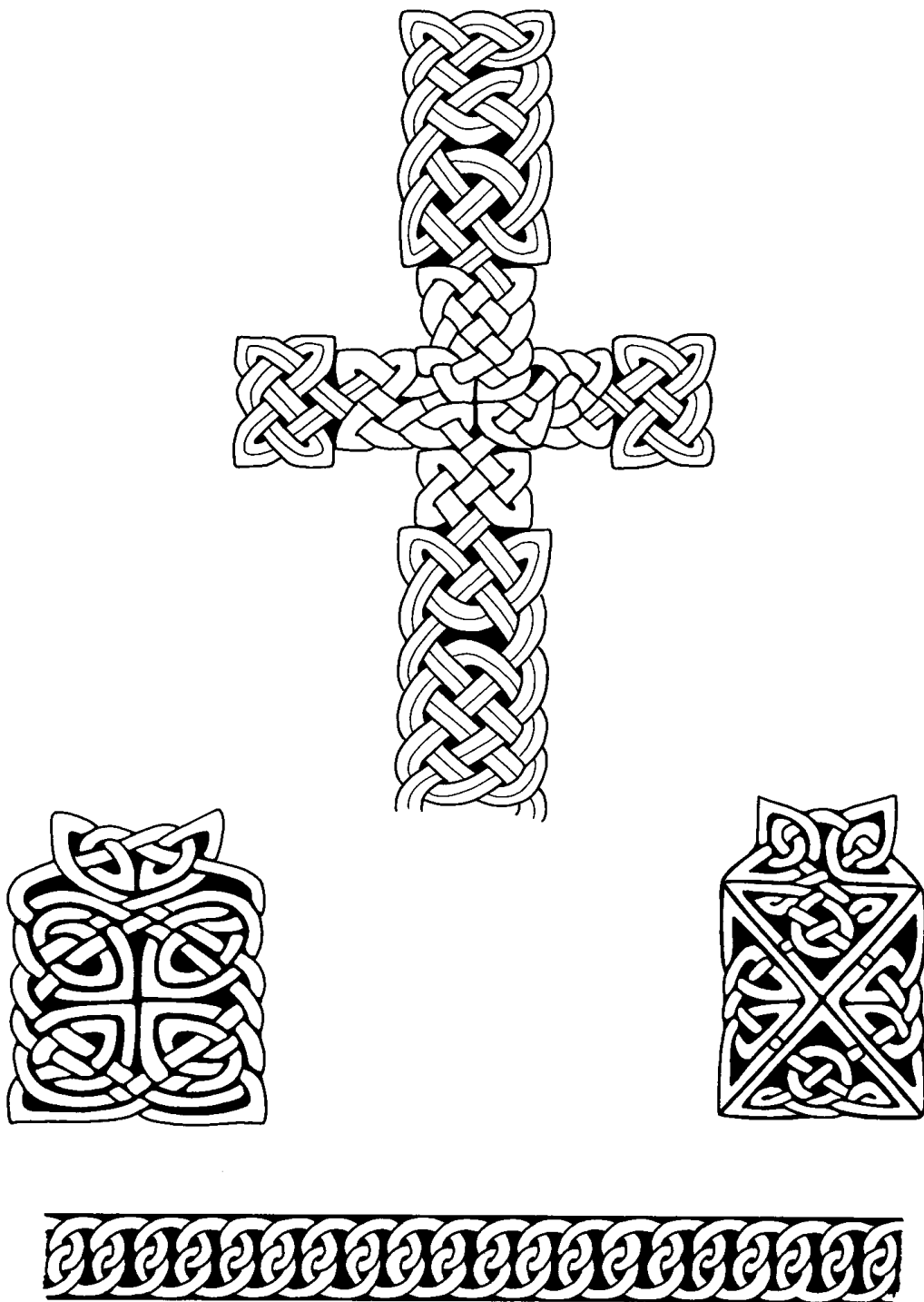
29 Knot patterns from Pictish stone crosses. 8th century.

51 Designs from Viking Age stone sculpture in the Isle of Man and from metalwork (TOP LEFT).

83 A knight and two pawns.

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