
Anglo-Saxon Art is written by Leslie Webster, former Keeper of the Department of Prehistory and Europe in the British Museum and Honorary Professor at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Her introduction to Anglo-Saxon art builds and expands upon two exhibitions produced by the British Museum, the first in 1984 entitled The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066, catalog edited by Janet Backhouse, D.H. Turner, and Leslie Webster; and subsequently in 1991, The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900, catalog edited by Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse. In her latest work, Webster discusses the recent discovery and analysis of the Staffordshire Hoard, a 3,500 piece trove of gold and silver metalwork, which is casting new light on Anglo-Saxon artistic culture and heritage.

Advancing chronologically from AD 400-1100, the book is divided into seven themes: “Reading the Image, Seeing the Text” uncovers the visual culture found in Anglo-Saxon imagination and the ability to ‘read’ images; “Rome Reinvented: The Early Inheritance” and “Celtic Connections” describe the influence of Roman and Celtic art and culture on Anglo-Saxons; ”Art and Power” connects the creation of artworks with both secular and religious wealth and power; “Mission and Reform” discusses the influence of Anglo-Saxon missionaries; and finally “The North Ascendant” describes the Viking settlements and impact upon Anglo-Saxon material culture. Webster skillfully incorporates quotes taken from Anglo-Saxon poems and texts (Beowulf, Widsith, etc.) into the beginning of each chapter, providing a well-rounded treatment of Anglo-Saxon art and culture. The afterward details the resurgence of scholarly interest in Anglo-Saxon heritage, and Webster draws connections between Anglo-Saxon culture and nineteenth-century literary works such as Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and the English Arts and Crafts movement, focusing in particular on the works of William Morris and his Kelmscott Press.

The bibliography provides a recommended list of general books on the subject along with specialized sources further divided by chapter. An index, glossary, and two maps of Anglo-Saxon England are included. There are over 200 beautifully produced color illustrations allowing the reader to see many of the metalwork and ceramic objects in greater detail than ever before, including several pieces of the newly discovered Staffordshire Hoard which are depicted in color half-pages. However, standing just under twenty-five centimeters high, one might wish that the format were slightly larger. Reasonably priced and well produced, Anglo-Saxon Art provides a thorough introduction to the subject and is recommended for the academic or museum library with an interest in medieval art.

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