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**Viking and Romanesque Flavour on Norwegian Stave Church Ornamentation
(1000-1250)**

Abstract

Vikings were Scandinavian seafaring warriors who occupied vast areas of Europe (850-1050). After the arrival of Christianity to Norway in the 11th century, the stave wooden churches (1000-1550) became the country's most significant contribution to European medieval art. They were erected with upright planks fitted between rounded corner posts which reached up to the roof truss of the main area. And their portals have animal carvings which are symbolically interpreted in light of Christian values. Although the Viking era has gone, Norwegians were still seafarers, bringing back new ideas to local conditions.

Consequently, Viking art (850-1050) tends to be more functional and symbolic, rather than contemplative or expressive. The wood carving and sculpture display inventiveness and level of skill, leaving a legacy of abstract animal forms, which have flourished in northern Europe from the period of migrations (c.400) onwards. This animal style consists of contorted, writhing snakes and beasts whose actual shape is hardly recognizable, as well as almost entirely devoid of plant ornaments. Stylistically, Viking art is divided into Oseberg, Borre, Jellinge, Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes, taking their names from the find-places of objects, despite chronological overlaps.

Of 100 original buildings, Urnes (1035-1150) has the oldest and most decorated with high craftsmanship. Strzygowski in *Early church art in northern Europe* (1928) confirms:

The architectural ornament in this early mast-church at Urnes is the finest example of medieval art in Norway, and can only be explained as a development of an earlier pre-Christian art...In this place we are looking for artistic forms which bear the stamp of the northern spirit and not of imported motives, and it seems to me that this condition is fulfilled by the Urnes ornament.

My paper discusses of Viking and Romanesque ornamentation in the 28 surviving Norwegian stave churches, to celebrate the work of Strzygowski.