

## DATASHEET 33

### Late Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age strap-ends 750-1100: Part 2

by

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This, the second of two datasheets focusing on Late Anglo-Saxon and Viking-Age strap-ends (*Datasheets 32 & 33*), represents a direct continuation of Part 1 which gave a general introduction to the series, covering function and classification, with detailed descriptions of Classes A to D. A further three classes, E to G, are presented here; the numbering of the strap-ends and figures carries on consecutively from Part 1.

#### **Class E: Tongue-shaped with an average ratio of width to length of 1:2 (Fig. 4)**

The second largest class of Late Saxon strap-end, comprising 16% of the database. Features distinguishing this from the other classes presented in Part 1 include its robust tongue-shaped form, the use of a solid as well as a split end for attachment, secured using an increased number of rivets, construction in a greater range of materials, including alloys of copper and lead as well as bone and ivory, and markedly different styles of decoration executed in heavy relief and openwork.

This form of strap-end was popular on the Carolingian continent and in Scandinavia during the 9th and 10th centuries, where one of its regular uses was to embellish baldrics (Mitchell 1994; Graham-Campbell 1980, cat.

no. 327). The close cultural and religious contacts established between Wessex and the Carolingian continent during the last quarter of the 9th century provide a likely context for the entry of this form of strap-end into the Anglo-Saxon repertoire, although Scandinavian contact in the British Isles during the same period is also likely to have contributed to the class's adoption. This is attested by the deposition of Carolingian strap-ends in pagan Norse burials such as Balladoole, Isle of Man, which highlight their use, in conjunction with matching buckles, on spur-straps and waist-belts (Wilson in Bersu & Wilson 1966, 37-41, pls VII, B & C; VIII, A & B). The continued use of this class of strap-end throughout the 10th and 11th centuries is evidenced by stratified archaeological discoveries from Winchester and York and by a range of stylistically diagnostic examples comparable to contemporary art-styles. The latter include a miscellany of exceptional 'one-off' finds including the 10th-century silver-gilt Jellinge-style strap-end from the Old Minster, Winchester, found with a matching belt-slide (Wilson 1965), and a copper alloy example from Norfolk (here published for the first time) which represents the only strap-end from the survey to display clear affinities with Romanesque art (No. 32).

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**Class E, Type 1: Winchester style** (Fig. 4.22-24)

With approaching 200 examples, this type represents a sizeable addition to the corpus of metalwork decorated in the Winchester style, an art-form which had its roots in the cultural and religious centres of southern England with their close continental links. Decoration, which may be both double- or single-sided and face either the terminal or the attachment-end, is ultimately derived from 'inhabited plant-scroll' - a motif characterised by fleshy plant-foliage and confronted pairs of naturalistic birds and animals - commonly employed as border decoration on contemporary illuminated manuscripts (Wilson 1984, 154-79). While the finest exponents of the type, such as the most elaborate of the important series of tongue-shaped strap-ends from Winchester, dated by Wilson (1969) to c.1000, attain a level of artistic execution comparable to manuscript art (Nos 22 & 23), a much more degenerate version of the motif is the norm. In such cases the zoomorphic component is often missing with the plant-scroll simplified to a symmetrical openwork pattern (No. 24).

The distribution of the type reinforces the impression gleaned from other media and old metalwork finds that the Winchester style was centred on southern and south-east England, although a number of such strap-ends from eastern England, penetrating as far north as York, indicate that the style enjoyed a significantly wider orbit of influence (Thomas 2000, 241).

**Class E, Type 2: Anthropomorphic** (Fig. 4.25-27)

This type, executed in both openwork and heavy relief, encompasses five different figurative designs, some more recognisably anthropomorphic than others. Clearly inspired by the same tradition as that responsible for the striking decoration on a Class A example from Brandon, Suffolk (*Datasheet 32*, Fig. 1.8), is the naked figure with raised hands and foliage sprouting from either side of its torso, depicted on a group of strap-ends from East Anglia (No. 25). Remarkably, the same 'hands-up' pose also characterises the figure

portrayed on a two near identical strap-ends from the south-west limits of the class's distribution, in this instance with legs which degenerate into ribbon interlace (No. 26), an association also found on a group of 11th-century stirrup-strap mounts (Williams 1997, class A, type 3, 36-9, fig. 25). The remaining two designs, more abstract and difficult to decipher, employ a central figure with outstretched arms, either in combination with ribbed lateral lobes or stylised profiled beasts (No. 27)

**Class E, Type 3: Ribbed** (Fig. 4.28)

A type distinguished by the presence of a median rib, occasionally elaborated with an internal groove, or lateral nicks, which may protrude beyond the apex of the tongue (No. 28). On some examples, the metal to either side of the rib is decorated with punched ring-and-dots. The distribution of this type embraces continental discoveries from Domburg, Holland (Capelle 1976, no. 307, taf.18) and multiple sites within Scandinavia. Within Britain the spread is polarised between the eastern Danelaw and the Irish Sea region, the latter region having produced matching buckle-sets from Norse cemeteries at Carlisle and Peel Castle, Isle of Man (Thomas 2000, fig. 23).

**Class E, Type 4: Borre style** (Fig. 4.29-30)

This type displays two distinctly insular variations on the Borre style, a Scandinavian art-form current during the late 9th and 10th centuries (Graham-Campbell 1980, 139). The first is a design replicated on a small group of strap-ends from East Anglia which feature a striking *en face* animal mask, above a segmented upper body formed of multi-contoured interlacing plaits (No. 29). Interestingly, all the recorded examples survive in a fragmentary condition representing only the upper half of the decorated design (as revealed by the broken, though reconstructable, example No. 29). Due to the clear antiquity of the breakage in each case this seems to be the result of an inherent weakness in the original master or model used in their serial production.

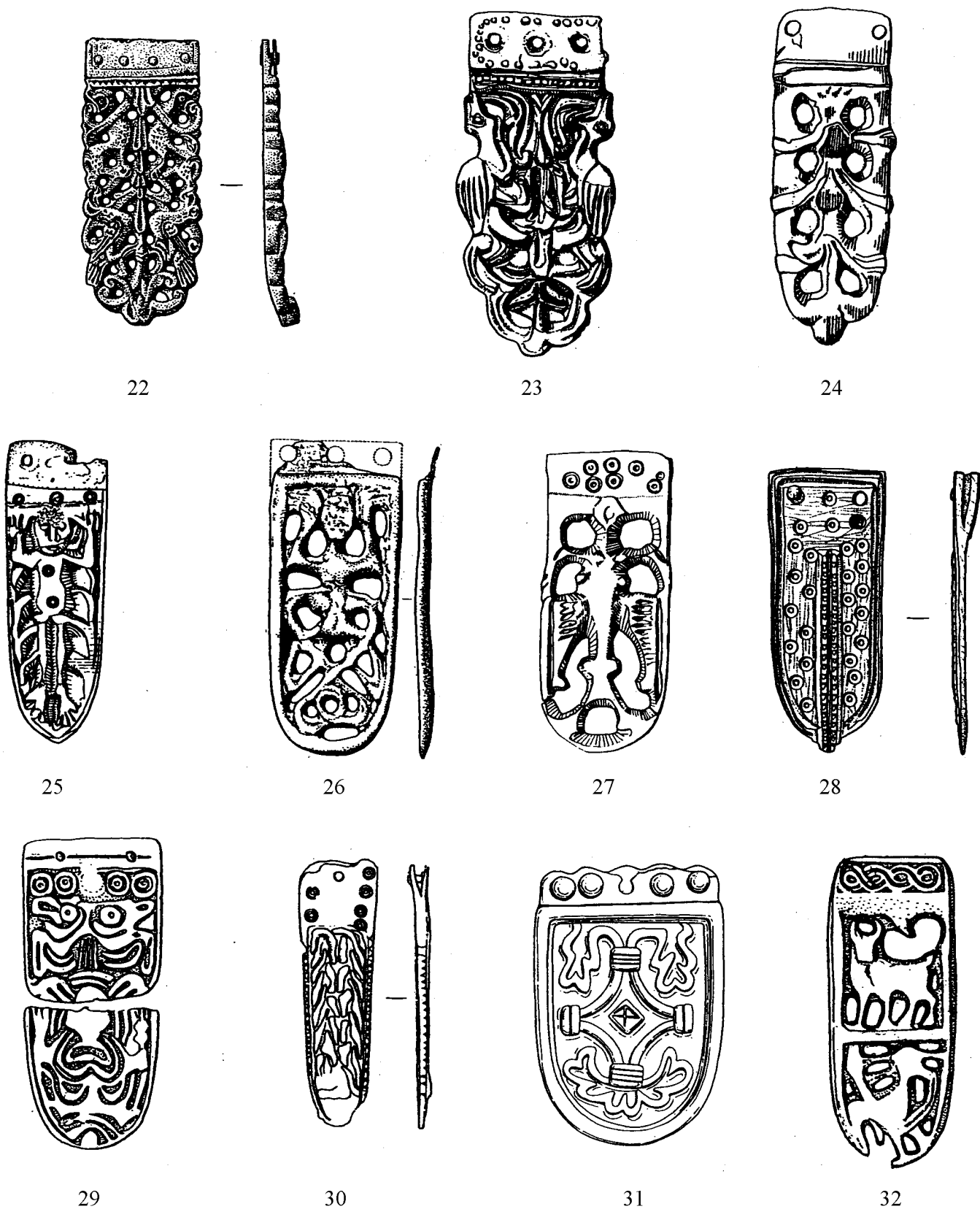


Figure 4: Class E strap-ends. E1: Nos 22-24; E2: Nos 25-27; E3: No. 28; E4: Nos 29-30; E5: No. 31; Unclassified (Romanesque): No. 32. Scale 1:1. See List of Illustrations, below, for full details.

Study of the Scandinavian background to this distinctive motif has shown that it represents a synthesis of the Borre-style decoration found on two variant types of tongue-shaped brooch specific to female Viking-period costume (Paterson 2000).

Another specifically insular adaptation of the Borre style finding its way onto tongue-shaped strap-ends of this period is the 'vertebral ring-chain', characterised by a central rib of concave-sided, truncated triangles with internal contours, enclosed by a series of double-contoured curving plaits (No. 30). This motif transcends a variety of contemporary artistic media and is commonly found on examples of Viking-age sculpture such as the Gosforth cross, Cumbria (Bailey 1980, fig. 60a).

#### **Class E, Type 5: Carolingian (Fig. 4.31)**

Although the majority of tongue-shaped strap-ends found in England are of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Scandinavian craftsmanship a small number are more likely to represent imports from the Carolingian continent. A distinguishing feature of such strap-ends is the distinctive handling of their plant ornament with an emphasis on simplified devices such as rosettes or stylized acanthus fronds, sometimes enclosed within rectangular or lozenge-shaped fields. Several examples, including the illustrated example from Claydon, Suffolk (No. 31), have a gilt finish applied to their decorated surface (see also Wilson in Bersu & Wilson 1966, 37-40), an embellishment rarely found on the Anglo-Saxon series.

#### **Class F: with a split end, zoomorphic terminal and double-sided decoration featuring a roundel and panels of interlace (Fig. 5.33-35)**

Originating in Ireland, several of this class's features are drawn from the canon of Insular metalworking, including the distinctive animal-heads with triangular ears and 'whiskers', a type featured on the hinge-plates used to secure the carrying straps of 8th- and 9th-century Irish house-shaped shrines, and the combination of incised roundels with

panels of interlace (No. 33), an ornamental scheme repeated on a series of bridle-fittings from the Irish Sea region (Wilson in Bersu & Wilson 1966, 19-26, Pl. V). The roundels, which may be perforated or plain, are likely to be in imitation of the decorative bossed rivets common to buckles and bridle-fittings produced within the same cultural milieu. On the basis of several discoveries from mid 10th- to mid 11th-century contexts within the town, Viking-period Dublin has been identified as a possible production centre. The cross-current activity of Hiberno-Norse Vikings probably accounts for the class's diffusion across the Irish Sea province during the latter 9th and 10th century, a cultural association also reflected by Class F examples from the same region decorated with Borre-style vertebral ring-chain (Graham-Campbell 1973). The class's wider dispersal via the Viking Dublin-York nexus is attested by a number of discoveries from the English Danelaw, although some clearly devolved examples (Nos 34 & 35) suggest that copies were also made in this region (Thomas 2000, 249). The archaeological evidence, including the stratified finds from Dublin, suggests that the core period for the production and use of the class extended from the latter 9th to the 11th century.

#### **Class G: with a wedge-shaped split end and openwork tongue depicting a sinuous beast (Fig. 5.36-37)**

This class has a cast openwork tongue depicting a sinuous beast with an asymmetrically interlaced body which emerges from a protruding animal mask located at the base of a plain, wedge-shaped split end. The likely forerunner to this class is represented (both singly and in matching pairs) in Late Viking period grave assemblages from eastern Scandinavia (No. 36), of which an exported example has been found at Freswick Links, Caithness, Scotland (Batey 1987, pl. 21C). The debased motif which appears on the English finds (No. 37) has close affinities with metalwork representative of an Anglo-Scandinavian version of the Urnes style, current during the second half of the 11th century (Owen 2001).

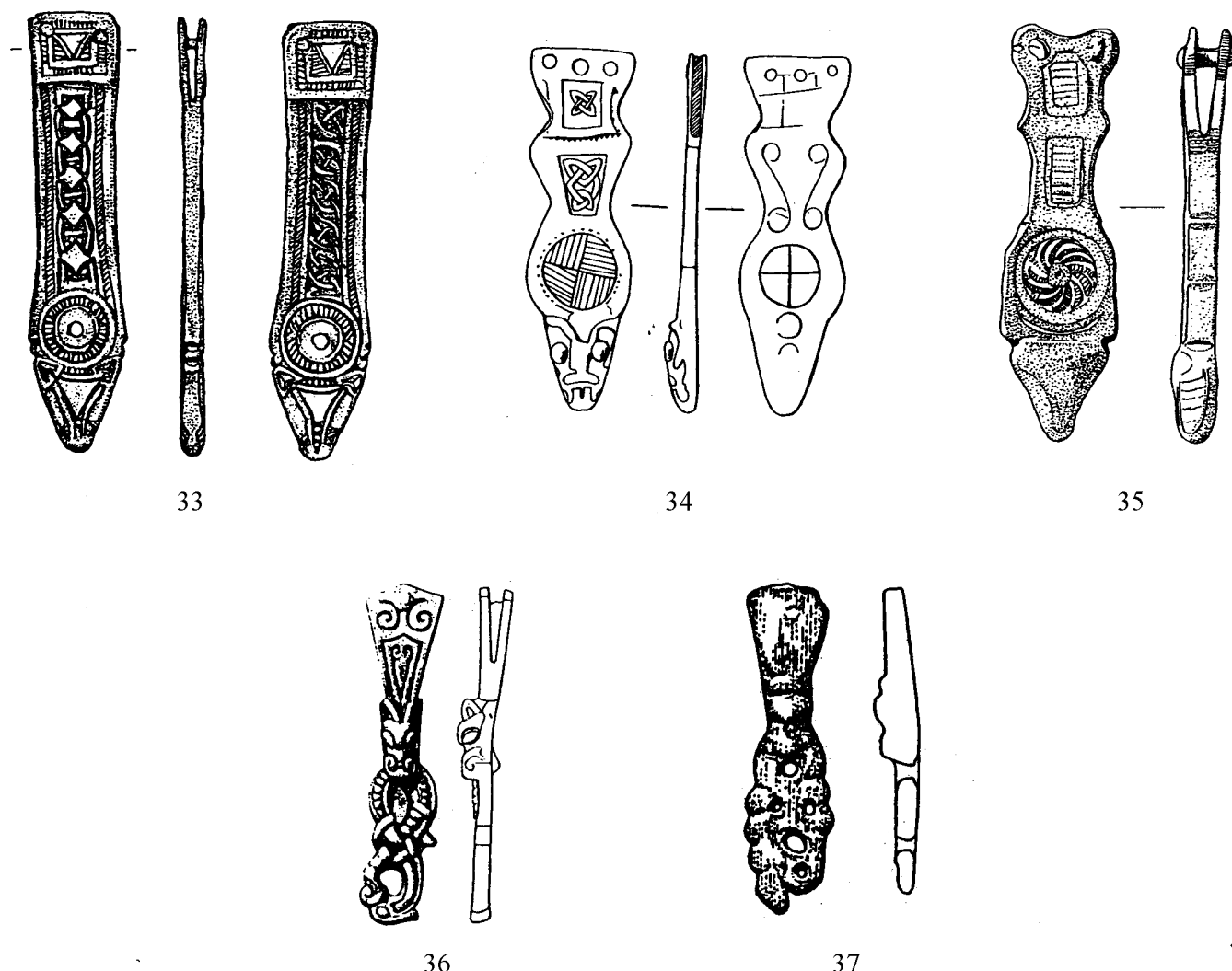


Figure 5: Class F and G strap-ends. F: Nos 33-35; G: Nos 36-37. Scale 1:1

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