

V&A Academy

THE ARTS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPE 800-1050



Introduction

Chart the patronage of the Carolingians, Ottonians and Anglo-Saxons during this formative period of European history, from Emperor Charlemagne's Palatine Chapel in Aachen to King Alfred's Jewel. This ten-week hybrid course will cover the period between 800 and 1050, inspired by the V&A's abundant medieval collections.

In 800, Charlemagne, King of the Franks, was appointed Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III. Charlemagne, and the dynasty of Carolingian emperors that followed him, sought actively to revive the world of Christian Antiquity, instigating what has been termed a renaissance. The Saxon Ottonian Emperors who assumed the imperial title in the 960s continued to revere the Antique past, as well as seeking to emulate the aesthetics of the Byzantine Empire for political ends. The commission of many Carolingian and Ottonian churches, books, metal work and ivory carvings was linked to imperial court patronage, frequently through the intermediary of monastic foundations, which flourished under influential abbots, and became the main centres of learning and craftsmanship during this period. In Anglo-Saxon England, where the visual arts flourished from the late 10th to mid-11th centuries, much influenced by developments on the Continent, monasteries such those at Winchester and Canterbury, played an even greater role in the realm of craftsmanship. By the late 10th-century the ripple effect of Iconoclasm began to wane in Western Europe, and it became acceptable, once more, to produce monumental, three-dimensional sculpture.

The year 1000 was greeted with anxiety, and its passing with a general air of relief. The confident mood of the new millennium saw the emergence of a united and centralized church in the West, which became the most powerful organization of the high Middle Ages, dominated by the monastic orders; both the well-established and newly founded, such as the Cistercians. As a result, unprecedented investment was placed in church buildings, many of them inspired by aspects of surviving Roman monuments. Lectures will consider the emergence of the mighty Romanesque style. Studies on Poitevin and Burgundian architecture, will highlight regional stylistic variations.

Information

Tuesdays, 20 January – 24 March, 11.00-15.30. Onsite and Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until 2 June 2026.

Your course leader

Dr Sally Dormer is a specialist medieval art historian and lecturer, with an M.A. in Medieval Art History and Ph.D. on Medieval manuscript illumination from the Courtauld Institute, University of London. Sally teaches, or has taught, for the Courtauld Institute of Art, ARTscapades, the Arts Society, Art Pursuits, Cox & Kings, Swan Hellenic, and Gresham College, and was Dean of European Studies, a study abroad semester for two university in Tennessee, USA, from 1999-2019.

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

Week 1 – 20 January

The Carolingians

- 10.45 Introduction **Sally Dormer**
- 11.00 The Historical Background 800-1050 **Sally Dormer**
- 12.30 Carolingian Architecture **Richard Plant**
- 14.30 Carolingian Metalwork **Sally Dormer**
- 15.45 Online Meet and Greet with Sally Dormer

Week 2 – 27 January

Carolingian Books and European Islamic Art

- 10.15 Online Meet and Greet with Course Director **Sally Dormer**
- 11.00 Carolingian Manuscript Illumination **Sally Dormer**
- 12.30 Case Study: The Utrecht Psalter **Sally Dormer**
- 14.30 The Crucifixion in Carolingian Art **Sally Dormer**

Week 3 – 3 February

The Carolingian Empire and the East

- 11.00 Islamic Art in Europe **Anna McSweeney**
This will be a pre-recorded session
- 12.30 Iconoclasm and 9th century Rome **Sally Dormer**
- 14.30 King Alfred and Anglo-Saxon Art c.900 **Meg Boulton**

Week 4 – 10 February

Ottonian Art I

- 11.00 Ottonian Art and Architecture: themes and developments
Richard Plant
- 12.30 Ottonian Royal Patronage I **Richard Plant**
- 14.30 Ottonian Episcopal Patronage and Art of the Nunneries
Richard Plant

Week 5 – 17 February

Ottonian Art II and Textiles

- 11.00 Ottonian Royal Patronage II **Richard Plant**
- 12.30 Early Medieval Textiles **Alexandra Makin**
- 14.30 Early English medieval embroideries in the V&A's collection
Helen Persson

Week 6 – 24 February

Byzantium 9th-11th century

- 11.00 Byzantine Art 843-1050 **Cecily Hennessy**
- 12.30 The Iconography of Imperial Power **Cecily Hennessy**
- 14.30 Case Study: Hosios Loukas **Sally Dormer**

Week 7 – 3 March

Early Medieval Art in Spain and England

- 11.00 Mozarabic Art and Beatus of Liebana **Rose Walker**
- 12.30 The Monastic Reform Movement and the “Winchester” School
Sally Dormer
- 14.30 Drawing: Technique and Purpose in Anglo-Saxon Art **Sally Dormer**

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Week 8 – 10 March

Late Anglo-Saxon Arts

11.00 Anglo-Saxon Architecture **Richard Plant**

12.30 Late Anglo-Saxon Sculpture: Stone and Ivory **Meg Boulton**

14.30 Pilgrimage and the Cult of Relics **Alexandra Gajewski**

Week 9 – 17 March

The Emergence of Romanesque Architecture

11.00 Early Romanesque Architecture **Michele Vescovi**

12.30 Poitevin Architecture and Sculpture **Michele Vescovi**

14.30 Wall Paintings **Sally Dormer**

Week 10 – 24 March

Romanesque In Scandinavia and Burgundy

11.00 Early Medieval Scandinavian Art and Architecture **Frances Parton**

12.30 Burgundian Architecture and Sculpture **Alexandra Gajewski**

14.30 St Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercians **Sally Dormer**