

History and Appreciation of Art

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Higher Level

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Art in Ireland: Bronze Age & Iron Age



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When was the Bronze age period?

Knowledge of metalworking gradually spread from Europe to Ireland during the 2000 BC. The Bronze Age was called so after the metal Bronze which was an alloy of copper and tin. Copper was a soft metal which was easy to shape and mould and it was discovered that if a small amount of tin was added to copper that a much stronger metal was formed. This new metal was called Bronze. During the Bronze Age this new metal was used to make functional objects and tools such as cooking pots, axes, and shields. Gold was the preferred metal to make jewellery and decorative ornaments from but other materials such as amber and stone were still in use. Unlike modern times, gold was commonly found in Ireland during the Bronze Age.

A new culture develops

Slowly the culture of these immigrants merged with the Neolithic people on the island and bronze-working developed into the Irish Bronze Age. At the time of the Bronze Age(2000B.C. - 500B.C.), Ireland was blessed with relatively rich copper deposits, allowing large quantities of bronze to be produced on the island, Along with many other new skills, the Bronze Age brought about many new styles of decoration. In both bronze and gold objects, repoussé was a common method of decoration which involved hammering a design

on the reverse of thin metal objects. Tools were developed and used to apply the decoration on discs, gorget terminals and other objects. Incision (biting) involved cutting into the front of the object to create elaborate designs.



Gold Discs



Gold Discs, also called sun Discs were among the very first metal objects made in Ireland. A piece of gold was hammered flat until it became a thin sheet – like gold foil (kitchen foil). Then the circular disc shape was cut out using a sharp tool.

The decoration was made using a technique called Repoussé. This was where the design was hammered in from behind so that it stood up in relief in the front. In the Gold Disc from Tedavnet the cruciform design was hammered in from behind. The edges of the disc were decorated with concentric circles which were made using the repoussé technique.

It is believed that these Gold Discs were worn – in the hair or attached to clothes. There are two holes in the centre of the discs (like a button) where gold wire would have been threaded through to tie the discs to the clothes or the hair.



*Pair of gold discs
Early Bronze Age, 2200 – 2000 BC.*

Discovered in the roots of an old tree, this pair of discs are the largest and most sophisticated of the Early Bronze Age discs known from Ireland. A complex arrangement of raised lines, rows of dots and zig-zags has produced a central cross surrounded by concentric patterns similar to other discs but much more elaborate in composition and, technically, far superior. The combination of the techniques of repoussé, punching and polishing, together with the slight doming of the surfaces, highlights and gives a depth and texture to the discs not seen on other pieces

Lunula

Lunula were worn around the neck. They are crescent shaped and are named for the crescent moon – lunula.

They were made by hammering gold flat into a sheet and cutting out the crescent shape using a sharp tool.

They were decorated with a technique called “Incision”- this involved cutting or incising into the surface using a sharp tool. Typically, the designs that were incised into a Lunula were chevrons (zig- zags) and Lozenges (diamond shapes).

Lunula were among the first gold objects to be made in Ireland and they date to the Early Bronze Age.



Blessington Lunula, Co. Wicklow

The British Museum

Chevrons and Lozenges incised into the Blessington Lunula.

Q: How might you remember this place?



Torcs

Torcs are twisted bands of gold which were made in various sizes to be worn around the neck, arms, around the waist like a belt or even small ones to be worn as earrings. Torcs date from the middle Bronze Age. They use much more gold than the earlier Bronze Age objects such as the Gold Discs or Lunula and are a much heavier piece of jewellery. A gold bar or band was twisted to form a rope like pattern.

Often the gold bar was beaten thin at the edges to form a flange before being twisted. This is called flange twisting. It produces a much more delicate twisted edge than without flanging.

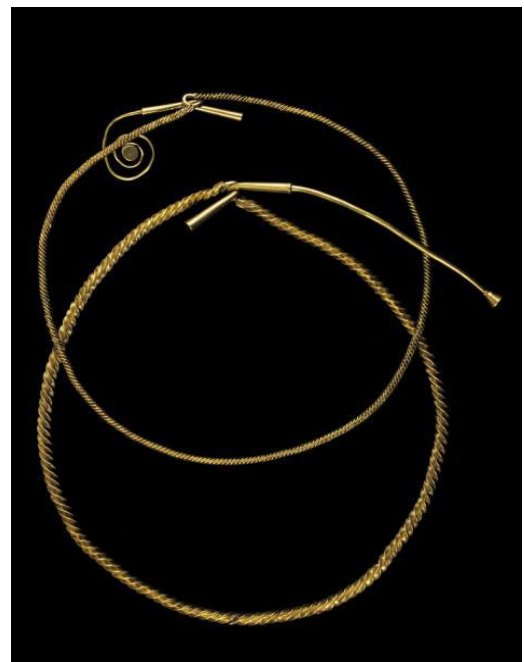
In this torc (right) you can see that the edges of the gold band were beaten very thin before being twisted. This produces a very delicate appearance like a ribbon giving the name Ribbon Torc.

Gold ribbon torc. Belfast, Co. Antrim

The two gold torcs from Tara (right) weigh over a kilogram in gold, are the finest of their class from Ireland. They are of exceptionally large size and are further elaborated by the addition of extensions to the terminals, a feature which is not recorded elsewhere. Torcs of this type are made from bars of square or rectangular section, the angles of which have been hammered up to produce flanges.

The even twisting of such a long bar requires considerable expertise and understanding of the working properties of the metal.

They have been found in various sizes and may have also adorned animals.



*Two gold torcs, Tara, Co. Meath.
Middle Bronze Age, 1200 – 1000 BC
Found at the Rath of the Synods,
Tara, Co. Meath*



Flanged gold earrings, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon

Q: What is a terminal and what does it mean?

Dress Fasteners



Dress Fasteners of all sizes were made during the middle Bronze Age. This Fastener above is very large and weighing over one kilo and is over 20cm long. Like most precious items, it was probably used only for ceremonial purposes. As the name suggests, it was used to keep clothes in place. There are two large bell-shaped terminals joined with a connecting solid gold (undecorated) bow. The surface of the gold is highly polished. The upper surface of bell-shaped terminals is decorated with a pattern of concentric circles with a small dot punched at each centre. The circles are not uniformly placed on the surface, they are scattered and occasionally touch one another. The outer ridge of the terminals is decorated with rows of raised concentric lines.

Gold Dress Fastener from Clones, Co Monaghan.

Manufacturing the fasteners involved attaching a solid gold bow to both terminals.

The smaller dress-fasteners may have been worn at the wrist, like modern day cufflinks.

Due to the size and weight of dress-fasteners, it can be surmised that they acted as a symbol of status and power for the owner.

Q: To remember, Clones rhymes with...?



Gorget

A Gorget is a type of gold collar to be worn around the neck. Gorgets were made during the Late Bronze Age and they display the range of artistry metalworking techniques that were developed during the Bronze Age.

A Gorget is made in three sections. A collar and two Terminal Discs. The collar is decorated with rope pattern designs using the technique of Repoussé which involved hammering in the design from behind so that it stood out in relief. The terminal discs show a range of designs and techniques. In the centre a conical shaped boss stands out very prominently from the surface.

Covering the surface of each disc is an elaborate design of rings of dots made in Repoussé and rings of incised concentric circles.



Gorget, Gleninsheen, Co. Clare. Late Bronze Age, 800-700 BC

The Gleninsheen collar is an exceptional example of the highly developed goldsmithing skills displayed by Irish craftsmen in the Late Bronze Age. The layout and execution of the designs incorporating concentric circles, rope patterns and conical and round bosses, have been expertly achieved.



Detail of gorget. This is a close-up view of one of the Terminal Discs. You can see in the very centre there is a large cone shaped Boss.

Decorating the surface of the Terminal Disc are rings of raised dots made using the Repoussé technique and rings of concentric circles which have been engraved into the surface.

Q: What word to describe gold would help to remember the name of this artefact?

The Iron Age arrives (500 BC to 400 AD)

The Iron Age in Ireland spans almost one thousand years from the end of the Bronze Age to the start of the Early Christian Era during the fifth century AD. Knowledge of using Iron metalwork gradually spread throughout Ireland from Europe where Iron was increasingly being used in metalwork. Iron became the main metal used to make tools and equipment because it is very strong – much stronger than bronze. At some point during the Iron Age the Celts invaded Ireland from mainland Europe. The Celts brought to Ireland a new culture which the native Irish adopted and made their own – celtic language, customs, and Art.

Bronze Disc in the La Tene style



La Tene

The new style of Art which the Celts brought to Ireland is called La Tene. This is an abstract curvilinear style of decoration. It is called La Tene – after a site in Switzerland where the earliest curvilinear style artifacts were found. This style is found over much of Europe and in Ireland, it lasted for several hundred years until the arrival of Christianity when the Irish La Tene style merged with christian designs and symbols.

The Triskel was a very popular La Tene motif. It is a triple spiral design – a type of “sun wheel”, it was used to decorate La Tene style objects.



Metalwork and iron

Iron became the metal to make tools such as knives, axes and functional objects such as cooking pots and stirrups, however, bronze and gold continued to be used during the Iron Age for their beauty and because these metals do not rust or decay like Iron.

The Loughnashade Trumpet



Trumpet, Loughnashade, Co. Armagh Early Iron Age, 1st century BC

The Loughnashade Trumpet dates from the 1st century BC. It is made from sheet bronze and is over six feet in length. It consists of two tubes of bronze which are joined together in the middle of the trumpet by a bronze ring and a bronze disc that forms the bell of the horn. The two tubes of bronze that form the length of the trumpet were made by bending sheet bronze into two half cylinders which were then joined together with rivets to form a tube – the edges are sealed from the inside using a strip of bronze which is fastened along the length using rivets. There are more than six hundred rivets used in the length of the horn.

At the flared mouth there is a decorated ring and its ornament is executed in the repousse technique of the Trumpet there is a bronze disc which is decorated in the La Tene style. Each quadrant (quarter) of the disc are mirror images of each other. The design is composed of long sinuous tendrils which terminate in spiral bosses in high relief which spiral to form high relief bosses (rounded knobs).



Several “Trumpet Curves” are incorporated into the design which flows and curves to resemble plant-life. It is believed that this design is based on the Greek Lotus bud motif.

Loughnashade Trumpet; detail of the La Tene design on the disc at the bell.

The trumpet was found in the eighteenth century, buried near the shore of Lough Shade, Co. Armagh, together with a human skull and three other trumpets, which have since been lost. This lake is overlooked by the Navan Fort which was one of the largest Celtic strongholds in Ireland. It is one of the earliest trumpets found in the world and still works as a musical instrument and may have been used as a type of sonic/psychological warfare.

Classical writers have left accounts of the unnerving effect on Roman armies which the continental Celts achieved by blowing their war trumpets before battle and we can assume a similar martial function for the splendid trumpet from Loughnashade. However, it is likely that the trumpet was also used on ceremonial and ritual occasions.

Q: How might you remember Loughnashade?



The Broighter Horde



The Broighter Hoard is probably the greatest find of ancient artifacts in Ireland. It was uncovered in Co Derry in 1896, when land near the shores of Lough Foyle were being ploughed. The “hoard” consists of a model boat with oars and mast, a bowl, two chain necklaces, two rod twisted torcs and a hollow collar. All these objects were made in gold, which had become much a more rare and precious metal in Ireland than in the Bronze Age.

The Broighter Boat and Broighter Collar are famous Irish prehistoric artworks. The boat is very unusual for Iron Age Art in that it is not abstract- it is a beautiful representation of a prehistoric boat complete with mast and oars.

The Broighter Collar

The collar is one of the finest examples of La Tene metal craftsmanship in Europe. This hollow collar is made from two plates of thin gold soldered together in tubular form and bent into a circular shape to fit around a neck. The La Tene style decoration was made using the repousse technique. This repousse design would have been hammered into the gold sheets before they were made into a tube. The design consists of trumpet shaped patterns and lentoid bosses (a boss is a lump or knob, and lentoid means its oval or lens shaped and not circular).



The Broighter Collar 1st Century BC



These are all linked together with flowing curved lines that make the design resemble a climbing plant complete with stems, leaves and flowers.

On the surface of the collar the sheet metal surrounding the repoussé work has been incised with arcs. This makes the La Tene design appear to stand out more from the surface.

There are two terminals at either end of the collar that have a Mortice and Tenon locking device that firmly clasps the collar together. Unfortunately, the plough that uncovered the collar more than a century ago broke the collar in two.



In this photo you can see just how high relief the pattern was made. You can also see the incised arcs in the background.

Q: Another word to describe gold to remember "Broighter"?

The Petrie Crown

The Petrie Crown is a fine example of Celtic Iron Age metalworking which displays the curvilinear repeated patterning typical of the La Tene style. It is made of Bronze pieces which are either soldered or riveted together. It consists of a band, two discs and one horn.

The base is a bronze band which was bent into a circular shape that fits onto the head. Tiny perforations running the length suggest that leather or some sort of textile was sewn to the band. A Running pattern of disc-like shapes has been cut out of the band and is decorated with a flowing La Tene Pattern.



Bronze head-dress known as the Petrie Crown, unlocalised. Iron Age, 2nd century AD



Two large discs are soldered onto this band and decorated with La Tene Trumpet Curves, the centre of some of these curves end in a bird head design. The eye sockets of the birds head would once have contained enamel. The discs are not flat, but are concave in shape. The designs are lined or carved in – ie the background of each line is carved away and smoothed so the lines appear raised. In each disc there is a boss with a mount for a bead – in one boss the bead is missing and in the other a red enamel bead remains.

The conical horn was cut from sheet bronze, was formed by bending sheet bronze into a cone shape and joining the edges using rivets – the edges were riveted to a strip of copper laid the length of the join inside the cone. Originally there was a second horn that was broken and lost. The horn is also decorated with cut away La Tene Trumpet curves and there is a mount where a bead would have been placed. This bead has been lost.

The find-place is not recorded. It is a complex object which was assembled expertly using rivets and solder. The components, which were probably sewn to leather or textile, formed part of an elaborate horned head-dress. Cast sinuous trumpet forms terminating in lentoid bosses and spirals ending in bird heads achieved low-relief ornament.

Stone Carving

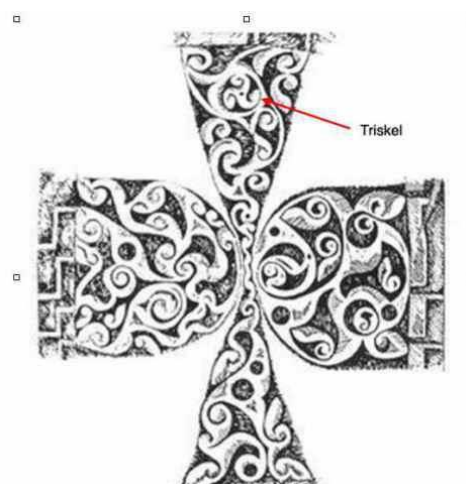
The Iron Age saw the revival of stone carving which had not occurred in Ireland since the Neolithic Era. Essentially things come back into fashion and stonework is still popular today.

The Turoe Stone in Co. Galway is the finest example of La Tene style carved onto stone. The all over design consists of flowing leaf and Trumpet shape pattern with spirals and one triskel (a motif of three radiating trumpet curves). A step pattern runs along the base which is believed to be influenced from Greek Key Patterns.



Turoe Stone, Co. Galway

Drawing of pattern on the surface of the Turoe Stone. The design flows all over the surface and shows how skilled the designer was at dealing with a round subject. The pattern can be divided into quadrants with a Triskel present in one quadrant.



Q: What Neolithic techniques were used?



The Castlegrange stone, Co. Roscommon

The Castlegrange stone is found in Co Roscommon. Like the Turoe Stone it is La Tene in Style. Both the stones were presumably used for some ceremonial or religious purpose, that is now long forgotten. These stones show the influence of European Art in Ireland.



Figure Carving

The carvings of figures, which are found in Northern Ireland, date from the late Iron Age. These are the earliest examples that we see of human figures in Irish Art. They are believed to be of Celtic Gods or "Deities". The Boa island figure is 75cm tall. It is located on an Island in Lough Erne called Boa- after the Celtic deity (Bodb Catha – who helped warriors in battle and often appeared in the form of a crow). The carved figure has two faces – front and back and is believed to have been influenced by the Roman god – Janus (who was two headed/faced). It is believed that the Irish Celts were influenced by Roman and Christian cultures in Europe who made statues of gods or saints and prayed to them.

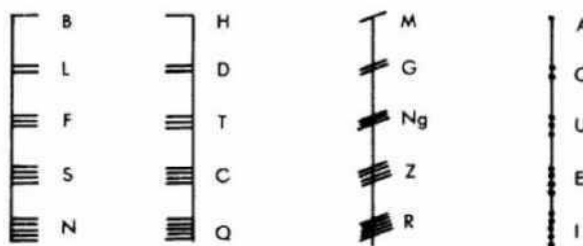


Carved figure from Boa Island, Co Fermanagh + Reverse side of figure

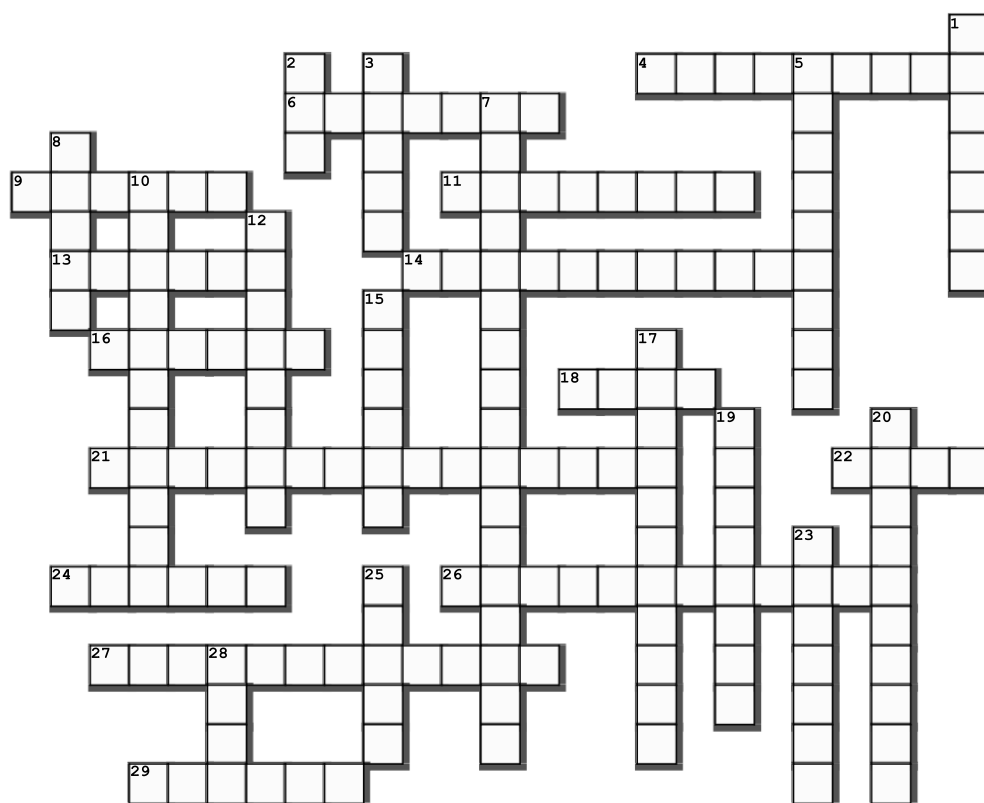


Ogham Stones

In the southern half of Ireland there are several Ogham Stones. These are the earliest examples of Irish language been written down. These dashed lines represent letters on the Roman Alphabet.



The Ogham Stone here is from the Glen of Imaal in Co Wicklow and is unusual because of the heart shape of the stone.



Clues

Across:

4. A famous collar
6. 500BC to 400AD
9. main ingredient of bronze
11. End of the airport
13. The stone design style is ...?
14. Origin of this culture
16. A prize winning gold artifact
18. Most of the precious objects are made from what metal?
21. keep clothes in place!
22. Large cone or someone at the end of a game
24. Moon shaped object
26. A famous trumpet
27. A stone in Co. Roscommon
29. Problem with iron?

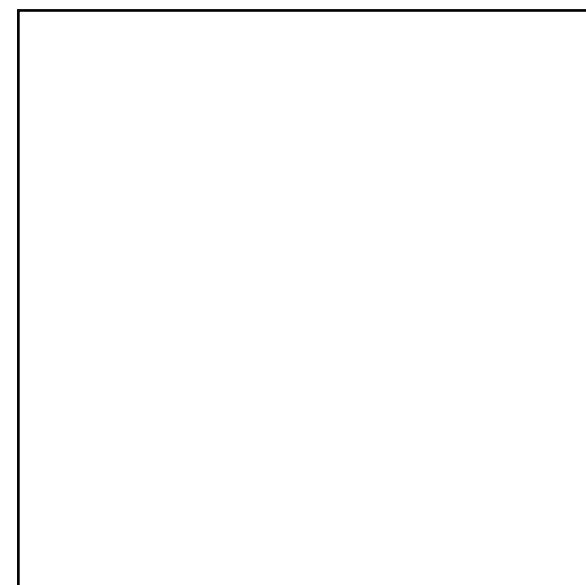
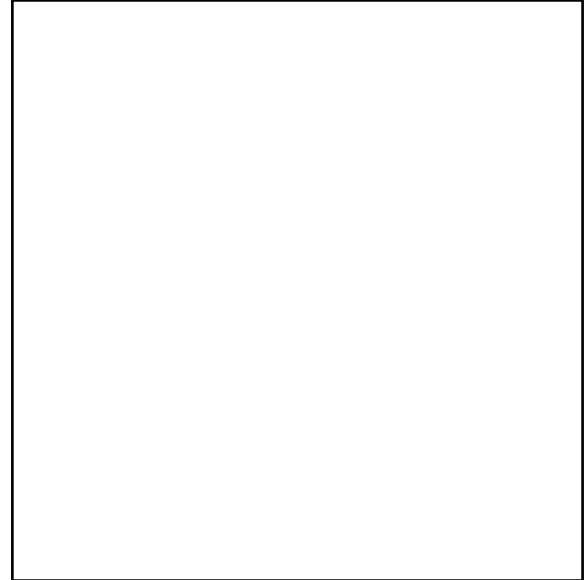
Down:

1. Popular symbol of these people
2. small ingredient of bronze
3. plural for many treasures is a....
5. found in Co. Monaghan
7. gold object found in Co. Clare (full name)
8. Iron used to make what?
10. Small but powerful head piece
12. Raised dots
15. funky pattern
17. A place in Wicklow
19. Another word to bite or cut
20. Expanding circles
23. Marking stone is called...?
25. A stone in Galway
28. Twisted metal / car power

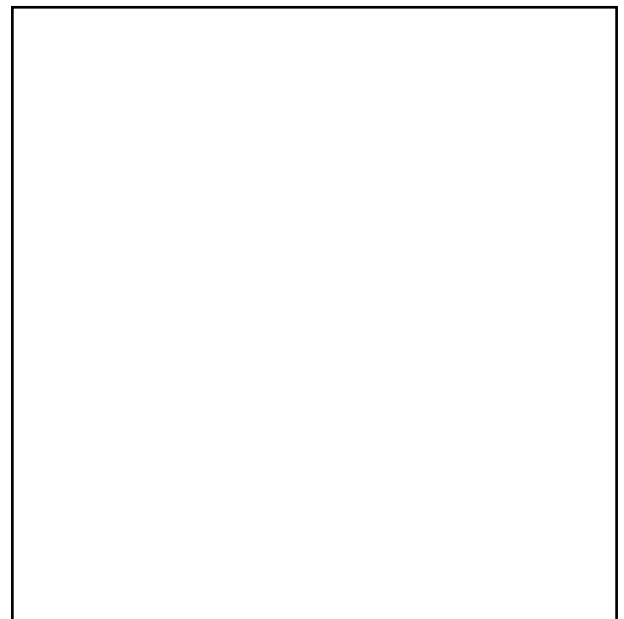
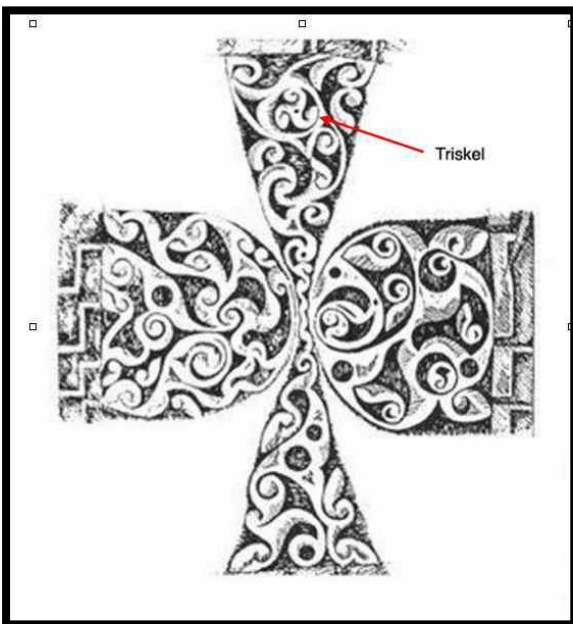
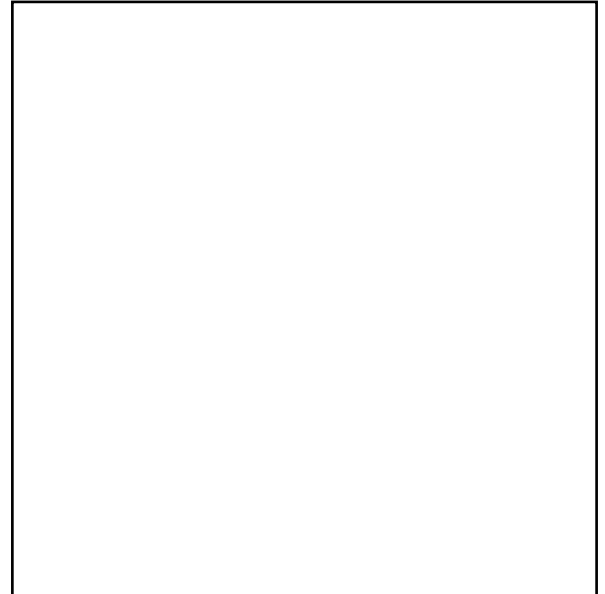
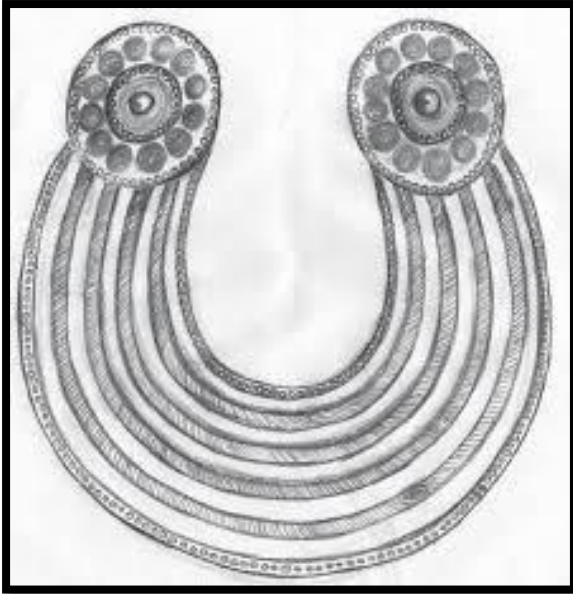


Sketch method

Study the design of the object carefully. Can you reproduce the patterns on this space below?



Study the design of the objects carefully. Can you reproduce the patterns on this space below



Quiz

1: When was the Bronze age?

2: What is bronze made from?

3: What was bronze used to make?

4: (i) What metal was used for jewellery and decorative ornaments?

(ii) What other materials were used to make jewellery and ornaments?

(i) _____

(ii) _____

5: When was the Iron age?

6: What are the pros and cons of iron?

7: What was iron used to make? 2 types of objects

8: Name the style that arrived with Iron and Celts?



9: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?

10: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?

11: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?



12: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?



13: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?



14: Name of this object and location?

Techniques used during manufacturing?

What is it for?



Draw 2 half page sketches of 1 iron age stone carvings below and 1 metal artefact, and annotate:

Set a stop watch and note the time for each sketch: 1st: _____ 2nd: _____



Sample questions and marking schemes

2017

2. Name, describe and discuss the two artefacts illustrated on the accompanying sheet. In your answer refer to form, function, materials and the techniques used in their production and decoration.

And Briefly describe and discuss the periods in which these artefacts were made.

Illustrate your answer.

2



Artefact 1



Artefact 2

2018

1. Name, describe and discuss the two artefacts illustrated on the accompanying sheet. In your answer refer to the period in which they were made, form, function, decoration and the techniques used in their production.

And Briefly describe and discuss one other named artefact from this period in Ireland.

Illustrate your answer.

1



Artefact 1



Artefact 2

Sample questions and marking schemes

2017

Q.2		Marks	Notes
A	Name of each artefact illustrated.	5	3/2 names
B	Description and discussion of artefact 1 with reference to form, function, materials and the techniques used in its production and decoration.	15	
C	Description and discussion of artefact 2 with reference to form, function, materials and the techniques used in its production and decoration.	15	
D	Brief description and discussion of the periods in which these artefacts were made.	10	5 for period 1, 5 for period 2
E	Sketches.	5	
	Total.	50	

2018

Q.1		Marks	Notes
A	Name, description and discussion of artefact one: refer to period, form, function, decoration and techniques used in the production.	15	3 for name 12 for description and discussion
B	Name, description and discussion of artefact two: refer to period, form, function, decoration and techniques used in the production.	15	3 for name 12 for description and discussion
C	Briefly describe and discuss one other named artefact from this period in Ireland.	15	5 for name 10 for description and discussion
D	Sketches.	5	
	Total.	50	

