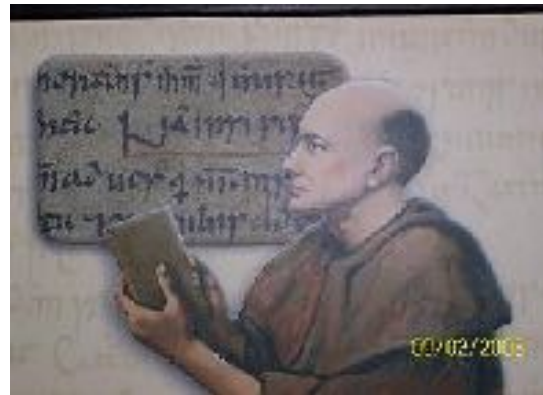


# Irish Art

Early Christian Ireland

# Intro to Christianity

- St. Patrick came to Ireland in 432 A.D. and with him brought Christianity to Ireland.



# Ogham

- Although the Romans never invaded Ireland their influences travelled through trade and contact with them. One feature that travelled was writing based on the Roman alphabet known as 'ogham'.
- We developed into a civilisation getting the island the title of 'Saints and Scholars'.
- The merging of Roman designs onto our brooches, jewellery, manuscripts and the use of precious stones inserted into metal objects.

+	A	≡	I	≡	S
┊	B	≡	L	≡	T
≡	C	┊	M	≡	U
┊	D	≡	N	≡	Z
≡	E	┊	O	✱	ea
≡	F	≡	P	◇	oi
≡	G	≡	Q	◊	ui
┊	H	≡	R	✱	ia

# Two phases of Early Christian Irish Art

- From 5<sup>th</sup> to mid 8<sup>th</sup> century
  - Early monastic settlements.
  - Few objects remain except some brooches and some pins and the first decoration of capital letters in manuscripts i.e. in the Cathach.
  - 8<sup>th</sup> century huge development of Irish Art with the early stone crosses and the Book of Durrow.
- From mid 8<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Golden Age of Irish Art.
  - Technical skills reached perfection.
  - Tara Brooch.
  - Book of Kells.
  - Crosses of Monasterboice and Moone.

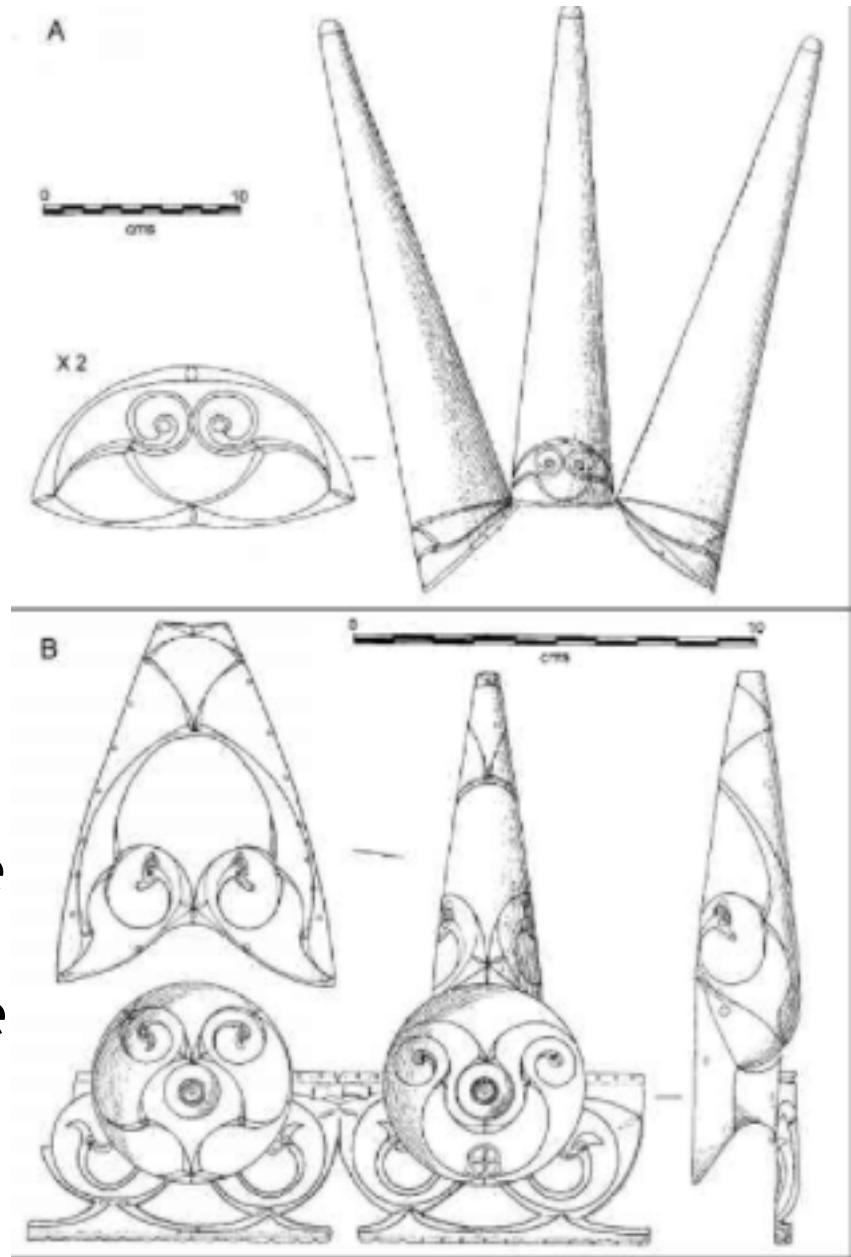
# The Church

- St. Patrick and other missionaries established small communities ruled over by their own bishop.
- This system changed gradually during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries to monastic foundations.
- The result.....a Church organisation. Recognising the authority of the abbot of the monastery more than the bishop of the diocese.
- Abbots were usually laymen and the monastery was usually passed down father to son. The monasteries also became places of learning and endless days were often spent on the art of manuscripts.
- Abbots had high social standing and strong connection with the Secular rulers who lived in ring forts or raths or crannogs. These secular rulers were their patrons to the arts for hundreds of years.

# Ultimate La Tene

- Later in the Iron Age there was a change in the style of design. The patterns became more symmetrical. The vegetal designs of the insular style gave way to the more geometric forms of the ultimate la Tene, which continued into the Christian Era. The loughnashade trumpet and the petrie crown are examples of this style

- the petrie crown is decorated with spirals ending in crested birds head. The deceptively simple designs on the disc combine palmate, lotus bud and trickle motifs created by slim trumpet curves. The artist made use of positive and negative shapes to create the design, a tendency that becomes more common in the Christian period



- The work left to us from this stage displays the elements of design that formed the basis for the decorative art that followed in the christian Celtic period. Plant forms (vegetal decoration), animal forms (zoomorph), simplified human figures and geometric patterns were brought together to create a flexible and harmonious style of art.



# Influences on Christian design

- Over a number of centuries, influences from outside mixed with the native Irish designs and evolved into a style that was used in all crafts during the 7th and 8th centuries.

- Spirals and pelta shapes had their origins in Celtic design which had been in use for 800 years. These designs were incorporated into the Christian works.

As Christianity spread to Ireland during the collapse of the Roman Empire (c.300 CE onwards), the country's geographic isolation and freedom from colonization by Rome provided a breathing space for cultural and spiritual development. Monasteries, many of them becoming centres of both religious and secular scholarship, sprang up across the country attracting men and women from the higher classes who, within a matter of generations formed a cohesive body of monks, scribes, and scholars.

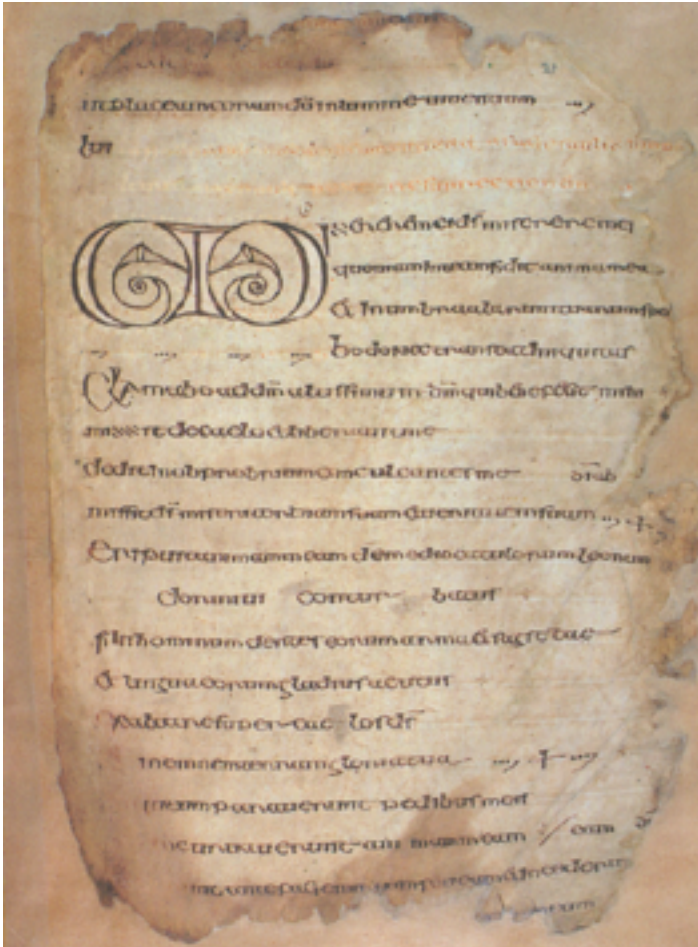
Side by side with this rise in monastic art, Latin scholarship, and scriptural study, came a renaissance in the arts of calligraphy and book illustration which led to the Golden Age of Irish illuminated gospel manuscripts.

This early renaissance in the history of Irish art, under the patronage of the Church in Rome and directed by bishops and abbots in the major monasteries, was closely associated with an upsurge in Celtic metalworking skills.

Thus, in addition to its Saints and Scholars, the early Christian artistic renaissance of monastic Ireland needed a skilled army of metalworkers to help produce the beautifully embellished artworks upon which its reputation was founded.

# The Catach

- The decoration used by the scribes seem to follow from the la tene style with trumpet ends, spirals and a few animal and plant forms



a Tene designs used highly organic, curvilinear styles, with flowing curves and abstract leaf-like patterns. Common forms included (1) spirals (built up from S-shaped and C-shaped forms, among others); (2) knotwork; (3) geometric imagery, like the trumpet, the triskel and the palm, together with endless floral and plant shapes; (4) numerous zoomorphic shapes and realistic pictures of animals, including: elephants, wild boars, wolves, stags, winged horses, bulls, hounds, cats, snakes, dragons, owls, and birds.

# Irish Manuscripts Triskele design



# Book of Durrow / Carpet page





# Book of Durrow



- The first letter of the text is enlarged and decorated, with the following letters surrounded by dots. Parallels with metalwork can be noted in the rectangular body of [St Matthew](#), which looks like a [millefiori](#) decoration, and in details of the carpet pages.
- There is a sense of space in the design of all the pages of the Book of Durrow. Open [vellum](#) balances intensely decorated areas. Animal interlace of very high quality appears on folio 192v. Other motifs include spirals, [triskeles](#), ribbon plaits and circular knots in the carpet pages and borders around the Evangelists

# Book of Kells/Chi Rho page



exemplify the stunning spiral ornamentation and knotwork of the ultimate La Tene style.

# Carved stone crosses



- Dunvillaun slab, Co. Mayo, 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century.
- Early Christian Ireland there was no great tradition of building or carving in stone. Standing stones were a feature of pre-Christian Ire and the tradition continued into the first Christian symbols of the cross. The shape of the stone never changed maybe because of the old irish belief if interfering with the spirit of the stone.
- In this particular stone and common to others we find a Greek cross on the reverse face of the slab and rare early representation of the crucifixion is engraved in the front.

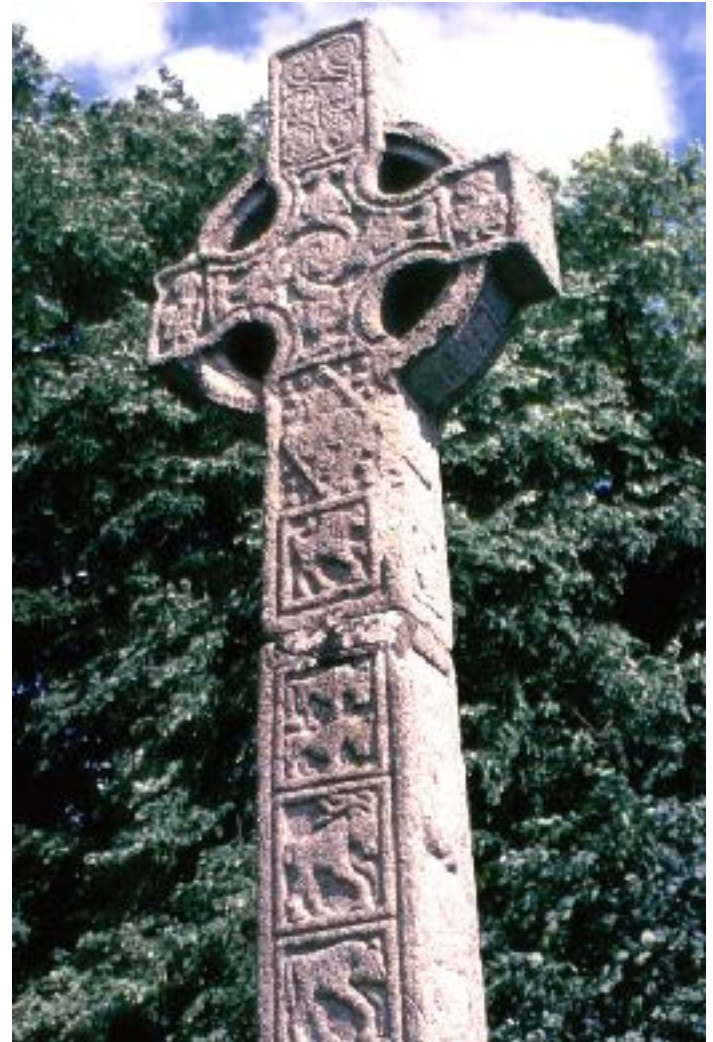
# Carved stone crosses



- Reask pillar Co. Kerry, 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century.
- Maltese cross supported by lines and spirals of Celtic decoration and imagery in the form of a Greek cross.
- Large numbers of engraved grave slabs survive near important monasteries like Clonmacnoise.















# Ardagh Chalice



- Complex gold filigree work forms a band around the chalice broken by red and blue glass studs. Under this band, engraved lightly into the silver, are the names of all the apostles except Judas.
- The bowl of the chalice is joined to the base by a thick bronze stem. Stem is heavily gilded (thin layer of gold impressed on to the metal). Here the decoration is the most intricate and involved of all. The base is formed by a cone-shaped foot around which is a decorated flange for extra stability. This flange has square blocks of the blue glass separated by panels of interlace and geometric ornament.
- In the centre of the underside of the base is a circular crystal surrounded by gold filigree and green enamels. The outer edge of the flange underside is divided into eight, with six copper studs and two silver.

# The Ardagh Chalice

- animal interlace patterns like that of the petrie crown are found in the gold filigree

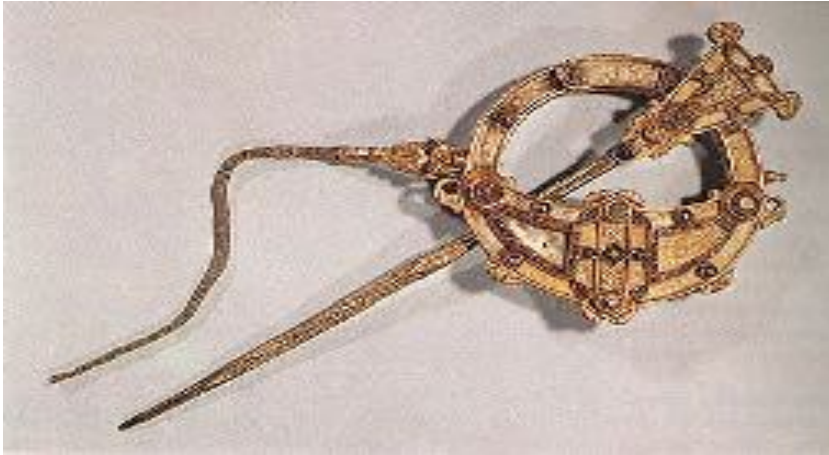


Celtic craftsmanship in metals continued to develop in the early Christian art period (c.500-900 CE), producing such masterpieces as the Tara Brooch, the Ardagh Chalice, the Derrynaflan Chalice,

# Metalwork 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

- During the Christian era, new artistic traditions developed in Ireland fusing Germanic art with traditions from the Roman world and traditions around the Mediterranean. These fused to the La Tene style art. This style was found in manuscript illumination i.e. the Book of Durrow. And so began the link between the style of manuscripts and metalwork of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- 600 A.D. fine Irish craftsmen changed considerably from the late Iron Age. Solid silver objects had appeared, enamel was used more and the new technique of millefori glass (method of producing motifs by covering a cane of glass with layers of different coloured glass and cutting into short lengths) had been adopted.
- Now new types of objects were fashionable i.e. large pins for fastening garments and penannular brooches. There were workshops all over the country i.e. monastic site at Armagh and Ballinderry crannog Co. Offaly. Penannular brooch got its name because of the gap in the ring which was developed from a Roman military-style brooch.
- Motifs in metalwork were also suitable for manuscripts. The colouring in manuscripts was approached in the coloured enamel in metalwork.
- 8<sup>th</sup> century shows a huge range of techniques, all over decorations various effects found in other traditions.
- New techniques such as gold filigree, gilding and silvering, die-stamping and a variety of new colours in glass and enamel were added to the native skills of bronze casting, engraving and colouring with red enamel.
- Early 8<sup>th</sup> century era known as the 'Golden Age'..... time of perfection. Examples the Tara Brooch and the Ardagh Chalice.

# Tara Brooch



- Tara Brooch, National Museum of Ire, 8<sup>th</sup> century
- Found near the seashore of Bettystown Co. Meath after the cliff collapsed by a jeweller and named it Tara and it remained.
- It's a form of penannular brooch based on a Roman design. No particular Christian connection. Most likely to be made for the personal adornment of a queen or king or bishop.
- It is tiny and is a ring brooch. And there is no gap which the pin can pass through so it is called a *pseudo*-brooch chains and loops are needed for fastening a chain like this.
- The point where the chain joins the brooch is beautifully decorated: two glass studs in the form of human heads.
- Made of bronze, back covered in copper and glass studs, front with gold, amber and glass. Gold is worked into filigree panels, some of which have fallen off.
- Decorated with spirals, loops, animal and bird heads.
- Back of brooch is also highly decorated. There are two plates. La Tene style is dark against a silver background. Chain is attached to the brooch by two animal heads at each end of a little plate. Two human heads lie in the centre of this plate. These human faces are purple.
- Straight pin with triangular head with gold filigree, amber and glass.
- Cast and gilded *kerbschnitt* ornament appears on the shaft and head of the pin. Occurs also on the inner and outer edges of the ring. *Kerbschnitt* is a method of casting which imitates wood carving.



# The Tara Brooch



# The Roscrea Brooch



The contribution of La Tene to ancient art continued for a surprisingly long period. As stated, La Tene was extinguished on the Continent by the process of Romanisation. However, it survived as a culture and art form in Ireland, where it merged with local pagan traditions before re-emerging (thanks to the monastic irish culture and the patronage of the Church) in a more ordered and disciplined style during the era of early Christian art. Its main forms were metalwork and illuminated manuscripts.