

- Art History:

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Pre-Christian Ireland

Intro to stone age art in Ireland

Stone Age

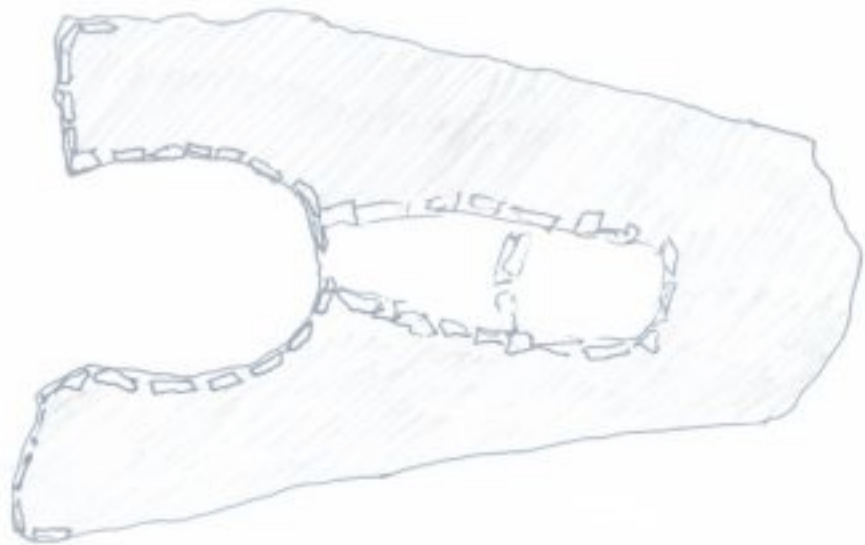
- The first human settlers came to Ireland around 7000BC during the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age as it's known.
- The island was plentiful in rivers and forest with an abundant food supply for the hunters to avail of. They located near rivers, but some remained nomadic, in search of food.

***Neolithic Period ***

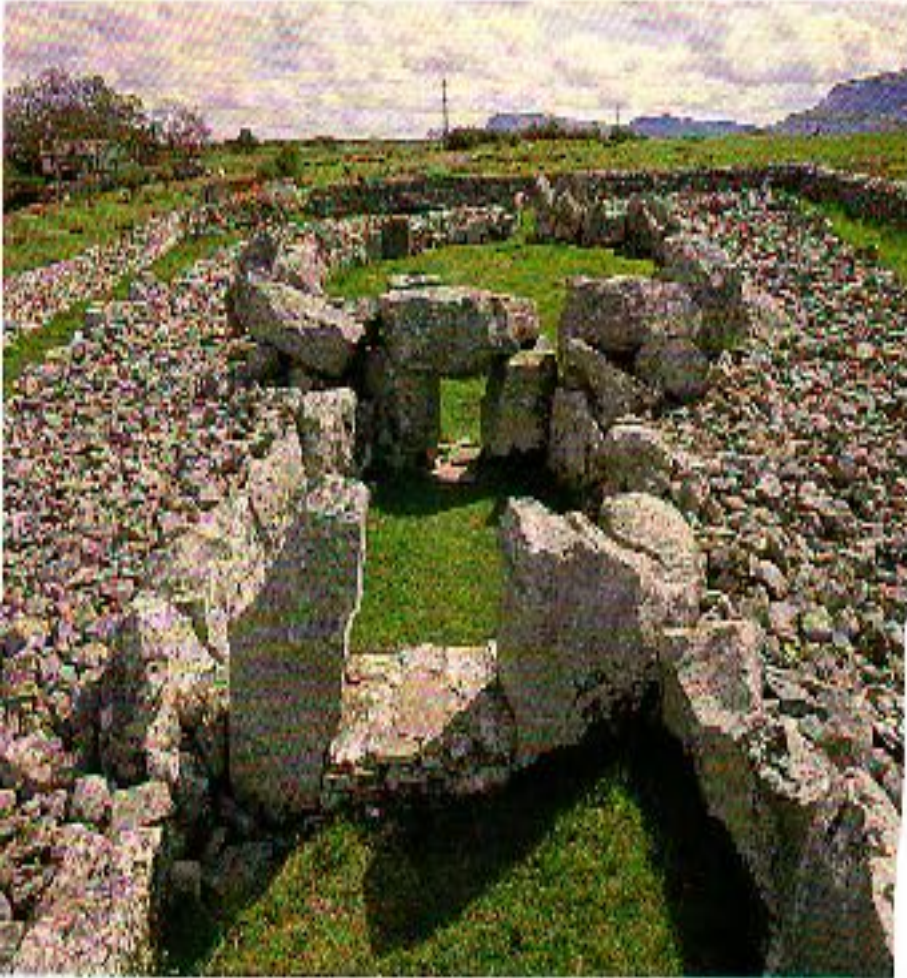
- This period is known as the Neolithic period or New Stone Age.
- This was a period of great change. The Neolithic people settled in one location, developing methods to harvest and cultivate the land. As a result of their evolutionary farming methods, they created farming implements, structures and pottery. They're impact on the landscape remains to this day. They deforested the land, divided the varying farms and left remnants of they're culture throughout the island.

Megalithic Burial Monuments

- The remnants of their impact on our landscape are most notably their burial sites.
- There are three different types of megalithic tombs from the Neolithic period: the Portal Dolman, the Court Cairn and the Passage Grave.



Court Cairn - Creevykeel



- o Court Cairn – found at Creevykeel in Sligo.
- o This is another type of grave from Neolithic Ireland which is more elaborate than the Portal Dolmens and nearer in design to passage graves like Newgrange.
- o Rectangular Burial Chamber
- o Divided with jambs and sills
- o Was open air not an enclosed chamber like Newgrange
- o Forecourt
- o It is thought that when built it was up to 48 meters in length.
- o Neolithic pottery, decorated early Bronze Age pottery and stone tools have been found at this site.

Court Cairns

- Cairn means heap of stone in Irish.
- Are the earliest form of burial tombs from this period. Court cairns consist of either a U-shape or oval-shaped open air courtyard. This provides the entrance chamber to the covered, rectangular burial chamber.
- These burials are thought to have served two purposes. The entrance to accommodate a ritualistic practice and the chamber to serve as a tomb.

- Opening from the court is a chamber or artificial cave, usually roofed with corbels or overlapping stones, though very few roofed examples survive. The chambers are divided into two, three or four

CORBEL VAULT



View looking up
towards the roof

Side View

The stones gradually slope inwards and finish with one large stone or cap on the chamber roof on the outside



Portal Dolmen

- The portal dolmen is a relatively simple, yet imposing and elegant structure.
- Examples can be found in the Burren at Poul nabrone in County Clare. There are over 170 portal tombs in various locations in Ireland.
- The design mimics a tripod shape and is echoed in our modern furnishings.

Portal Dolmen

- The dolmen usually consists of 4 prominent stones.
 - Cap stone is the largest stone, which can be held up by either 2 to 7 stones
- Dolmens mark burial places in a very distinctive way with large capstones elevated at an angle and held up by huge standing stones.
- Dolmens were usually covered with earth or smaller stones to form a barrow (mounds of earth and stone), though in many cases that covering has weathered away, leaving only the stone "skeleton" of the burial mound intact.



Passage Graves

Newgrange

Passage graves consists of a narrow passage made of large stones and one or multiple burial chambers covered in earth or stone. Megaliths* are usually used in the construction of passage tombs

*A megalith is a large stone that has been used to construct a structure or monument

- Newgrange has been dated to about **3200 BC** (more broadly 3300-2900 BC) making it centuries older than the Great Pyramids of Egypt and a thousand years older than Stonehenge.
- It was excavated in 1967 and reinforced.
- Newgrange is part of a complex of monuments built along a bend of the River Boyne known collectively as Brú na Bóinne. The other two principal monuments are Knowth (the largest) and Dowth, but throughout the region there are as many as 35 smaller mounds.

Newgrange is a large kidney shaped mound covering an area of over one acre, retained at the base by 97 kerbstones, some of which are richly decorated with megalithic art. The 19 meter long inner passage leads to a cruciform chamber with a corbelled roof. The amount of time and labour invested in construction of Newgrange suggests a well-organised society with specialised groups responsible for different aspects of construction.

This precision in planning, placement and construction is simply astounding given that tools in the Stone Age were little more than chipped rocks.

Construction

Many of the megaliths, or giant stones, used to build Newgrange came from a site about 22 kilometers away and the outside face of quartz and granite came from the Mourne Mountains to the north and Wicklow Mountains in the south.

Artwork at Newgrange

- Passage graves display the earliest forms of artwork in Ireland. These designs are of great significance due to the similarities with the Celts designs in later years.
- These carvings fit into ten categories, five of which are curvilinear (circles, spirals, arcs, and dot-in-circles) and the other five of which are rectilinear (chevrons, lozenges, radials, parallel lines and offsets). They are also marked by wide differences in style and the skill-level required to execute the designs.

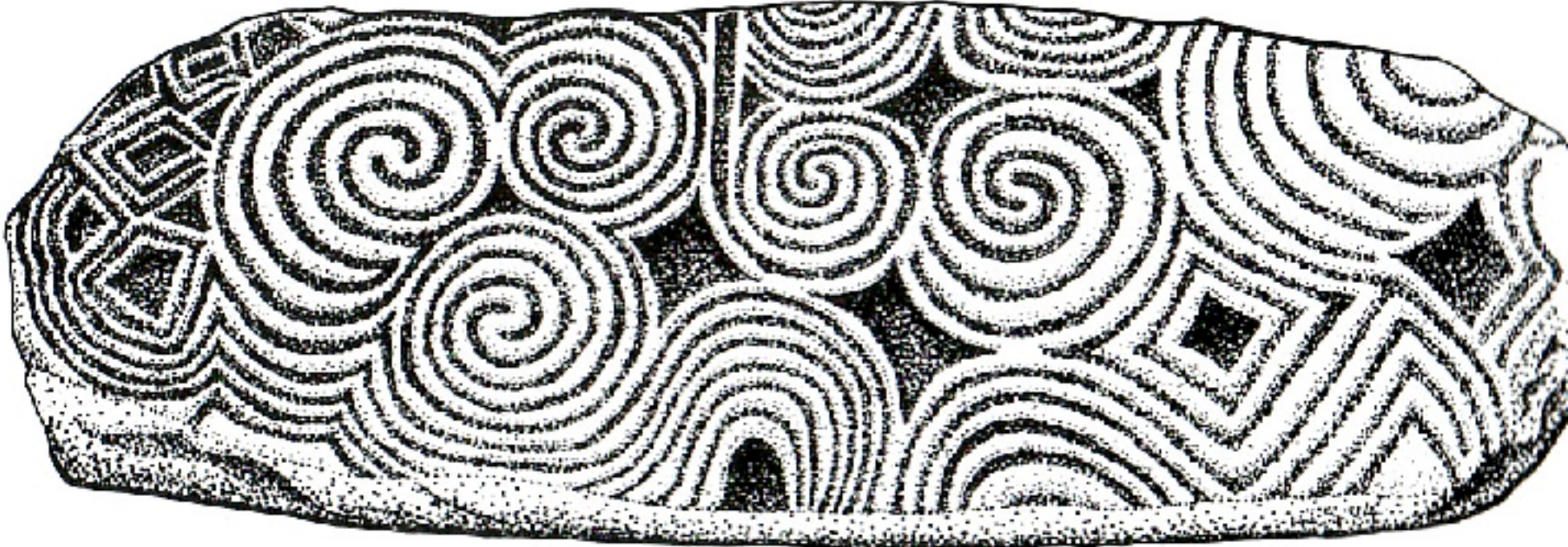
- Chevron= v pattern
- Lozenge = diamond pattern

Entrance Stone

- The entrance stone is richly carved with spirals and lozenges. A vertical line divides the spirals into a grouping of 3 on the left hand side and 4 on the right. This division is of significance, but one can merely suggest the possible reasons for this. A groove, left of the center of the stone, marks the location of the doorway. On the larger side of the divide, lie two double spirals, below these are two curves, which provide a connecting motif to a triple spiral.
- Towards the end of the stone the motif becomes more rectilinear with lozenges and zig-zag designs.



Corbis.com



- Possible connection between the stones
indication of the entrance and the design?

KERBSTONE 52

Many speculate and try to decipher the intent of the Neolithic peoples artwork. The circles may depict the night sky or refer to the varying mounds on this site.

Kerbstone 52 is both richly decorated and similar to the entrance stone. The stones line up precisely with that of the entrance. The stone echoes the designs of the entrance stone with further emphasis on the vertical line yet lacks the balance and harmony of its counterpart.

Surrounding the 11-13 meters tall mound, is a ring of standing stones reminiscent of Stonehenge. These additional stones focus ones attention on the importance of this tomb and the possible ritualistic aspects of this site.

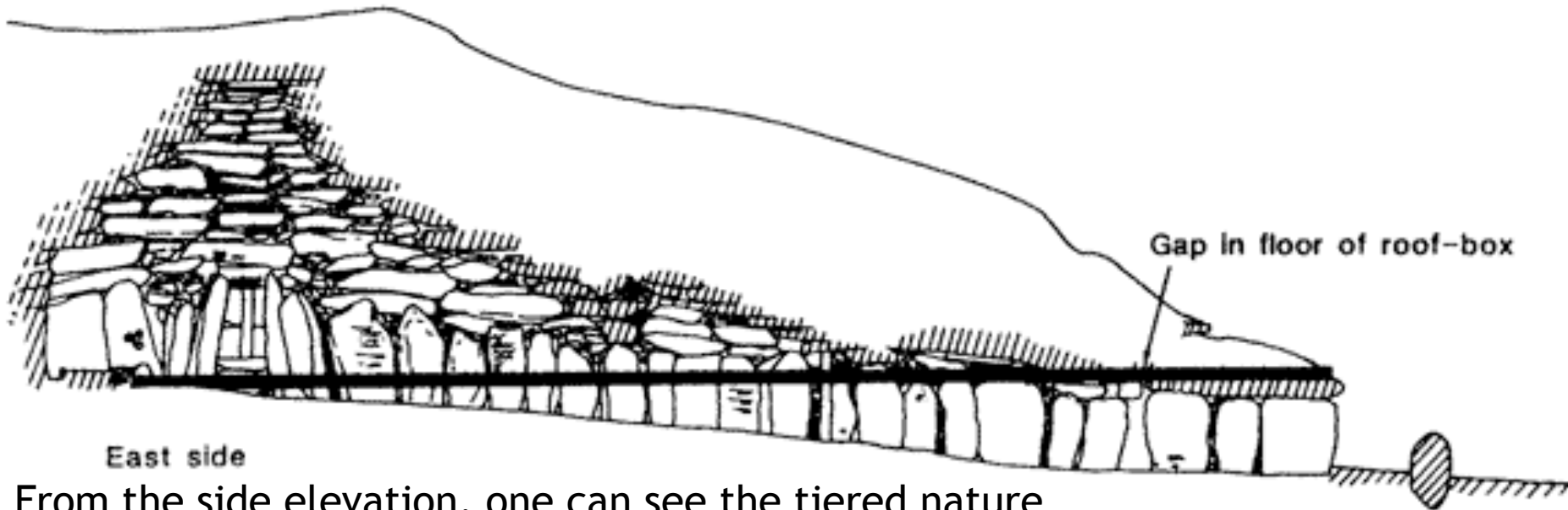




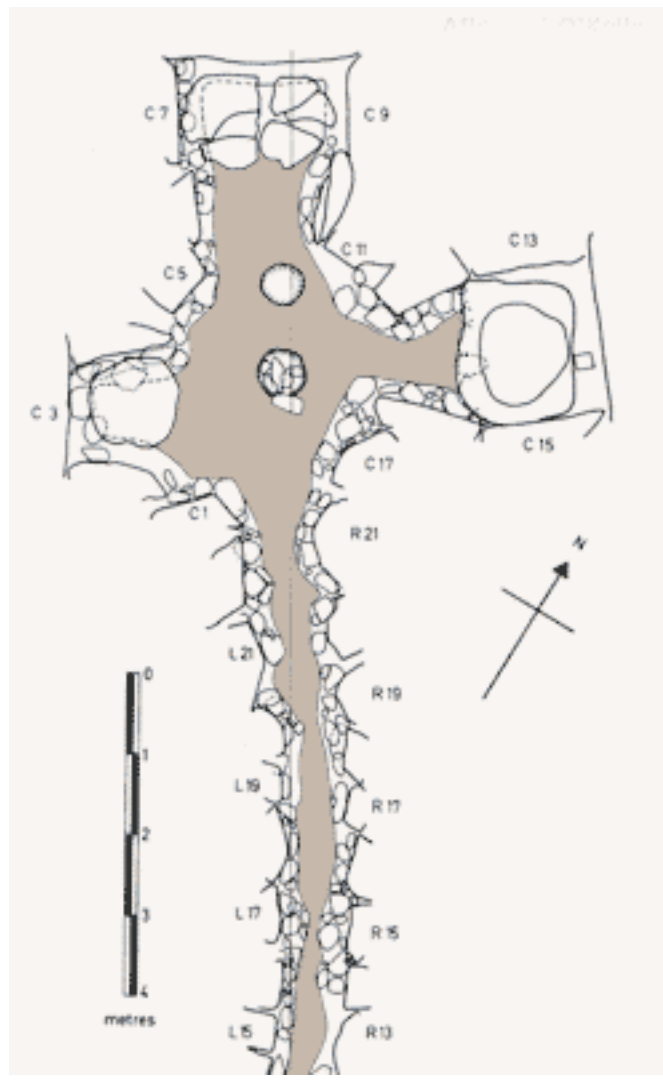
There are 22 standing stones along the left of the passage and 21 along the right. Of these 43 stones in total, 15 are decorated with varying motifs. The first part of the passage grave is roofed with 3 large stones the remainder is corbelled roofing.

97 kerbstones create the outer perimeter of the tomb. Some of which, are decorated most notably the large entrance stone and the back stone (kerbstone 52)

Draw the elevation



- From the side elevation, one can see the tiered nature of the corbeled roof, which has remained watertight. This roofing structure is used in contemporary building and reminiscent of vaulted roofs. Upon further excavation, archeologists found channels, that removed rainwater from the roof.



- Judging from the splendour and magnificence of Newgrange and Knowth it is likely that these temples were places of astrological, spiritual, religious and ceremonial importance, much as present day cathedrals are places of worship.
- One's assumption of spiritual and religious importance is compounded by the illumination of the chamber during the winter solstice.

- On the Winter Solstice, the light of the rising sun enters the roofbox at Newgrange and penetrates the passage, shining onto the floor of the inner chamber. The [sunbeam](#) illuminates the chamber of Newgrange for just 17 minutes.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYR9f-PcBvo>

There are many documented Stone Age tombs in Ireland that reveal a wealth of information about the lives of the people who built them.

Discuss this statement with reference to **two** named stone tombs that you have studied. In your answer refer to the structure, function and location of each of the examples you have chosen.

and

Briefly describe and discuss the motifs and stone working techniques used to decorate Stone Age tombs.

Illustrate your answer.

Q.1		Marks	Notes
A	Two named stone tombs.	10	5/5 names
B	Discussion of statement and description and discussion of stone tomb one referring to structure, function and location.	10	
C	Discussion of statement and description and discussion of stone tomb two referring to structure, function and location.	10	
D	Brief description and discussion of the motifs and stone working techniques used to decorate Stone Age tombs.	10	5 for motifs, 5 for stone working techniques
E	Sketches.	10	
	Total.	50	