



The Bronze Age

2000-500 BC

Art & Craftsmanship

- It was not until at least four thousand years after the first people settled on the island in 7000 BC that there is any evidence to suggest artistic activity for its own sake in Ireland.
- The Neolithic people decorated their tombs with a variety of patterns, but it would seem that these were for religious rather than artistic reasons.
- It was the onset of the Bronze Age that art and craftsmanship as we know it can be said to have begun.
- There is no sharp division between the late Stone Age and the Early Bronze Age, but there is general agreement that the Bronze Age started around 2000 BC and lasted until 500 BC.

Bronze Age Periods

Early - 2000 - 1500 BC

Middle - 1500 - 1200 BC

Late - 1200 - 500 BC

Discovery

- The discovery of metal was a key event in human history.
- This was the first material that could be moulded into any desired shape.
- Additionally, metal was much stronger than stone and could be put to much more effective uses.
- The first metal that mankind widely used was bronze - an alloy of copper and tin.

New Ways of Working

- Although this new technology arrived in Europe around 4000BC, it did not reach Ireland for a further 2000 years.
- Settlers from France arrived in Ireland around 2000BC, bringing the knowledge of Bronze working with them and the existing inhabitants learned the trade from them.
- Slowly the culture of these bronze-working settlers merged with that of the Neolithic Irish and gave birth to the Irish Bronze Age.

Metal Working

- Ireland was blessed with relatively rich copper deposits, allowing large quantities of bronze to be produced on the island.
- However, the copper-rich areas did not necessarily coincide with areas that had been important sources of material in the Neolithic era.
- Thus, the focal points in Ireland moved to regions that in some cases had been relatively devoid of previous activity, for example western Munster.

Early Bronze Age-2000-1500BC

Artifacts from this period :

Metalwork:

- Gold Discs
- Lunulae

Beaker Pottery:

- Food Vessels
- Burial Urns
- Earthenware bowls
- Vases and urns

Early Bronze Age

Gold Sun Discs

Probably the earliest examples of Irish gold ornaments are thin gold discs of various sizes.

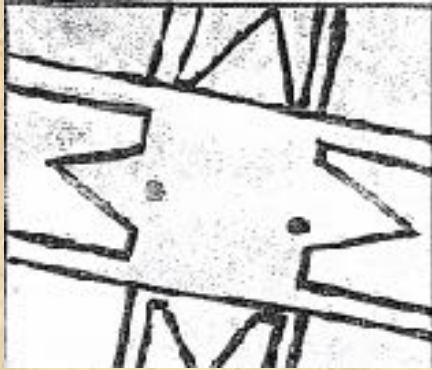
- **Example:** Pair of gold sun discs from Tedavnet Co. Monaghan
- **Form:** Small discs of thin sheet gold 11.6 cm in diameter, often they were found in pairs
- **Decoration:** Cross motif of chevrons. They were also decorated using the repoussé technique
- **Function:** Small holes near the centre suggest that they were used to decorate garments. The holes suggest they would have been attached to the garment like buttons. They were more than likely worn on the chest area.
- **Metalwork Technique:** Circle cut from thin sheets of gold. Decorated by hammering and punching



Gold Sun Discs



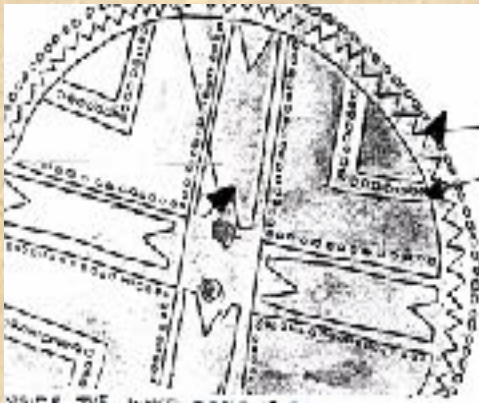
Gold Sun Disc



Centre of Disc - example of the holes in the centre



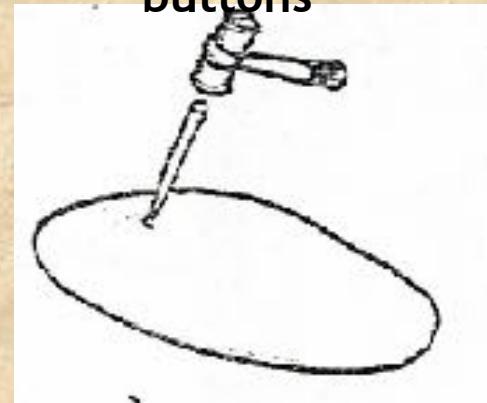
Example: Worn on the chest area of the garment, almost like buttons



Abstract repeated pattern

- Zig-zags
- Dots
- Parallel lines

All used in a geometric manner



Decorated using the repoussé method. This was achieved by hammering a design on the reverse of the disc which creates a textured denting on the reverse

Early Bronze Age Beaker Pottery

- **Artefact:** Food vessels, burial urns, earthenware bowls, vases and urns
- **Example:** Bowl-shaped food vessel-Aghnahily, Co. Laois.
Vase shaped food vessel-Topped Mountain, Co. Fermanagh.
Vase urn- Priestdown Co. Down and Encrusted urn-Newtown
Co. Limerick
- **Form:** Small, squat, rounded bowls or taller v-shaped,
narrow based vases 10cm to 20 cm high
- **Decoration:** Incised patterns made with a comb. Slanted
lines in a herringbone motif and cross-hatched triangles.
Encrusted or applied relief strip lattice ornament.
- **Function:** Funerary vessels for cremated ashes or to
accompany the dead in tombs



Beaker Pottery



Early Bronze Age Funerary Pottery

Beaker Pottery-Food Vessel



- The early centuries of the Bronze Age saw the production of highly decorative pottery, of which the finest examples are the food vessels which were placed in graves to hold sustenance for the dead on their journey to the other world
- Pottery vessel found at Dunamase co. Laois around 1600 BC
- The whole outer surface covered in ornament much of which created using a toothed comb or wheel which produced dotted lines often running parallel with one another
- Motifs include herringbone, chevrons and lozenges, while the base sometimes are decorated with a cross pattern

Middle Bronze Age

Lunulae

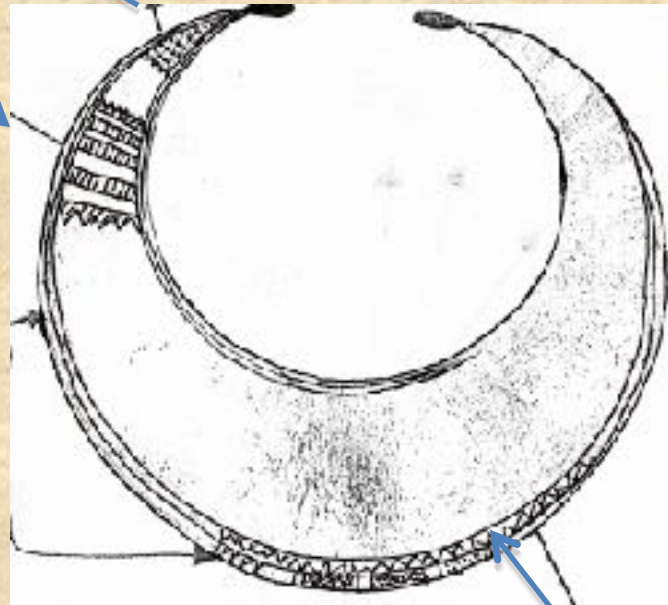
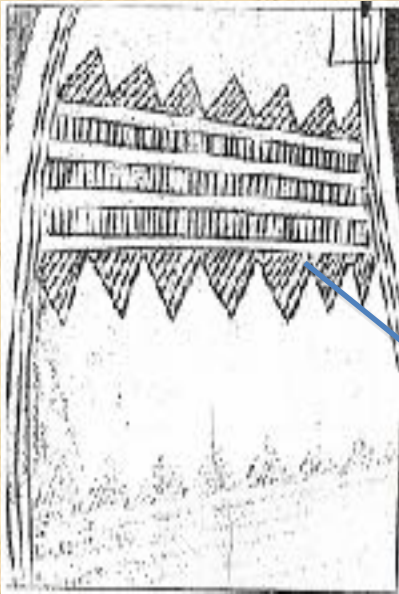
- **Example:** Gold Lunula from Ross, Co. Westmeath
- **Form:** Crescent or half-moon shaped, approx 20cm across. Thus the name lunula or “little moon”
- **Decoration:** Combinations of lines, zigzags and hatched triangles. Normally there is a fine incised pattern of triangles, lozenges and chevrons near the end of the crescent and all around the edges. Due to the thin sheets the incision can be seen on the back of the piece. Incision (cutting) technique - Around 1500 bc the repoussé method gave way to the new technique, that of incision or cutting into the front of the object
- **Function:** Likely to have been worn as neck ornaments/jewellery
- **Metalwork Technique:** Shape cut from thin beaten sheets of gold with slightly thicker extensions or paddle shaped ends that can be turned to form a



Lunula



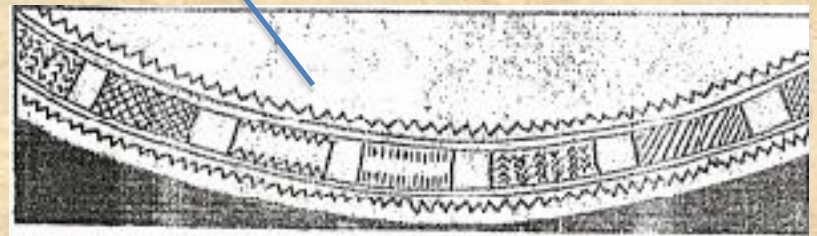
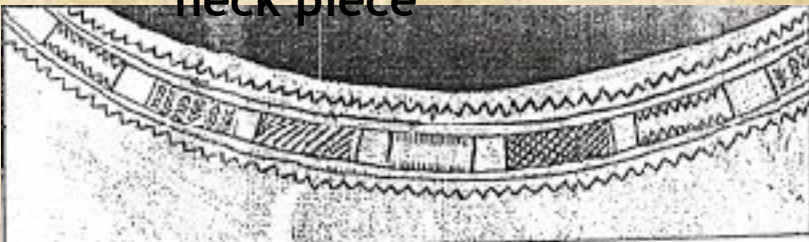
Lunula



ZIG ZAGS -	
HATCHING -	
CHEVRONS -	
CROSS HATCHING -	
PARALLEL LINES -	

Three bands of identical designs on both sides of the neck piece

Decoration



Identical designs on the inner and outer edges of the lunula

Middle Bronze Age

1500-1200 BC

- **Artefact:** Earrings
- **Example:** Flanged gold earrings, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon
- **Form:** Small twisted rings with a “collar” and rod like ends. 3.6 cm in diameter
- **Decoration:** Flanged and twisted
- **Function:** Worn on the ears for decoration
- **Metalwork Technique:** Four flanges created by hammering out the edges of an angled bar of gold. Twisted to 180 degrees

Late Bronze Age

The late Bronze Age is famous for the huge quantity and variety of its goldwork. The work had developed over a period of 1500 years from simple and unsophisticated beginnings, and had now reached the height of its achievement. Although outside influences did play a part in its development, goldwork produced in Ireland during the Bronze Age reached the highest standard known in Europe at the time. The period from 1200 BC onwards was a very prolific time for gold ornaments and many gold hoards are dated from that period. These include earrings, armlets, anklets and twisted ornaments called torcs.

Torcs

- **Gold Torcs**
- These were created from long strips of gold which were sometimes flattened at the edges into thin flanges before twisting.
- Torcs of various forms were made throughout the Bronze Age, with **bar twisted**, **flange twisted** and **ribbon twisted** being the most common



Flange Torc



Intricate Locking Device

Twisting & Flange Twisting



Flanged gold earrings from 1200 BC. Four flanges were created by hammering out the edges of a rectangular bar of gold. The marks of the hammer can be clearly seen on these earrings, they were then twisted into shape



Gold ribbon torc 1100 BC. To form an ornament like this gold torc from Belfast, a strap of gold was beaten to reduce its thickness at both sides. The ribbon was then twisted with the narrow ends worked into the rounded knobs to form an intricate locking device. This was worn as a neck ornament.



Derrynaboy Armbands



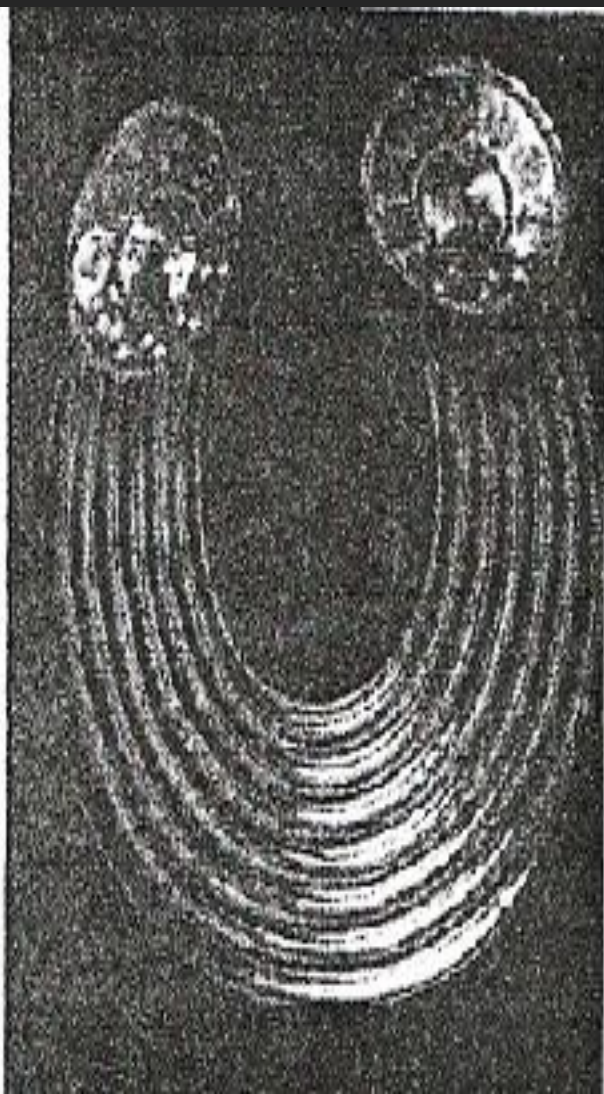
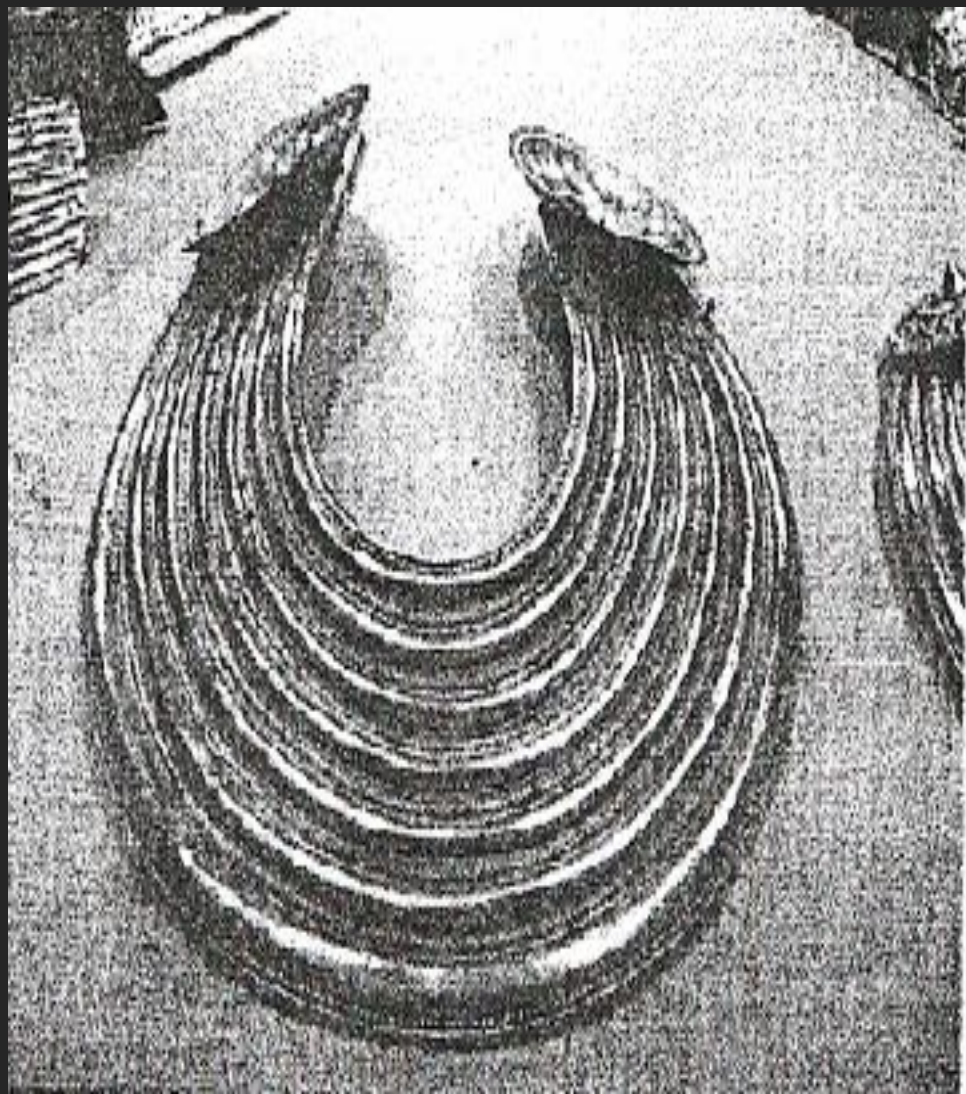
The Clones Fibula



Gorgets



- After the lunula, the most spectacular ornaments of the Bronze Age are the gorgets from the late period. Like the lunula this is a crescent-shaped collar. The most well known example is the Gleninsheen gorget which was found in a rock crevice in the Burren in Co. Clare 70 years ago

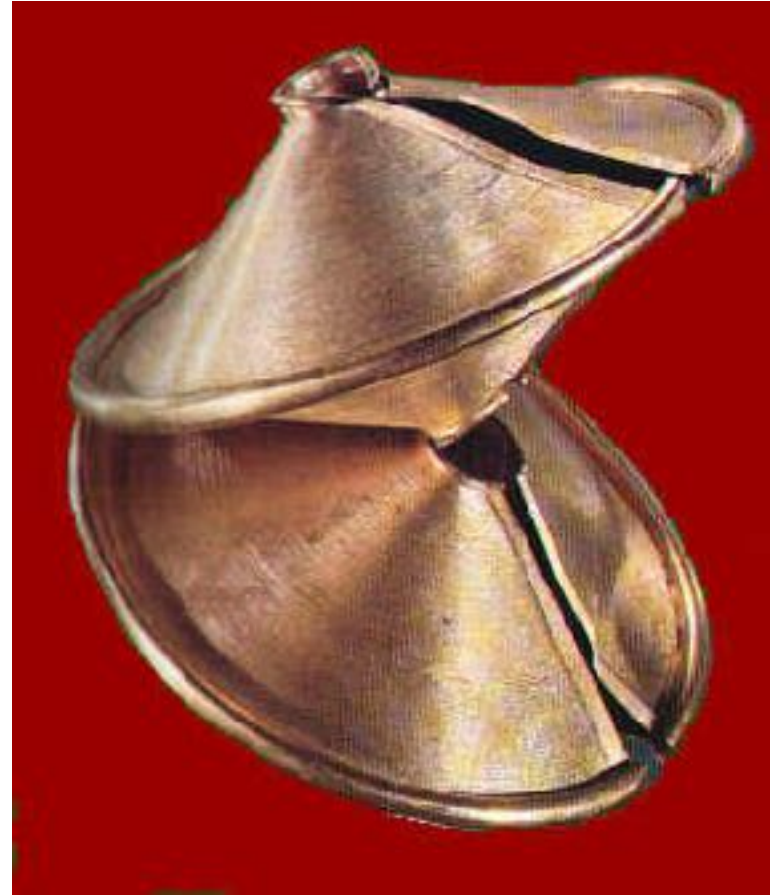


Gorgets

- **Example:** Gold gorget, Glenisheen, Co. Clare
- **Form:** Curved sheet of gold with disc terminals. 31.4cm in diameter
- **Decoration:** Repousse ridges with recessed rope moulding. Abstract geometric ornament. Engraved concentric circles enclose a small conical boss on the terminal discs.
- **Function:** Neck ornament
- **Metalwork Technique:** Semi-circular band of beaten sheet gold with rolled edges. Terminal discs linked together by folded edges. A slit in the lower disc allows the band to slip through. Terminals stitched on with gold wire.

Gold Hair Lock Rings

- Example: Gorteenreagh Co. Clare
- Other ornaments of the late Bronze Age are gold lock rings or tress rings, which are believed to have been hair rings.
- These are about 10cm in diameter and are conical in shape with a slit at the side.
- These display a high level of workmanship.
- In some the surface is covered with individual gold wires soldered together without a backing. In others the surface of sheet gold is drawn with a compass while the metal is flat.



Bulla

- Example: Gold-Plated Bulla, Bog of Allen, Co. Kildare
- Form: Pendant-shaped 'Bulla' 6.4cm long
- Decoration: Concentric circles, semi-circles, triangles and other patterns in repoussé.
- Function: Possibly worn around the neck as a pendant. May have served as an amulet or an object to ward off evil or unsure fertility.
- Metalwork Technique: Lead covered with sheet gold.



Dress Fasteners

- **Example:** Fibula from Clone Co. Monaghan
- **Form:** Large bow-shaped bar linking two concave bases or terminals. 21.5cm long. Some smaller examples would have been used as a sleeve fastener.
- **Decoration:** Engraved concentric circles on the terminals. Parallel bands and chevrons on the bases of the bow.
- **Function:** Garment fastener or double button. Designed for two button holes on a garment (probably ceremonial)
- **Metalwork Technique:** Pure gold weighing over 1000g. Concave terminals beaten to shape

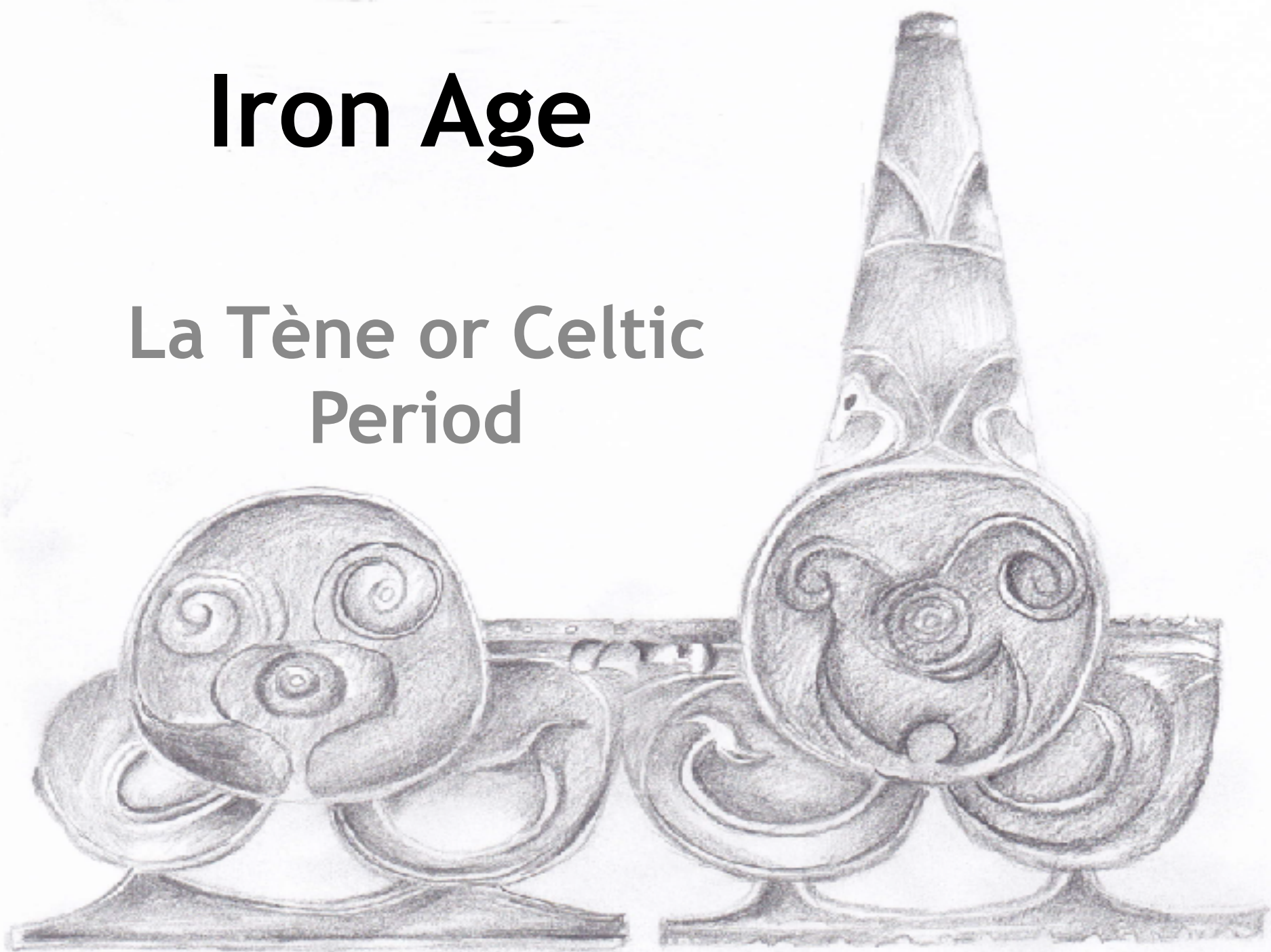


Dress Fasteners



Iron Age

La Tène or Celtic
Period



The Celts In Ireland

- The Iron Age is the period in Irish history about which there is the most speculation and the least certainty
- There is no certainty as to when the celts came to Ireland, but the influence of these central European people is certainly to be found in the artwork of the period in Ireland just before and after the first century BC, particularly the north and north-western part of the country

La Tène

- By the mid-fifth century the centre of power and wealth in Europe had moved northwards and westwards to the Rhineland and next to the areas of the present day France
- This was where La Tène culture came into being because some of the Celtic people came from an area known as La Tène near Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland
- It was part of the Celtic Culture to throw objects into lakes as ceremonial offering and La Tène is a prime example of a European Celtic site, with great deposits of weapons and other objects found in the lake

La Tène

- This culture reached far beyond La Tène
- It had contact with many areas, such as the Mediterranean and the east, including Greece. This contact is reflected in the style of artwork associated with this period.
- The art form was varied but repetitive and incredibly decorative. Motifs were borrowed from Eastern and Greek ideas with special emphasis on plant forms such as honey suckle, and these, together with flowing tendrils, were blended into a distinctive style of abstract and curvilinear patterns

La Tène

- This style developed in central Europe around 300 BC, was known as the Waldalgesheim style and it was an off shoot of this which reached Ireland.
- Iron was commonly used at the time for implements and weapons
- Bronze was used more for ornamental objects as was gold
- It is not certain when and where these Celtic people first came to Ireland. It is believed to have been around the first century AD.

Trumpet, Loughnashade, Co. Armagh

Early Iron Age, First Century BC

- This curved trumpet was found at Loughnashade, Co. Armagh
- It was made by rolling a tube of bronze and riveting the sides to a strip on the inside
- A ring halfway down the tube divides the object into a tube ending in a mouthpiece and an elongated conical form.
- The mouthpiece is decorated by a rimmed circular disc.
- The design, executed in repoussé, is controlled and regular.
- Linear curves and spiral bosses are all in high relief, with larger spirals ending in curvilinear forms.



Trumpet, Loughnashade, Co. Armagh

Early Iron Age, First Century BC



Gold Collar, Broighter, Co. Derry

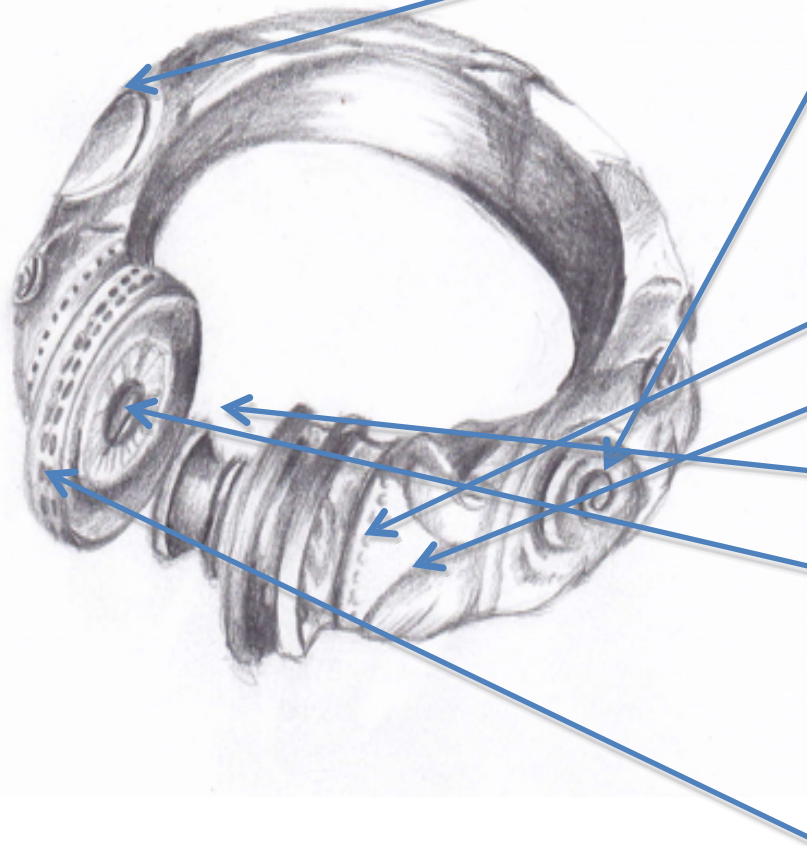
Early Iron Age, First Century BC



The Broighter Collar

- Found in a hoard of gold objects deposited close to the ancient shore at the entrance to Lough Foyle, Broighter, Co. Derry.
- There is an elaborate, raised, curvilinear design on the convex areas of the ring.
- The area between the raised decoration is filled with concentric arcs of circles incised with a compass in a fashion that's serves to emphasise the raised decoration.
- The ends of the tubes adjoining the terminals each bear a single row of small punched-up pellets and a zone of raised ornament with trumpets, lentoid and circular bosses.
- The terminals are fitted with a mortice and tenon device which fastened the collar and the T-shaped tenon is surrounded by raised lines resembling a sun-burst.
- Each of the terminals has a recess on the circular face into which an openwork strip of three rows of conjoined raised bosses has been fitted.

Brighter Collar-A Closer Look



- Curvilinear design on the convex of the collar
- Raised decoration with concentric arcs of circles incised with a compass
- Punched up pellets
- Raised trumpet ornaments
- Mortice and tenon device
- T-shaped tenon is surrounded by raised lines resembling a sun-burst
- Row of pellets.

Brighter Collar



**Detail : Trumpet, Loughnashade, Co. Armagh
Early Iron Age, First Century BC**



Gold Model Boat, Broighter, Co. Derry Early Iron Age, First Century BC



**Bronze Head-Dress, The Petrie Crown
Early Iron Age, Second Century AD**



The Petrie Crown

