

Iron Age

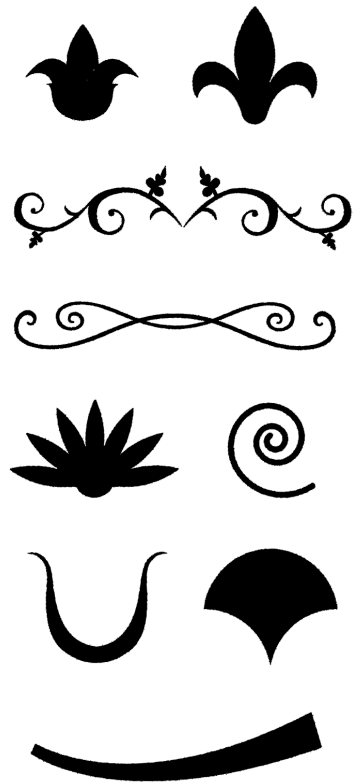
The Iron age began in Ireland around 500BC and is considered to have finished in 400AD with the arrival of christianity in Ireland.

It was brought by the Celts, groups of tribal cultures from northern Europe. They developed the technology to smelt and shape Iron. This was a much harder metal and their tools and weapons were far stronger as a result.

There is no clear date as to when Celtic culture arrived in Ireland, it seems they slowly settled and assimilated into the existing society through trade and immigration rather than a mass invasion.

Celtic culture was based on tribal societies led by a chieftain or king. Wealth was established by ownership of cattle and territories were protected and contested.

There was a distinct celtic style using a combination of motifs; leaves, vines, tendrils, lotus', spirals, lyres, peltas and trumpets



Leaf

Lotus

Peltas

Vine

Spiral

Trumpets

Tendrils

Lyre

This style developed through influences from Greek, Roman, Etruscan, Scythian and Oriental artwork and designs. This new style is known as La Tene after the site where an extensive hoard was found, by Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland. While there are some representational artefacts from this period, most of the designs are abstract organic forms based on flora and fauna. They are *curvilinear*, meaning they are based on curves lines. While the geometric forms of the bronze age were made using tools such as rulers and compasses Iron age artisan worked both with tools and freehand to get the sophisticated organic forms.



Many variations of the La Tene style existed across Europe. The islands of Ireland and Britain had a style called Insular La Tene. Insular means island and this style is found between both islands as they would have most likely traded with one another more commonly than mainland Europe. The Broighter Collar and the Turoe Stone are great examples of Insular La Tene.

Working with iron involved much higher temperatures to smelt the mineral from the ore than copper. This shows Iron age metalworkers probably had much better forging techniques and tools than their bronze age counterparts. These skills remained the common way to work metal and a village blacksmith would have had similar tools right up to the mid 20th century.

Although they were softer metals, bronze and gold were still used at this time for their decorative qualities and because bronze doesn't rust. We have less iron artefacts now than bronze ones because many iron objects would have rusted away over the centuries.

Gold seemed to be in shorter supply in the Iron age as less gold artefacts survive but those that have been found are of a very sophisticated design, construction and decoration.

They continued to cut and shape, incise, cast and a new technique called chasing where the surface would be hammered back down to create a higher relief was used. This technique was called *chasing*.

An excellent example of Irish Iron age goldwork is the pieces of the Broighter hoard, found on the edge of Lough Foyle, Co. Derry, by a farmer ploughing his field.

The hoard consists of a model boat, a bowl made of thin sheet gold, two gold chains, two twisted torcs and a gold collar. The model boat is a finely crafted representational depiction of an ancient boat, complete with mast, seats and oars.

Broighter collar

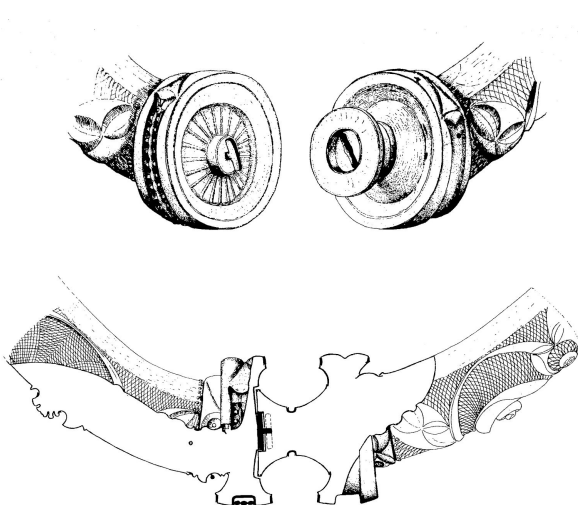


The collar is made from two hollow tubes forming a circle with a diameter of roughly 20cm. It has raised patterns and incised lines on the outside surface and smooth metal on the inside where it would be against the neck. Buffer terminals at one end of each tube correspond to each other with a t shaped bar in one that connects to a slit in the other to form a locking mechanism. The other ends of the tubes are broken, perhaps there was another terminal at this end but we can only speculate.

It is called a collar as it was probably meant to be worn around the neck, many descriptions of celtic people around this time mention that celts wore collars and some classical statues depicting celts feature similar looking collars.



As it is made of gold and the design and decoration is highly complex and elaborate, it was probably worn by an important member of society as a status symbol.



The tubes were built from flat gold ribbons. The raised patterns would have been chased into the flat gold and the incised lines with a compass arc. These ribbons would have been heated and rolled to form a tube and the edges soldered to enclose it. The tube would be filled with hot mastic and bent into a curved semi circle. Mastic is a resin which would be stiff but malleable which would help keep the tube intact as it was curved so it wouldn't buckle or tear in the process. The terminals at the ends were riveted to the curved tubes and the spiral bosses on the chased patterns were pinned on separately.

The chased patterns feature symmetrical interconnecting scrolls, plant like vine forms and spiral bosses. These organic forms seem to represent floral patterns but have also been said to be a stylized representation of a horse.

What do you think? _____



Incised lines

Spiral bosses

Spirals

Trumpet shapes

Leaves

Symmetry

Beading



Isolation of repeated motif

The incised lines between the chased designs are concentric and crosshatching and create a contrast against the smooth surface of the raised floral patterns. At the end of the tubes a band of beading disguises the rivets attaching the terminals. Flowing designs decorate the terminals with a row of beading on one. Radiating lines surrounding the T bar mechanism on one terminal.

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