

Late Bronze Age

The Late Bronze Age saw a change in the Irish climate with wetter and colder conditions prevailing. Archaeologists believe this may have impacted heavily on the agricultural economy in Ireland with bogs expanding and the countryside becoming more heavily forested. The increased quantities of weaponry (swords, spears, rapiers, knives, dirks and halberds) in hoards may indicate a rise in warfare between communities.

Why might this be?

Cremations were a popular burial practice in the later Bronze Age. The burnt bones were often placed within a food vessel. Occasionally this vessel was inverted (turned upside down) in the burial site.

A common ritualistic practice in the later Bronze Age was the deposition of hoards in sacred places. These hoards may have represented votive offerings to gods or have been left for safekeeping, or a mixture of both. Bogs have proven to be a rich source of Bronze Age artefacts, with the anaerobic environment preserving even organic material. An exceptional example of a hoard from Dowris, Co. Offaly can be seen in the Museum of Archaeology. It comprises of approximately 218 objects and includes swords, spearheads, axes, gouges, knives, razors, cauldrons, buckets, horns, crotals and other miscellaneous objects.

The Dowris Hoard was accidentally discovered in the 1820s by two men digging trenches for potatoes and was probably a ritual deposit, perhaps for religious purposes. Archaeologists are not sure if it was one deposit, or a series. Current thinking tends to see it as a series, possibly over a very long period, of ritual deposits into a lake.

The late Bronze age is sometimes referred to as the Dowris Phase after this hoard.



Late Bronze age Artefacts.

Fibula

Clones, Co. Monaghan (800 -700 BC)

- **Function** Used as a dress fastener, some were very heavy, so may have only been used for ceremonial use.

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- **Structure** 21.5 cm long, Made from a kilo of solid gold. Gold bow or handle connected to a two gold hemispheres. Handle cast in mould, flat metal hammered into shape for the cups then soldered together.

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- **Decoration** Decorated with rows of small concentric circles with a hollow in the centre of each. Area where bow joins has incised triangles and bands of lines. Unadorned handle

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Gorget

Gleninsheen Gorget found in Burren, Co. Clare (800-700 BC)



- **Function** Worn on neck as a high status symbol probably for ceremonial uses. Fastened around neck by cord attached to the ends of the collar.
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- **Structure** Semicircular collar with a gold disc at either end. The discs were made from two layers with the edges of the larger back disc wrapped over the front to create a finished edge. The discs were attached to the collar by sewing with gold thread. To finish the raw edges of the collar narrow strip of gold was rolled all around the edge.
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- **Decoration** Crescent shaped body decorated with rows of decorated bands alternatively rope and smooth plain patterned. On the discs, 11 incised concentric circles surround a large concentric circle with a conical boss in the centre. Beads surround the perimeter and the centre concentric circle. Smooth and textured patterns on the surface capture the light beautifully.
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Lock Rings

Uniquely Irish

Gorteenreagh Co. Clare (800-700 BC)

Discovered along with a hoard of other artefacts including gold collar and gold bracelets



- **Function** Used as hair ornaments. Plait of hair slipped through opening and turned out of line to hold the hair in place. Hair held in place by protruding bosses from tube in centre.
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- **Structure** Double cone shape with a narrow opening down one side, bound together by a band of gold. They have a diameter of 10 cm and length of 5 cm.
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- **Decoration** cone made up of fine gold wires soldered together
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