

Pre Christian Ireland - Bronze Age | Sample

answer

2013 Higher Level Question 1

The arrival of the Celts in Ireland gave rise to a distinctive style of decoration used in stone carving and metalwork. Answer (a), (b) and (c). (a) Name and briefly discuss this style. (b) Name, describe and discuss the object illustrated on the accompanying sheet, referring to form, function, materials, decoration and the techniques used in its production. AND (c) Name and briefly describe one other example of stone carving or metalwork from this period. Illustrate your answer.

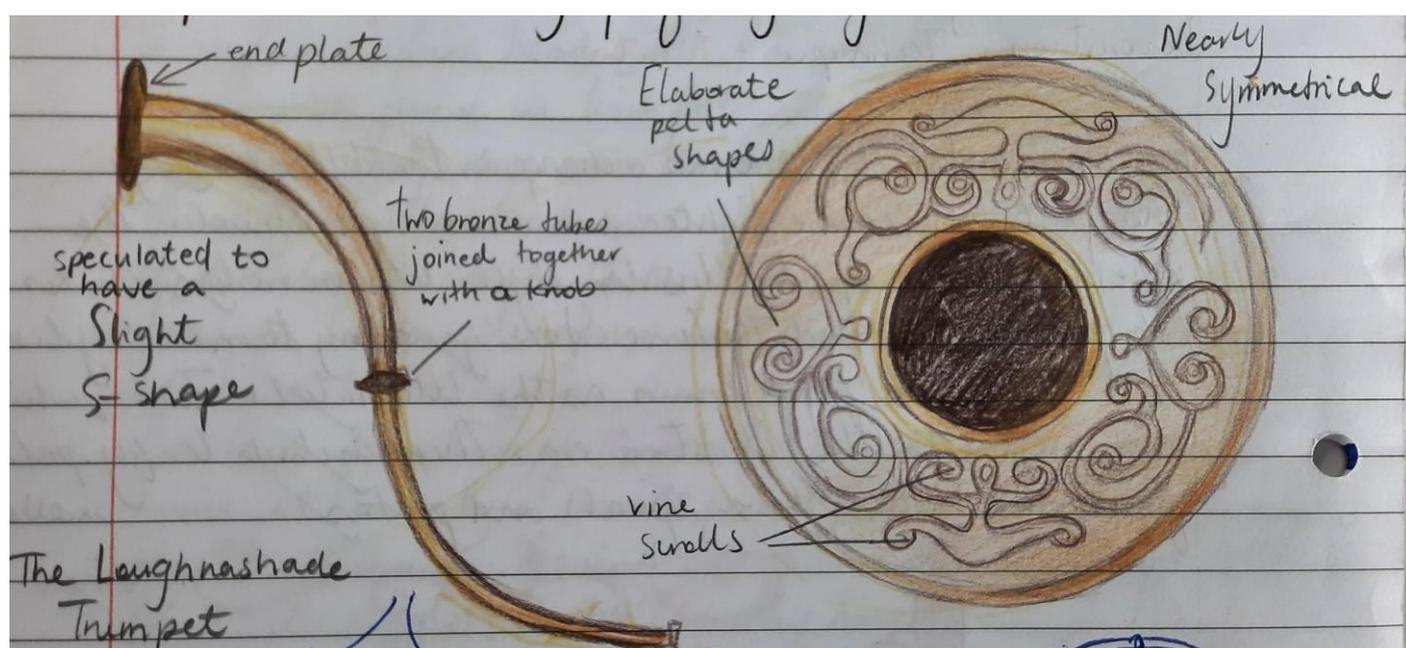
La Tène art was first introduced to Ireland in the 3rd century BC through the arrival of the Celts. There was a distinct change in the style of design. Their art was a curvilinear style based on the plant designs of the Mediterranean but the Celts transformed the patterns to be lighter and more symmetrical with flowing abstract compositions. The vegetal designs of the Insular style, seen on works such as the Broighter Collar and the Turoe Stone, gave way to more stylised and elaborate forms known as the Ultimate La Tène, which continued into the Christian era. These include leafy palmate forms, vines, lotus flowers, spirals, and peltas. The La Tène art style was to be the most lasting manifestation of Celtic identity and unity.



Loughnashade Trumpet

The Loughnashade Trumpet is a fine example of a mix between Insular and Ultimate La Tène. It was found in Co. Antrim in the Lake of the Treasures dating back to around the 1st Century BC. The magnificent trumpet is around 186.5 cm long and made in 3 parts, two tubes of sheet bronze

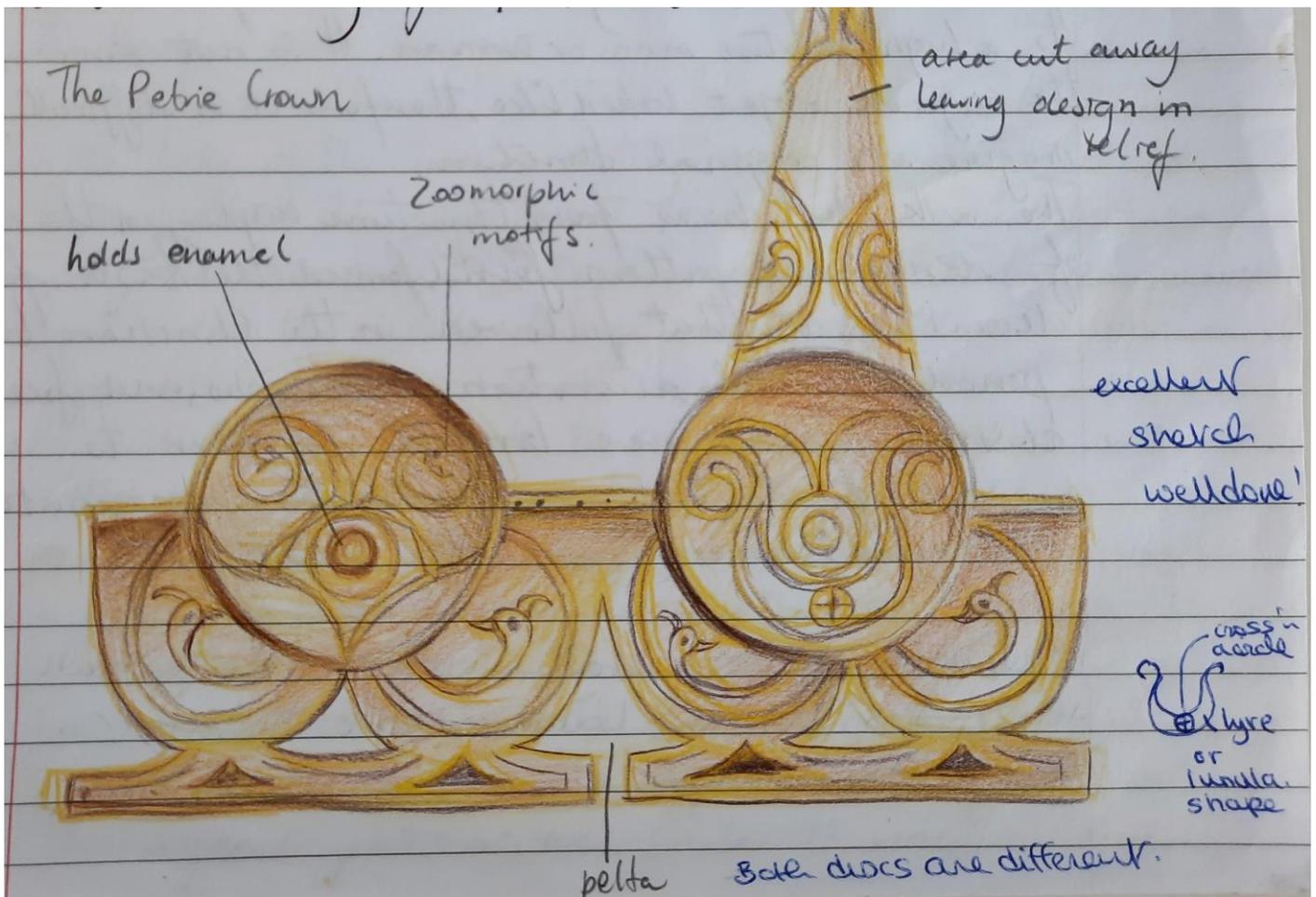
joined by a knob in the middle. A large circular decorative mouthpiece is attached to the open end. Collectors believe it was originally meant to be in a slight S shape, however, it is displayed in a curved crescent shape in the gallery. The tubes are expertly made, the edges are rolled together and riveted onto an internal strip of bronze. The endplate is decorated with the technique of Repousse. This involves placing a thin sheet of metal on a firm surface (for example leather) and using a sharp point to draw patterns onto the metal. When the motifs are completed, the sheet is turned so the designs are elevated when flipped over. The endplate is decorated with a four-part repeat pattern in an open linear free-flowing abstract design. There is a large pelta spiral and a smaller one on the opposite ends of the circle. The organic patterns are similar to vines or tendrils on plants and are nearly perfectly symmetrical.



The true function of the trumpet remains unknown. Based on the loud noise it gave off and its intimidating size, some suspect the trumpet was used as a musical instrument to lead armies into battle. The loud noise may have also been used to frighten the enemies or warn them of their approach. However, taking into consideration the lack of war and conflict in this period, it is more likely to have been used as a signal to alert the community of a sacred event, such as important ceremonies or rituals.

Petrie Crown

The Petrie Crown is a piece of artefact that dates back to around the 1st Century BC. It is made of Bronze and Enamel and demonstrates the introduction of enamel and zoomorphic decoration, in the Late Iron Age. Named after George Petrie, a 19th-century antique collector, in whose collection it first appeared, the Petrie Crown is a fascinating piece of artwork. The Crown consists of a band of metal perforated with small holes along the edge and two circular concave discs mounted to it. A conical horn rises from behind the discs. The Horn was made by folding a piece of hammered bronze into a conical shape and riveting the edges to an under a sheet of copper. The decoration was achieved by cutting away the background and leaving the design in relief. This shows the pure skill and talent these craftsmen possessed. The concave discs would have been hammered into shape. Each disc consists of a boss slightly off centre, one of which still has a red enamelled bead in its hollow centre. This is the first example of enamel work in Ireland. Enamelling is where glass is melted into a molten state and then let to cool down to the desired shape and placed onto objects for decorative purposes. The deceptively simple designs on the disc combine palmate, lotus buds and triskele motifs created by slim trumpet curves. The artist makes effective use of both positive and negative shapes to create the design. Pelta shapes can be seen in the areas cut away from the band.



The entire object is decorated in free-flowing curves ending in stylised bird heads. This is amongst the earliest form of zoomorphic art found in Irish art, which will later come to influence works such as the Book of Kells. The word zoomorphic comes from the Greek words for 'animal' and 'change' It describes the way artists stylised or changed animal forms in Celtic designs, sometimes to the point where they are hard to decipher.

The true function of the Petrie crown remains unknown since it is only a small proportion of a much larger object. Although basing our guesses on the perforated band, it suggests that this may have been sewn onto fabric or leather, or maybe fixed to wood or metal. It could have been part of a Bronze headdress or horse trappings. The elaborate decoration proposes the possibility of it being ceremonial gear or belonging to a high-status man or woman. It is not known how the original object looked, therefore it is difficult to imagine its original function.

The work left to us from this time displayed the elements of design and pattern that formed the basis for the decorative art that followed in the Christian Celtic period. Vegetal decoration,

zoomorphic, and free-flowing abstract design were brought together to create a style of art that was harmonious, imaginative, ambiguous and above all, beautiful.