

The Bronze Age | H1 Notes

The People

The Bronze Age began when another group of people settled in Ireland. **The Beaker People**, as they were known, had learnt how to use **bronze**, a metal alloy of **copper and tin**. They **mined copper** ore with stone, bone and wooden tools, and **imported tin** from Cornwall. Easier to work, lighter and more durable than stone, bronze allowed the Beaker People to thrive. The Beaker People were so named as they were the first to use a kind of ceramic "Bell Beaker" (shaped like an inverted bell). These beakers were used as drinking vessels, or used to bury their dead.

The Artefacts

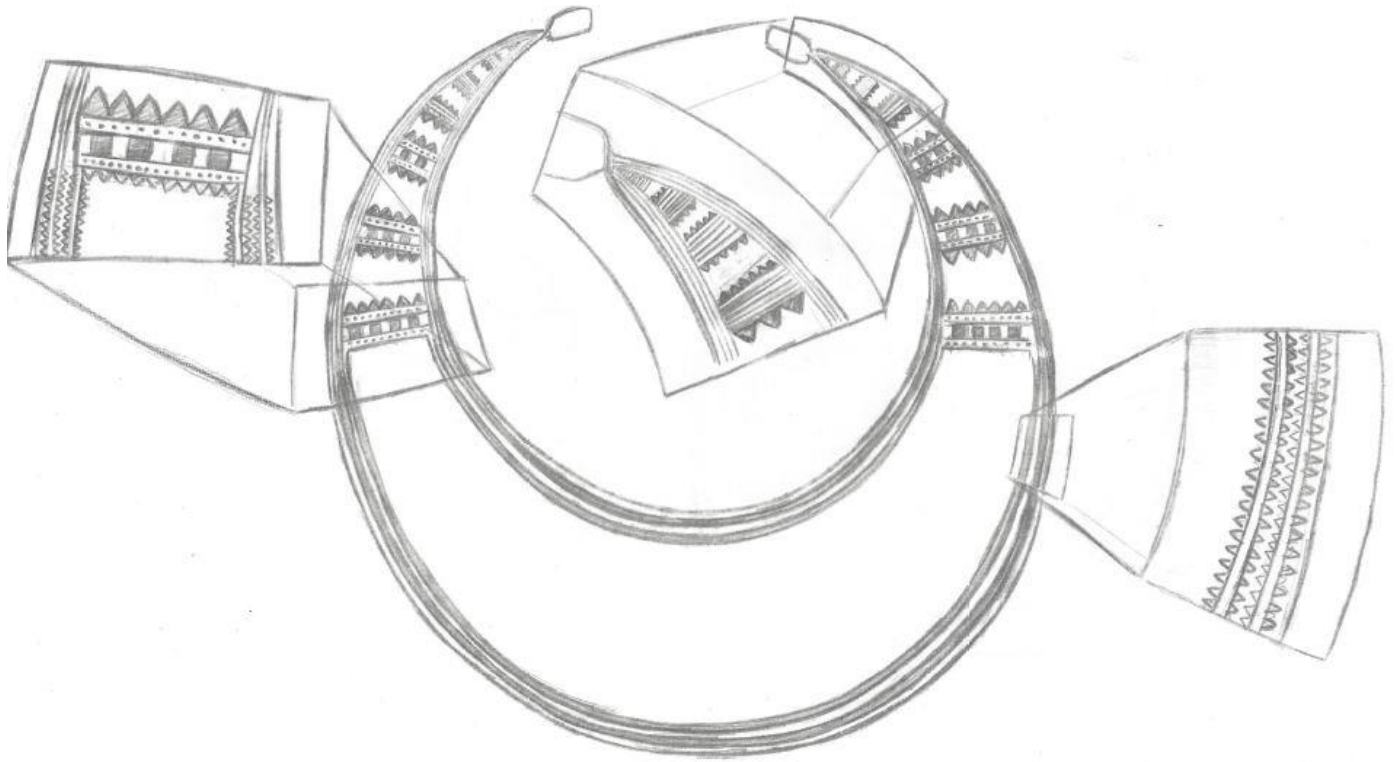
The Beaker People used tools made of bronze, but their art was mostly made from **Alluvial Gold**. Alluvial Gold is the term used to refer to gold found in rivers, (the gold would have been in very small pieces, then **panned** out of the water and melted together to create solid gold ingots). The gold nuggets were hammered flat, making **sheet gold**, then **cut** into the shape needed. Gold is stable and easy to work, and so it was widely used for decoration. Gold items were a **status symbol**, though some are also believed to have had **ceremonial functions**.

They decorated their pieces with **abstract geometric** motifs, such as concentric circles, hatched triangles, rope and herringbone patterns, and punched dots.

As the Bronze Age progressed, metalworking techniques became more advanced. Early techniques such as **Sheeting and Cutting, Incision**, and **Repoussé** characterise a period known as **The Early Bronze Age**, whereas more advanced techniques like **Casting, Soldering**, and **Riveting** are more typical of **The Late Bronze Age**. Complexity of some artefacts shows that they must have had some **advanced tools** and instruments.

The Ross Lunala

Early Bronze Age -Ross, Co. Westmeath



Lunala –Little moon, Latin, referring to crescent moon shape

Flat, tapering towards ends. Decorative border, **incised** zigzags. **Hatched triangles** and squares at ends. **Balance** and **symmetry**. Careful **planning** of decorated/ non-decorated space. Strong **sense of design**. **Compass** (used to get such perfect curves). Sheet metal, cutting, **repoussé**.

Ribbon Torc

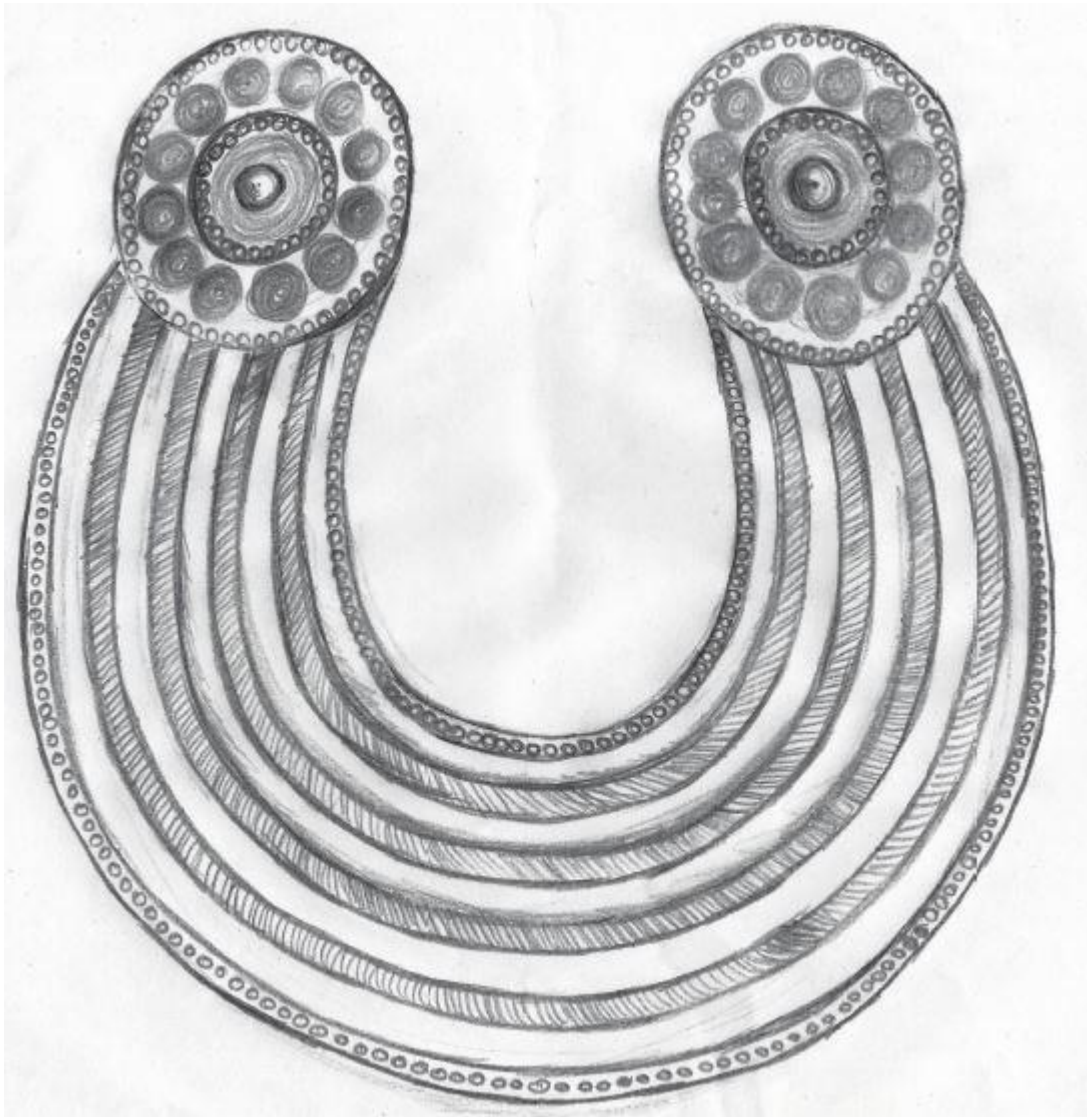
Middle Bronze Age -Belfast, Co. Antrim

Band of gold that was slowly heated, then **twisted**. Then given circular form. Gives fluid, ribbon-like effect. The locking clasps link together. More **sophisticated** than Ross Lunala. Shows **development of techniques** since Early Bronze Age.



The Glenisheen Gorget

Late Bronze Age -The Burren, Co. Clare



Extravagant gold collar. U-shaped. Cord pattern. Emphasised by **plain** areas. **Intricate repoussé** dots emphasise shape and edges. **Concentric** circles (must have had specialised tools). Small cones. **Carefully planned**. Variety of **motifs**.

Other Important Artefacts

- The Tydavnet "Sun" Discs – Early Bronze Age – Tydavnet, Co. Monaghan
- The Derrinboy Armlets – Middle Bronze Age – Derrinboy, Co. Offaly
- The Castlederg Cauldron – Late Bronze Age – Castlederg, Co. Tyrone
- The Clones Dress Fastener/Fibula – Late Bronze Age – Clones, Co. Monaghan

- Bulla – Late Bronze Age – Bog of Allen, Co. Kildare
- Gorteenreagh Hair-Lock Rings – Late Bronze Age – Co. Clare

Writing Your Answer

The question usually asks you to **contrast** Early and Late Bronze Age artefacts, e.g. **Ross Lunula** versus the **Glenisheen Gorget**. Generally, you're asked to compare their **styles** and **techniques**. Having **background** on the Beaker People is important, and so is how they got the gold, as one of these is often asked as the "**and**" question.

If you can, try put in a few **small sketches** of details (e.g. Ross Lunula sketches, above). Don't forget, the most important thing is the **LABELS**. Label the hatched triangles, the incised concentric circles, etc. A sketch is nothing without labels, they're what get you the marks.

And most importantly never forget the "**and**" part. For this topic, it's usually to describe the life of the Beaker People, or discuss one other artefact. However, don't get carried away with this part. While this part is important, don't forget to keep an eye on the time.