

# Art History | Iron Age

## Sample answer

### 2015 Iron Age Exam Question

*The “Petrie Crown” illustrated on the accompanying sheet is an example of a remarkable change in style that took place during the Iron Age. Discuss this statement referring to the function, form, and style of the Petrie Crown, and to the materials and techniques used in its production and decoration. and Name and describe one example of decorative stone carving from this period. Illustrate your answer.*

I can agree with the above statement that the Petrie Crown, from the Early Iron Age (c.A.D. 150), is an example of a remarkable change in style that took place during the Iron Age which lasted from 500B.C. to approximately 100A.D. It's evident from the artefact produced at this time that new influences were impacting the designs and motifs such as classical Greek and Eastern art forms, and derived many of their symbols from these cultures. Celtic art grew and developed, culminating in the Waldalgesheim style, the form which was brought to Ireland. It's not completely clear when the Celts arrived in Ireland but I find it to be very evident that they left a major influence when they did by bringing these new styles and techniques. An offshoot of the Waldalgesheim style reached Ireland around 300 B.C., where motifs were based on plant forms such as honey suckle and palm leaves and were also curvilinear patterns including spirals, waves, triskeles and s-scrolls. The Waldalgesheim style also used animal and forms in a free flowing linear style. From my study of this age, I believe this style died out in Europe in approximately 290 B.C., yet it continued to grow and develop in Ireland until 150 B.C. because Ireland, as an isolated country, had less influence from other styles and changes/movement of travellers.

Unlike in the previous ages, (Stone Age and the Bronze Age), the Iron Age people, Celts, did little stone carving, and were instead very skilled horsemen and metalcraft workers. They produced a wide range of goods and weapons in gold, bronze and iron, so there are no significant stone tombs from the Iron Age in Ireland. Stone forts are the only important architectural structures to survive from this time, such as the Dun Aonghasa Fort which is located in a high cliff overlooking the Atlantic in Inis Mor, Co.Galway. However, it is clear to me that many Celtic art forms and designs derived from the early Stone Age, such as the spiral which may have been an early symbol of the sun. Straight and curvilinear repeated lines were also a common recurring motif

used in stone carving over the course of the centuries. Repeated line markings are found on the chamber stone in Newgrange and Knowth from the Stone Age, as well as on the Aiglish pillar, Co.Kerry, which also features carved, repeated lines. This may represent a calendar in a similar way that seasonal changes may be represented in earlier examples. In my opinion, I strongly believe because of this, that stone monuments made in one era influenced eras that followed, or that monuments created in one era may have been adapted and altered by craftsmen from the next. An example of this in an Iron Age object which I have studied, is the Turoe Stone, found in Co.Galway, dated to c. 200 B.C.

The Turoe Stone is an example of insular style (which was specific to Ireland and the British Isles) from the Iron Age, of La Tene stone carving style. The Turoe Stone is carved from a naturally rounded and heavy Connemara granite boulder (1.68 metres in height), which to me, suggests that it is native to the area as it would have been extremely difficult to transport. Archaeologists believe it was deposited by a glacier during the Ice Age. The Turoe Stone has vertical sides and a spherical top, and the quality of the decoration on the stone suggests its importance. Its function is unclear, although I think it may have had a number of purposes, such as being a ceremonial site, a boundary marker, a landmark or a meeting place for the Celtic people. There are four distinct sides to the Turoe Stone in terms of decoration. Organic tendril shapes mingled with trumpet curves cover most of the surface impressively, and a triskele is found on one side. There is a step/brick pattern along the base, deriving from the Celtic interest in Greek classism. The decorative motifs include leaf shapes, triskeles, spirals, circles and trumpet-ends; more evidence of the La Tene style of Celtic art.

The Petrie Crown is also a very impressive piece of Iron Age metal work, made from bronze and enamel. This small bronze object is a fragment of a larger object from the Ultimate La Tene phase of the Iron Age. It was probably used for ceremonial purposes and may have served as a headdress. Small holes perforated on the band also suggest to me that it was originally stitched to leather and may have possibly been used in fertility rituals too. I believe it may have been worn as a headdress due to two linked rectangular pieces of a band at the base which may have gone around the person's head. There are two flat circular discs in each rectangle. Two concave circular discs (5 cm in diameter) are attached to the band at the base in front. There is a conical horn behind one of the discs. The horn was created by folding a sheet of bronze into a cone shape and then attaching the edge with rivets to a sheet of copper underneath. It's thought that there was originally a second cone attached to the other roundel, which may have been attached

to leather or a cloth base. The Petrie crown shows repetitive symmetrical decoration, evidence of the curvilinear La Tene style. On the roundels (concave discs) trumpet curves and spirals, which derive from the Stone Age, originate from the centre of the discs as decoration. These are stylised motifs of birds. There is a red enamel stud on the raised central boss of one disc, representing in my opinion, the eyes of the birds, however, only one remains intact. The bird head decoration on this crown are among the earliest zoo morphs found in Ireland. There are also spirals on the horn, base band and two concave discs which end in three types of stylised bird heads. The Celtic people used more advanced metalwork techniques than the people of the Bronze Age did but used the Bronze Age techniques as a base for what they developed. Enamelling is an Iron Age form of decoration, where coloured glass was heated and applied to the metal. Another technique used was chasing, a more advanced form of repousse where sheet metal was heated and placed over a moulded surface, then beaten into shape, and is evident on the Petrie Crown on the outlines of the decoration.

Named after the 19th century collector who owned it, George Petrie, it's clear that the Petrie Crown shows the thought and time that went into decorating Iron Age pieces and the great skill used. It's also very impressive to me and a prime example of the remarkable change in style that took place during the Iron Age, and how much previous eras influenced it.