

The Iron Age | Sample answer

The Petri Crown 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 Petri 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. (2015 Q1)

From around 500 BC groups of Celts from mainland Europe began to settle in Ireland. They introduced the skills of mining and working Iron. The Romans were happy to trade with Ireland and never invaded the country, resulting in Celtic culture surviving.

Iron tools and weapons were not as hard or durable as their bronze counterparts. The use of iron became more widespread after people learned how to make steel, a much harder metal, by heating iron with carbon. The remarkable change in style that took part during the Iron Age refers to the La Tene style of Celtic Art. It shows the influences of Greek and Etruscan plant motifs. The Iron Age ran between 500 BC and 400 AD.

The Petri Crown

Function

The Petri Crown was part of the personal collection of George Petri, an archaeologist and collector of antiquities of the 19th century. The function of the Petri crown is unclear. However it has been suggested that it's part of a crown or headdress. The base is a bronze band which may have been bent into a circular shape to fit the head.

Form and style

The Petri Crown consists of two concave discs mounted to a band. There is a single conical horn behind one of the discs. Originally there was a second horn that was broken and then lost. The band has four flat discs that are joined together.

Materials and Techniques

The Petri Crown is made from Bronze and enamel. Each piece was cut from a sheet of bronze. The horn is made from a piece of hammered bronze that was folded into a conical shape and the edges were riveted to an underside of copper. The designs are carved into the background and each line is carved away and smoothed so the lines appear raised.

Decoration

The discs and horn on The Petri Crown are magnificently decorated with curved trumpet shapes, some terminating in stylised birds heads. The La Tene style is used here. Red enamel was used as decoration also. Raised bosses in the centre of the disc were beaten out using repousse technique. The Petri Crown would have been decorated by highly skilled craftsmen.

The Turoe Stone

The Turoe Stone is an excellent example of stone carving from the Iron Age. It dates back to around 200 BC and can be found in County Galway. It is made from granite rock and is a curved pillar stone. A technique known as finishing involved carefully decorating and smoothing the stone to the desired size. Hard Iron tools allowed for very fine carving. It is sculpted in low relief. The design was carefully planned and divided into 4 segments. There are curvilinear La Tene decorations above the base. Decorative motifs include leaf shapes, triskeles, spirals, circles and trumpet ends. The Turoe Stone is by far the best known stone of the ritual decorated carved pillar stones. It may have marked a ritual site or a boundary.