

Celtic Art.

- Traceable back to C6th BCE in non-Mediterranean Bronze-Age Europe; they were non-literate, therefore what we know of early Celtic culture comes from Classical writers. They lived a tribal/clannish life-style with a common language and cultural traditions. They sacked Rome in 387BCE and Delphi in 279BCE before being driven back by Rome. Subsumed or pushed away to the outskirts of the Empire by Rome, and invaded by Germanic tribal traditions, they survived in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Cornwall, and the Isle of Man, where Germanic tribes failed to invade, and where Celtic Christianity developed.
- Exchanged cultural artefacts with the Classical world.
- **Hallstatt** in Austria gives its name to the 1st Celtic culture, from finds in its great cemetery. They were Iron-Age salt miners of the C6thBCE who buried valuable artefacts, such as funeral wagons and bronze couches and cauldrons, in graves.
- **La Tène** in Switzerland is the most important site of C5thBCE Celtic finds, where beautiful metalwork was discovered in Lake Neuchâtel.
- Most of the art is decoration (probably magical and symbolic) of functional objects, made for actual use or ritual offering. Many artefacts are signs of status, eg. chariots, swords, trumpets, horns and headdresses, harness fittings, brooches and mirrors, coins and torcs. The Celts were famous for vanity and ostentation. Lack of writing meant that art was an important visual language containing coded messages. Aristocratic patronage. Spread of style across Europe indicates itinerant craftsmen.
- Some artefacts are older than the graves, showing the importance and veneration of decorated objects.
- Torcs were worn by both sexes and were symbols of power and wealth. They were also used as offerings and as currency by an elite warrior class.
- East Anglia was the wealthiest part of the Celtic world during the C1stBCE.
- Symbols include very stylized human and animal forms; birds' heads; yin-yang circles; swastikas (Indo-European auspicious symbol of good fortune); and triskeles (3-armed whirligig possibly a solar symbol of rotary movement and triplism); tendrils and foliage (some plants such as mistletoe were sacred remedies); palmettes and lotuses (influence from the Mediterranean countries, possibly symbolic of the tree of life); and yew berries (representing eternity). Abstract animal or human forms are difficult to make out and were probably symbolic messages for the gods, and later, for God.
- Avoidance of narrative art. Rarity of human images except heads, possibly because of religious taboos. Heads are mask-like, stylized and expressionless, or are tiny pattern-like faces interwoven within designs. Many animals depicted are schematized fabulous beasts. Ambiguity of pattern/representation. Possible interest in liminality.
- Cernunnos, the antlered god, is the most important of the gods and goddesses, and is depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron (C1stBCE, Jutland, Denmark). Some names of gods are known because of inscriptions in Latin or Greek, and images of them are sometimes Romanised.