

# Guide to the National Museum of Ireland

## Archaeology

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National Museum of Ireland

Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

Archaeology



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*Archaeology*



## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Building and its Collections</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Exhibitions</b>	<b>8</b>
Prehistoric Ireland	8
Ór – Ireland's Gold	15
The Treasury	21
Viking Ireland	31
Medieval Ireland 1150–1550	37
Ancient Egypt	43
Ceramics and Glass from Ancient Cyprus 2500 B.C. – A.D. 300	46
Kingship & Sacrifice	48

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**Photography:** Valerie Dowling, Noreen O'Callaghan and John Searle

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## Introduction



View across the gallery  
of the centre court

The Museum of Archaeology is home to the Irish Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland which is the national repository for all archaeological objects found in Ireland. It holds in trust for the nation and the world a series of outstanding archaeological collections spanning millennia of Irish history and also holds extensive collections of non-Irish antiquities. The museum houses artefacts ranging in date from 7000 B.C. to the late medieval period and beyond. On display are prehistoric gold artefacts, metalwork from the Celtic Iron Age, Viking artefacts and medieval ecclesiastical objects and jewellery, as well as rich collections of ancient Egyptian and Cypriot material.

## The Building and its Collections

The National Museum of Ireland was founded under the Dublin Science and Art Museum Act of 1877. Previously, the museum's collections had been divided between Leinster House, originally the headquarters of the Royal Dublin Society, and the Natural History Museum in Merrion Street, built as an extension to Leinster House in 1856–7. Under the Act, the government purchased the museum buildings and collections. To provide storage and display space for the Leinster House collections, the government quickly implemented plans to construct a new, custom-built museum on Kildare Street and on 29th August 1890, the new museum opened its doors to the public.

The building, designed by Cork architects Thomas Newenham Deane and his son Thomas Manly Deane, is an architectural landmark. It is built in the Victorian Palladian style and has been compared with the Altes Museum in Berlin, designed by Karl Schinkel in the 1820s. Neo-classical influences can be seen in the colonnaded entrance and the domed rotunda, which rises to a height of 20 metres and which is modelled on the Pantheon in Rome. Within the rotunda, classical columns – made of marble quarried in Counties Cork, Kilkenny, Galway, Limerick and Armagh – mirror the entrance. In the great centre court, a balcony is supported by rows of slender cast-iron columns with elaborate capitals and with bases decorated with groups of cherubs. On the balcony, further rows of plain columns and attractive openwork spandrels support the roof.



Mosaic floor in the rotunda depicting the signs of the zodiac.

The interior is decorated richly with motifs that recall the civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome. Splendid mosaic floors depict scenes from classical mythology, among which the zodiac design in the rotunda is especially popular with visitors. Particularly lavish are the majolica fireplaces and door surrounds manufactured by Burmantofts Pottery of Leeds, England, and the richly carved wooden doors by William Milligan of Dublin and Carlo Cambi of Siena, Italy.

The building is faced with Leinster granite, while sandstone from Mount Charles, County Donegal is used in the entrance colonnade, on the upper storey and to highlight doors and windows. Dublin sculptor Thomas Farrell was commissioned to produce the sculptural detail on the facade and roof in the form of statuary groups, single figures and urns, but the work was curtailed for reasons of cost. In recent years, the exterior stonework, some of the mosaic floors and a number of the majolica door and fireplace surrounds have been restored.



Wooden door panel carved by Carlo Cambi of Siena, Italy.

Based on core collections assembled in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Royal Dublin Society and the Royal Irish Academy, the archaeological collections have been augmented considerably over the last hundred years. The National Museum is responsible for the portable archaeological heritage of Ireland, and legislation enacted over the years has developed the role of the museum in relation to all aspects of Irish archaeology, including excavation, conservation, underwater archaeology and export control. The museum's role in relation to local museums has also grown considerably. The collection and its archive constitute a national database of archaeological information that is an indispensable resource for the study of Irish civilisation.

## The Exhibitions



The earliest artefact found in Ireland is a flint flake from Mell, Co. Louth. It could date to as early as 400,000 B.C.

### Prehistoric Ireland

No clear evidence has yet emerged to demonstrate the presence of humankind in Ireland during the Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) period, a time during which much of Ireland was covered by ice sheets. A flint flake from gravel deposits at Mell, near Drogheda, County Louth, is the earliest known artefact found in Ireland. Fashioned elsewhere, perhaps between 300,000 and 400,000 B.C., it was deposited subsequently by an ice sheet near the Irish coast. From around 12,000 B.C., the ice sheets melted and wood-lands developed, providing a habitat for wildlife that migrated to Ireland via land bridges from Britain and mainland Europe. By around 7000 B.C., the earliest Irish settlers were hunting animals, especially wild pigs, gathering wild plants and shellfish, and fishing in lakes, rivers and the sea.



Polished stone spearhead from Cloonarragh, Co. Roscommon.



Javelin head of chert found in a bog at Kellysgrove, Co. Galway.



Axe of jadeite from Paslickstown, Co. Westmeath, an exotic import from alpine Italy probably reserved for ceremonial use.

Excavation of the earliest settlements in Ireland has produced tiny blades and points of flint and chert, called microliths that were used in composite harpoon-like implements. Scrapers and stone axes were also utilised. By around 4500 B.C., larger flake implements called Bann flakes (so-called because many were found on the shores of the River Bann in the north of Ireland) replaced earlier forms, and polished spearheads of slate or mudstone appeared.



A log boat from Addergoole Bog, Lurgan, Co. Galway. Acquired in 1902, it created more than passing interest on its arrival at the museum.



Decorated flint mace head from Knowth, Co. Meath, one of the earliest artistic masterpieces from Ireland.

By around 3700 B.C., the first farming settlements had been established. Farming was based on imported domesticated cattle, sheep and goats, and on cereals such as wheat and barley. Flint-bladed sickles were used to harvest grain that was ground to flour on saddle querns. The farmers lived in rectangular timber houses, and household goods included pottery bowls used for storage and cooking, while flint javelin heads, arrowheads, blades, knives and scrapers were used for a range of functions. Factories for the quarrying and production of stone axes are known. Some axes may have had ceremonial functions, while the wearing of axe amulets and the deposition of axes in burials would appear to confirm their important status.

Food Vessels (from left), Danesfort, Co. Kilkenny; Stonepark, Co. Mayo; Greenhills, Co. Dublin; and Lisnamulligan, Co. Donegal. Early Bronze Age.



Three cinerary urns (from left), Gortereghy, Co. Antrim; Ballycastle, Co. Antrim; and Ballyconnell, Co. Wicklow. Early to Middle Bronze Age.





Top Right: Halberd from Greaghnafarna, Co. Leitrim and dagger from Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Early Bronze Age.

Top left: Spearhead found near Maghera, Co. Derry. Late Bronze Age. Bronze rapier, Lissan, Co. Derry. Middle Bronze Age.



Megalithic (large stone) tombs such as portal tombs, court tombs and passage tombs were used for communal burial. A reconstructed passage tomb is displayed that incorporates decorated stones from several ruined tombs; however, the precise significance of the decorative motifs on these stones has been lost. Pottery, mace heads, small polished stone balls, beads, amulets and pendants were deposited ritually with the dead, along with phallic-shaped stones and bone pins that may have been associated with fertility rituals. Towards the end of the Neolithic (New Stone Age) period, circular ceremonial enclosures were built of earth and wood, while flat-based pottery and a new form of flint arrowhead made their appearance. The oldest intact Irish vessel is a huge logboat from Addergoole Bog, Lurgan, County Galway, hollowed out from the trunk of an oak tree around 2500 B.C. It was around this time that the knowledge of metalworking was introduced to Ireland, together with a distinctive type of pottery called Beaker Ware that, all over Europe, is found in association with early metalworking. Ceramic bowls, sometimes with projecting feet, are also known, as are similar vessels carved from wood.

At Mount Gabriel, County Cork, a wooden pick, shovel, stone mauls and tapers of resinous wood to provide light were among the equipment found in mines dated to the Early Bronze Age. The earliest metal objects produced in Ireland were flat axes of pure copper that could be cast easily in single-piece stone moulds and hardened by hammering. Later, these were replaced with two-piece stone moulds, allowing for the making of tools and weapons of increasing complexity. A further development was the process of mixing copper with tin to produce bronze. Other products included knives, daggers, sickles, awls, spearheads, razors and halberds (a dagger-like blade attached to a long wooden pole).



Cast bronze sword, Ballyharney, Co. Westmeath. Late Bronze Age.



End-blown trumpet, Drumbest, Co. Antrim, and side-blown trumpet, Derrynane, Co. Kerry. Late Bronze Age.

The earliest metal-smiths were buried in megalithic monuments known as wedge tombs, but around 2200 B.C. these began to be replaced by separate burials of one or more persons either in simple pits or in stone-lined graves known as cists that are sometimes found clustered in cemeteries. In keeping with earlier burial practices, the remains were cremated, but in a new development, unburnt bodies were also interred, usually in a crouched position. Highly decorated pots known as Food Vessels and – very occasionally – other personal possessions accompanied the dead.

Gradually, cremation became popular once more, and the burnt bones were placed in large decorated pots called urns, which were inverted in the graves. Different types of urns – Vase, Encrusted, Collared and Cordoned – were used, and in some cases, Food Vessels and tiny vessels called Incense Cups were placed with them, accompanied occasionally by daggers, beads, pins and ceremonial stone battleaxes.



Bronze cauldron from Castleterg, Co. Tyrone. Late Bronze Age.



From about 1200 B.C., climatic deterioration and other factors resulted in a period of development and innovation. The dead were cremated and sometimes placed in undecorated urns, often buried at the centre of small ring ditches. Metal-smiths made spearheads, rapiers, axes of a type known as palstaves and a range of smaller tools.

After 900 B.C. the production of large numbers of weapons, especially swords, and the deposition of hoards suggest a period of violence and uncertainty. Other weapons and tools were produced including shields, cauldrons, spears and axes as well as tools such as chisels, gouges, punches, tweezers, sickles and knives. Bronze horns were cast in moulds and these are among the oldest known musical instruments from Ireland. Crude, coarsely-made pottery was used for cooking, storage and as containers for the cremated bones of the dead. Wooden trackways were constructed across bogs, and at Doogarrymore, County Roscommon, two wooden wheels from a cart used in the fourth century B.C. were found in association with such a trackway.

Top Right: Five gold bands from Belville, Co. Cavan. Early Bronze Age (2300–2100 B.C.).



Bottom Right: Pair of Early Bronze Age gold discs from Tedavnet, Co. Monaghan.



### Ór – Ireland's Gold

The National Museum of Ireland's collection of Bronze Age gold work is one of the largest and most important in Western Europe. The earliest objects were produced between 2200 and 1800 B.C. from gold that was probably acquired from river gravels and worked into thin sheets by hammering. These were of two types: convex discs, sometimes found in matching pairs, and crescent-shaped neck ornaments known as lunulae. The discs are decorated with concentric rows of dots, crosses, triangles and zigzags, and the presence of a pair of central perforations suggests that they were attached to a garment and were worn on special occasions.



Above Left: Two gold torcs found at Tara, Co. Meath. Middle Bronze Age.



Above Right: Gold lunula from Rossmore Park, Co. Monaghan

Right: Gold dress-fastener, found near Clones, Co. Monaghan. Late Bronze Age.



The lunula with spade-shaped terminals set at right angles to the plane of the crescent is the most characteristic gold object of the Irish Early Bronze Age. More than one hundred are known from Western Europe, of which more than eighty have been found in Ireland. Incised or punched decoration is normally confined to the horns and the inner and outer edges. This consists usually of fields of simple geometric patterns and can be compared with decoration found on pottery of the period such as Beaker Ware and Bowl Food Vessels, as well as with that found on certain flat bronze axes and kite-shaped spearheads. Lunulae have been classified into three groups designated as Classical, Unaccomplished and Provincial, of which the Provincial type may be of foreign manufacture, but based on Irish prototypes. Other early Irish gold artefacts include a pair of basket-shaped earrings that, like some of the discs, can be compared with similar finds from Beaker burials in Britain. A small number of bracelets, and decorated gold bands and plaques are also known.



Top Right: Hoard of gold ornaments from Derrinboy, Co. Offaly. The neck ornament is made of gold wire wrapped around a leather thong.

Top Left: Hoard of gold ornaments including two dress-fasteners, a bracelet and four ear-spoons from Ballinesker, Co. Wexford. one incomplete. Late Bronze Age.

Right: Two Late Bronze Age ornaments made of gold foil-covered lead. The objects, which are unlocalised, are finely decorated and may have been used as ear ornaments.



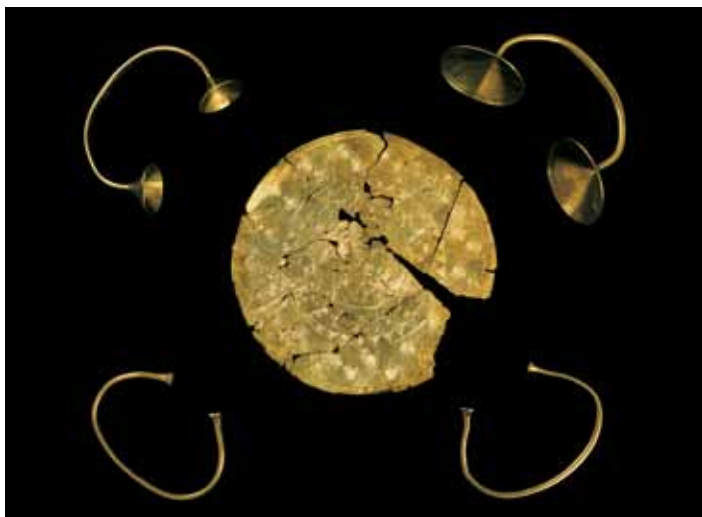
Around 1200 B.C., new gold-working techniques were developed and new styles began to appear. Ornaments made from sheet gold continued to be made, such as a pair of armllets and rings used as hair ornaments from Derrinboy, County Offaly. However, the use of gold bars, either plain or with hammered raised edges, was an important development. Multi-faceted neck ornaments, earrings and bracelets were produced by twisting thin strips of gold sheet and gold bars.



Above Right: Hoard containing a decorated disc, two dress-fasteners and two bracelets, found at Lattoo, Co. Cavan. Late Bronze Age.

Above Left: Bronze rings and necklace of imported amber, probably from the Baltic, Tooradoo, Co. Limerick. Late Bronze Age.

Right: Part of the hoard of gold ornaments found in 1854 in Mooghaun North, Co. Clare, known as the 'Great Clare find'. Late Bronze Age.



The Late Bronze Age – after around 850 B.C. – was an extremely productive period, noted for the highly developed technical skills of metalworkers and for the range and variety of high-quality gold work. The artefacts produced fall into two main categories. Solid objects that were cast or made from bars and ingots, such as bracelets, dress-fasteners and neck-rings, contrast with collars or gorgets, ear spools and discs made of sheet gold. Gold wire was also used in a number of ways, but especially to produce a type of hair ornament known as a lock-ring. Thin gold foil, sometimes highly decorated, was used to cover objects made of other metals such as copper, bronze or lead.



Gold gorget, Gleninsheen, Co. Clare, one of the finest of its type to have been discovered. Late Bronze Age.

A variety of techniques were used to produce many different decorative motifs, including arrangements of geometric patterns, concentric circles, raised, domed or conical bosses, and rope and herringbone patterns. The deposition of hoards of objects is a characteristic of the Late Bronze Age in Ireland. Several hoards of gold ornaments are known, while others contain a mixture of gold and bronze objects and may sometimes also contain necklaces of amber beads. The number of spectacular discoveries from bogs suggests that the people of the Bronze Age regarded them as special places. During the eighteenth century a large number of bronze and gold objects were found during turf cutting over a period of about seventy years in the Bog of Cullen in County Tipperary. A large hoard of gold ornaments found in marshy ground close to a lake at Mooghaun North, County Clare, in 1854 contained more than 150 objects weighing over 5 kilos. The hoard consisted mostly of bracelets but also included at least six gold collars and two neck-rings. Unfortunately, the majority were melted down soon after discovery.

Hoard of gold ornaments, Gorteenreagh, Co. Clare, consisting of a gorget, two hair ornaments called lock-rings, an ear ornament and two bracelets. Late Bronze Age.



Group of ornaments known as bullae, possibly worn as pendants. (From Left) Bog of Allen, Co. Kildare; Arboe Killycolpy, Co. Tyrone; River Bann, Co. Antrim; Kinnegoe, Co. Armagh; no locality, Ireland. Late Bronze Age.



Among the more dramatic gold ornaments of the Late Bronze Age are large collars known as gorgets, made mainly from sheet gold, that would have been worn on the breast. Among the other showy items worn as objects of prestige were large ear spoons that would have been inserted into ear lobes specially perforated and stretched for the purpose. Small penannular rings, known as ring-money, may in fact have been ornaments for the ears or nose. A set of eleven large graduated hollow spheres with lateral perforations from Tumna, County Roscommon, were once strung together to form a necklace, while a variety of gold bracelets, pins, dress- and sleeve-fasteners would have been among the personal ornaments worn by powerful and wealthy members of Irish society during the Late Bronze Age.



Above: Hoard of gold objects from Broighter, Co. Derry. Iron Age.

Right: Bronze trumpet from Loughnashade, Co. Armagh. Iron Age.



## The Treasury

Inspired by the great church treasuries of medieval Europe, the Treasury houses outstanding religious and secular metalwork and sculpture dating from the pagan Celtic Iron Age through to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond.

The Iron Age gallery displays outstanding bronze and gold metalwork that provides a backdrop to the later developments of the Christian era. The centuries between 500 and 300 B.C. appear to have been times of cultural stagnation in Ireland, although this was the period during which the continental Hallstatt culture evolved into the mature phase of the European Iron Age known as the La Tène culture. The classic Celtic La Tène art style is named after a site in Switzerland where it was first recognised during the nineteenth century. The style was developed in eastern France and the Rhineland during the fifth century B.C. as a result of classical influences on the native peoples of central Europe, who came into contact with the Greeks and Etruscans through the medium of trade. It is a highly stylised curvilinear art based mainly on classical plant motifs.

During the third century B.C. imported objects bearing La Tène decoration appeared in Ireland, for example the two gold collars made in the Rhineland, which were deposited in a bog at Ardnaglug, County Roscommon. Native production of a range of objects ornamented with a local version of the style followed quickly, and this coincided with the widespread adoption of an iron-working technology, the techniques of which appear to have been fully assimilated by around the time of Christ. By the second century B.C., Celtic objects manufactured in Ireland, such as decorated sword scabbards, had immediate stylistic antecedents on the Continent.



Above: Bronze spearhead found in a bog at Boho, Co. Fermanagh. Iron Age.



Right: Three-faced stone head, Drumeague, Corleck, Co. Cavan. Iron Age.

By the first century B.C., Celtic craftsmen in Ireland were producing objects of exceptional quality – mainly personal ornaments and weapons – that may have been influenced by stylistic traditions found in Britain.

The sumptuously ornamented gold collar from Brougher, County Derry is displayed along with other neck ornaments and models of a boat and a cauldron found with it. These objects may have been deposited as offerings to the Celtic sea god Manannán Mac Lir. Displayed nearby are weapons, brooches, armlets, mounts, horse-bits and the great bronze trumpet from Loughnashade, County Armagh. Together, these suggest the existence of an aristocratic warrior society in which chariots were used for display and warfare. Some of the neck ornaments in the Brougher hoard are of Roman manufacture, and the exhibition contains a number of other Roman finds from Ireland, including figurines, coins, jewellery and a hoard containing silver ingots and chopped up silver tableware from Balline, County Limerick.



Roman silver ingots and cut tableware, Balline, Co. Limerick. Late fourth century A.D.

Christianity was introduced to Ireland mainly from Roman Britain during the fifth century A.D. As a result new object types associated with the Church such as chalices, patens and containers for the enshrinement of books and relics provided a whole range of objects for adornment by Irish craftsmen. In the centuries that followed, Irish monks travelled to Britain and to the Continent to reintroduce Christianity into areas overrun by pagan tribes following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Exposure to new influences meant that new styles and technical skills were acquired from a variety of sources such as the Anglo-Saxons and Franks as well as from the late Roman classical world. These styles and skills were added to the repertoire of Irish Celtic designs and techniques.



Zoomorphic penannular brooches, one unlocalised, the other from Arthurstown, Co. Kildare. Fifth or sixth century A.D.

The most outstanding item of secular metalwork of the early medieval period is the silver-gilt brooch known as the 'Tara' Brooch, which is remarkable for the sumptuousness and variety of its decoration and for the detail and quality of its workmanship. The front of the brooch displays animal and plain interlace patterns executed in gold filigree wire, as well as cast birds and animals, and settings for amber and glass. The reverse has cast and inlaid decoration in the Ultimate La Tène style, as well as some glass and amber settings. The pinhead of this eighth-century masterpiece is also decorated on both faces. A knitted silver wire attached to a hinged cast animal head was used to safeguard the brooch when worn. The brooch appears to have been lost close to the shore at Bettystown, County Meath, where it lay until its discovery in the nineteenth century. So splendid and delicate is the workmanship that it was assumed to have been associated with one of the kings of Tara (a site situated some 29 km to the west of its find place) – hence the popular name of the brooch.



Above: Carved stone pillar bearing a cross and an ogham inscription, found in a churchyard at Aghlish, Co. Kerry. Fifth or sixth century A.D.

Above Right: Belt reliquary, found in a bog at Moylough, Co. Sligo. Eighth century A.D.



Centrally placed within the Treasury are some of the best-known ecclesiastical treasures of the eighth- and ninth-century Golden Age, including the Ardagh Chalice, the Derrynaflan Chalice and Paten, and the Moylough Belt Shrine. The Ardagh hoard, from County Limerick, was found in 1868 by a youth digging potatoes in a ringfort where the treasure may have been concealed from raiding Vikings in the ninth or tenth century. The objects found included a large decorated silver chalice, a smaller plain bronze chalice and four silver-gilt brooches. The chalices date to the eighth century, while the brooches probably date to the ninth. The silver chalice is a native rendering of a type known from the eastern Mediterranean at a slightly earlier time. Particular attention was paid to ornamenting the rim, stem and handles by means of a variety of decorative techniques, including the use of glass studs with silver inlays, gold filigree panels and cast interlace and curvilinear designs. There are two decorated roundels on the bowl, while the base of the chalice, which would have been seen during the elevation of the wine, is also highly ornate, its overall design being centred on a polished conical crystal. Beneath the rim is a Latin inscription listing the names of the apostles.



Above Left: Gold brooch, known as the Dalriada brooch, found at Loughan, Co. Derry. Ninth century A.D.



Above Right: Back of the 'Tara' brooch. Eighth century A.D.

Like the Ardagh find, the hoard from Derrynaflan, County Tipperary, may also have been concealed during the Viking Age, possibly during the early tenth century. In much of its decorative details, the Derrynaflan Paten is comparable to the Ardagh Chalice and may be a product of the same workshop. Dating a century later than the paten, the Derrynaflan Chalice is less ornate than its counterpart from Ardagh. While the decorative scheme is similar, the elaborate coloured glass and silver inlaid studs of the Ardagh Chalice have been replaced on the Derrynaflan vessel by plainer studs of amber. A decorated strainer-ladle made around the same time as the paten was also part of the Derrynaflan hoard and was probably used for symbolic purification of the Eucharistic wine.



Hoard containing two chalices and four gilt silver brooches found in Reerasta ringfort near Ardagh, Co. Limerick. It was probably concealed around the year 900 A.D.

The Tully Lough cross displayed nearby was found close to the edge of a small crannóg (lake dwelling) in County Roscommon. Made by Irish craftsmen in the eighth or ninth century, this outstanding cross consists of decorated gilt bronze plaques and tinned bronze sheets over a wooden core. Also displayed are a small, decorated metal bucket from a crannóg in Clooneenbaun, County Roscommon, and two wooden buckets with ornate metal mounts from Clonard, County Meath, and Derrymullen, County Laois, of a type that appears to have been used on high-status secular sites, as well as on monastic sites. The Moylough belt shrine, found in a bog in 1945, contains a leather belt that was a relic associated with an unknown early saint. The belts or girdles of saints were regarded as potent relics having miraculous properties, and they were believed to be particularly effective in relation to problems of childbirth. Small tomb-shaped shrines were used as containers for the bones of saints, and the remains of a number of such shrines are displayed, along with two relatively complete examples found in the River Shannon and in Lough Erne. Perhaps serving the same purpose is a small stone reliquary inside of which was a small wooden box found at the monastery of Dromiskin, County Louth.



Hoard of ecclesiastical metalwork consists of a chalice, a paten with its stand, a strainer/ladle and a large bronze bowl used to cover the concealed objects in a pit. Derrynaflan, Co. Tipperary. Eighth or ninth century A.D.

A collection of mounts decorated in the Ultimate La Tène style from Donore, County Meath, are likely to be from a larger tomb-shaped reliquary. Among larger objects that display the art of the monastic stoneworkers are carved slabs from Inishkea North, County Mayo, and Carrowntemple, County Sligo, a pillar stone from Aghlish, County Kerry, and a cross shaft from Banagher, County Offaly. The Aghlish stone is carved with an inscription in Ogham characters, a uniquely Irish script which preserves the earliest form of the Irish language.



Above Left: Gilt bronze crucifixion plaque found in a churchyard, St John's Church, Rinnagan, Co. Roscommon. Eighth century A.D.

Above Right: Silver brooch with gold filigree inlays found at Killamery, Co. Kilkenny. Ninth century A.D.



The arrival of the Vikings at the end of the eighth century marked the beginning of a period in which monasteries were attacked and many church treasures looted or destroyed. However, the Vikings were traders as well as raiders, and their commercial activities brought large amounts of silver into Ireland, some of which was buried in the ground for safekeeping. The Vikings also introduced new types of objects and novel art styles, which led to developments in native metalwork and in the decorative arts. The easy availability of silver during the ninth and tenth centuries led to new fashions in brooch design, with bossed-penannular, thistle and kite-brooches being popular forms.

Viking art styles were widely employed on church metalwork during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Notable examples include the croziers from Clonmacnoise, County Offaly and Lismore, County Waterford, the shrine of St Lachtin's Arm and the Shrine of St Patrick's Bell, constructed around 1100 under the patronage of Domhnall Ua Lochlainn, king of Ireland, to house the bell of St Patrick, kept at Armagh. The twelfth century was a time of change for the Irish Church, and a number of reforms were implemented whereby a diocesan structure under the primacy of Armagh was confirmed, the power of the abbots was checked, and monasteries were eventually taken over by foreign orders.





Top Left: Reliquary known as the shrine of St Lachtin's Arm, Donaghmore, Co. Cork. Made around 1120 A.D.

Top Right: Crozier traditionally associated with the abbots of Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly. Eleventh century A.D.



Female exhibitionist figures known as sheela na gigs dating to the end of the Middle Ages are often associated with churches founded by the continental orders – of the two examples on display, one is associated with a Dominican friary in Clonmel, County Tipperary, and the other with an Augustinian foundation at Seir Kieran, County Offaly.

The Treasury also includes a rare collection of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century costumes found in bogs; leather shoes along with jackets, hats, a cloak, trousers and a dress, all made of wool. Although the costumes are in a remarkable state of preservation, the original colours of the textiles have been stained brown by the peat.



Top Left: Viking sword found on a crannóg at Ballinderry, Co. Westmeath. Ninth century A.D.

Top Right: Weights associated with balance beams and weighing pans from a Viking cemetery at Islandbridge, Dublin. Ninth century A.D.



### Viking Ireland

Although the Treasury includes a number of Viking objects, this exhibition on the first floor deals in greater detail with the Viking Age in Ireland. The first recorded Viking raids on Ireland took place in A.D. 795, when islands off the north and west coasts were plundered. Later on, Viking fleets appeared on the major river systems, and fortified bases for more extensive raiding are mentioned from about A.D. 840. The principal targets of Viking raiders were the monasteries, which could supply loot and slaves. Among the exhibits on display is a replica of a Viking fishing vessel that is similar in most respects to larger Viking warships. The original was found with a larger vessel in a boat burial at Gokstad, Norway. Timbers from Viking ships have been found in Ireland, as have sketches of ships on planks, model or toy ships in wood and lead fishing weights in the shape of ships.

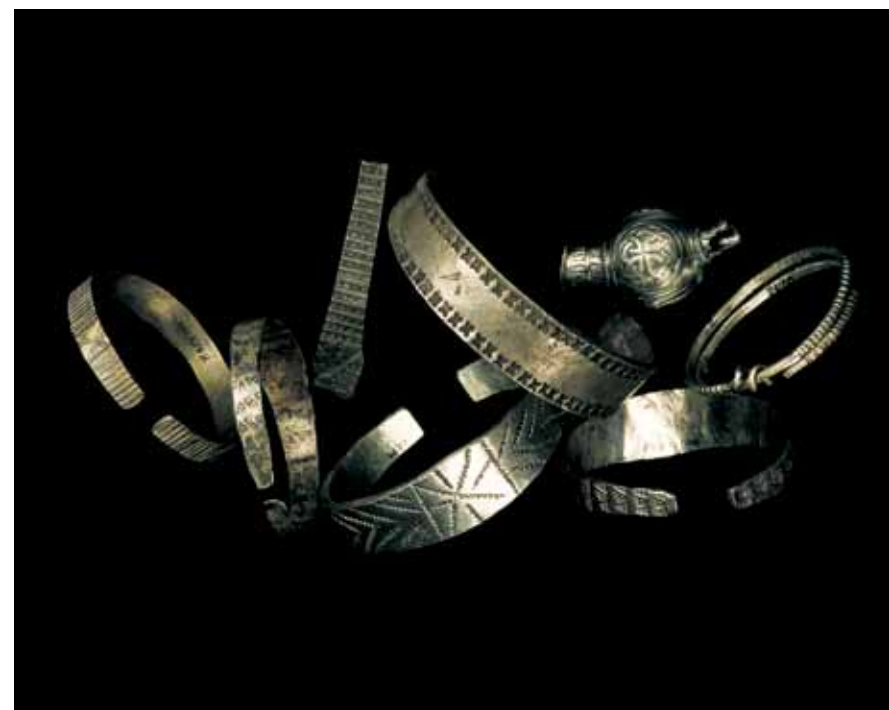


Reconstruction of the Viking town at Dublin as it would have looked around the year 1000 A.D.

Ninth-century pagan Viking burials at Kilmainham and Islandbridge, Dublin, contained the personal possessions of the deceased. Warriors were interred with long swords of a type vastly superior to native Irish swords, and the presence of weights, scales, purses, tongs and hammers suggests that some of the dead were merchants and blacksmiths. Oval brooches of typical Viking type worn in pairs by women have been discovered alongside other finds such as a whalebone 'ironing board', spindle whorls and bronze needle case, demonstrating that Scandinavian women were also buried in the cemetery.



Objects of amber, carved wood and gold from excavations at the Viking town of Dublin. Fragments of porphyry brought back as religious souvenirs from Rome indicate that the pagan Vikings soon converted to Christianity.



Silver arm rings were manufactured in the Viking settlements in Ireland during the ninth and tenth centuries A.D.



Top Left: Carved wooden crook, from Fishamble Street, Dublin. Eleventh century A.D.



Top Right: Wooden gaming board, Ballinderry, Co. Westmeath. Tenth century A.D.

While towns were established by Viking settlers in the tenth century, Irish society was overwhelmingly rural, and a mixed farming economy was practised in the countryside. Ballinderry crannog, Co. Westmeath, the homestead of a prosperous Irish noble, provides a picture of life in a rural settlement between the late ninth and early eleventh centuries. A Viking sword obtained by trade or as loot is the finest surviving example from Ireland. It has a silver-mounted handle and an elaborate pattern-welded blade inlaid with the name of the sword-maker VLFBEHRT, whose blades were exported from the Rhineland during the Viking Age. Other exceptional objects from the same site include a silver kite-brooch, a bronze hanging bowl, a wooden bow and a decorated wooden gaming board that may have been used to play the Viking war game Hnefatafl. Most finds from Ballinderry and other native sites reflect everyday activity and include tools used in spinning, weaving and sewing, shoes and other leather items, and tools and utensils of wood, iron and bronze.



Top left: A range of silver brooches and arm rings made by Irish and Viking craftsmen. Ninth and tenth centuries.

Top Right: Silver kite-brooch, one of two found near Limerick. Early tenth century A.D.



Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford and Cork trace their origins to the Vikings. New trade routes into the rich markets of Byzantium and Muslim central and western Asia were opened up by Viking traders, who amassed silver coins and bullion that were melted down later to make a variety of brooches and arm-rings. The range of personal ornaments found in Dublin reflects the wealth and trade contacts of the city, which produced objects of amber, glass, jet, bronze, silver and gold. Bronze ringed pins and stickpins were produced in great numbers in Dublin, where high-quality metalworking was concentrated in the Christchurch Place area. The discovery of motif-pieces adjacent to this area shows that the production of these patterns was in some way related to metalworking activity.

Houses in Viking Age Dublin had walls of post-and-wattle which were probably daubed with cow dung or mud. Wood was used in house construction, shipbuilding and furniture making, and was also used to make domestic utensils such as bowls, plates, cups and barrels, in addition to toys and board games. Wooden handles were fashioned for iron tools made by local blacksmiths, who also made hinges, hasps, locks, keys and harness fittings, while implements such as shovels and weavers' swords were sometimes made of wood.



Top Left: The Cross of Cong, made to enshrine a relic of the True Cross, obtained in 1122 by the high-king, Turlough O'Connor.



Top Right: Thistle brooch, found at Celbridge, Co. Kildare. Tenth century A.D.

By the end of the tenth century the Vikings in Ireland had adopted Christianity, and with the fusion of cultures it is often difficult to distinguish between Viking and Irish artefacts at this time. The term Hiberno-Norse is used to describe the culture of the inhabitants of the Viking towns in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Irish art was strongly influenced by the late Viking Ringerike and Urnes styles, present on ecclesiastical metalwork of the period such as crosiers, bell shrines and book shrines. Important reliquaries of the twelfth century include the Cross of Cong, a processional cross made in the 1120s by order of the high-king of Ireland Turlough O'Connor to contain a relic of the True Cross.



Gold ring brooch with inlaid studs found in Marlborough Street, Dublin. Thirteenth or fourteenth century A.D.



Gold finger ring set with an antique gem showing a running hare. Found at Castletown Mount, Co. Louth. Twelfth or thirteenth century A.D.

### Medieval Ireland 1150–1550

This exhibition focuses on the later Middle Ages in Ireland, a period that is defined effectively by two ecclesiastical processes – the Church reform movement of the mid-twelfth century and the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century. It is the period during which the English invaded and partly colonised Ireland, resulting in the existence of two cultures on the island, each with its own language, laws, social system and agricultural practices, out of which a hybrid Anglo-Irish culture developed during the later Middle Ages. In a wider context, much of the material on display illustrates lifestyles, trades and activities that were common to much of medieval Europe.



Pottery jug from High Street, Dublin, made in Bristol. Thirteenth century A.D.



Left: Whalebone book cover, Donabate, Co. Dublin. Sixteenth century A.D.



Right: Drinking horn known as the Kavanagh Charter Horn, symbolic of the kingship of Leinster. Twelfth and fifteenth century A.D.

A contemporary view of medieval European society divided it into three categories – *bellatores* (those who fight), *oratores* (those who pray) and *laboratores* (those who work). While such a scheme clearly does not adequately describe the complexity of medieval Irish society, it provides a useful template for the exhibition, which is divided into three galleries, titled 'Power', 'Prayer' and 'Work'.

'Power' deals with the nobility, both Irish and Anglo-Irish, who ruled medieval society in Ireland. Kingship and lordship in Irish and English cultures are examined, and the roles of music, poetry, games, hunting and hospitality in courtly life are highlighted. Jewellery and other items of personal adornment used by noble and affluent men and women are displayed, as are treasures associated with important aristocratic families. These include the eleventh-century Breac Maodhóg shrine associated with the O'Reilly lords of East Bréifne, the Kavanagh Charter Horn, a symbol of the Gaelic kingship of Leinster and a sixteenth-century book cover from Donabate, County Dublin, made from whalebone and bearing the coat of arms of the Fitzgerald earls of Desmond. There is also a fine display of late medieval swords and axes that highlights the unique characteristics of medieval Irish warfare.



Two 13th century silver-inlaid iron 'gallowglass' axes from Ballina, Co. Mayo and Co. Donegal. During the Middle Ages, Irish warriors were adept at the use of the battleaxe as the main weapon of choice.



Two silver drinking bowls found at Taughmon, Co. Westmeath, imported from southern England or Germany. Thirteenth century A.D.



Sword of Irish type with a distinctive ring-shaped pommel. Early sixteenth century A.D.



Ivory chess piece showing a queen seated on a throne, found in a bog in Co. Meath. Late twelfth century A.D.



Wooden drinking vessel of uniquely Irish type called a meth. Made between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D.



Enameled copper crozier head made in Limoges, France found at Cashel, Co. Tipperary. Mid thirteenth century A.D.



Top Left: Ivory plaque showing the Crucifixion. Found at Thomas Street, Dublin. Fourteenth century A.D.



Top Right: Bell, processional cross and candlestick found in a quarry at Sheephouse, Co. Meath. Early sixteenth century A.D.

'Prayer' explores the dominant features of religious life during the Middle Ages in Ireland, in particular the fundamental changes that took place in the organisational structure of the Church and the introduction of new monastic orders. Many practices of the older Church tradition survived, however, especially in areas outside English control, and this is strongly reflected in the important collection of shrines and reliquaries on display. The exhibition features most of the surviving medieval Irish shrines and reliquaries, most of which are associated with Irish saints. These include a number of book shrines: the Domhnach Airgid, the Cathach, the Miosach and the Stowe Missal; bell shrines: St Senan's Bell and the Corp Naomh, as well as the shrine of St Patrick's Tooth and the Mias Tighearnáin. The latter is a dish-shaped reliquary, perhaps made to hold a relic of St John the Baptist. Also on display are wooden statues from Fethard, County Tipperary, and Askeaton, County Limerick, and a magnificent fifteenth-century embroidered cope from Waterford.



Many important Irish reliquaries such as the shrine of the *Cathach* were re-embellished by Irish lords during the high Middle Ages. Of 11th century workmanship and redecorated in the 14th century the shrine encased a book associated with St. Colmcille.

'Work' focuses on secular, non-noble society, with particular emphasis on economic and social life. Separate sections deal with the agricultural practices of the countryside and with the life of towns, which became a widespread feature of the Irish landscape for the first time in this period. A large part of the gallery is devoted to the tools and products of medieval crafts and trades, both urban and rural, drawing largely on material that has come to light as a result of recent archaeological excavations. Among the highlights of this gallery are a large metal basin from Geashill, County Offaly. Other notable exhibits include a part of one of the earliest spectacle frames in northern Europe, a striking display of medieval pottery, a reconstructed section of a fourteenth-century tiled floor and an inscribed oak beam from a late sixteenth-century house in Drogheda, County Louth.

## Ancient Egypt

The Egyptian collection of the National Museum of Ireland comprises about three thousand objects ranging in date from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages, the majority acquired from excavations carried out in Egypt between the 1890s and the 1920s. The finest and most important objects are exhibited to provide an introduction to ancient Egypt.

By 5000 B.C. farming was established in the different regions of Egypt. Before 3200 B.C., formal art and hieroglyphic writing were developed, and the earliest texts already indicate that a single king controlled the unified 'Two Lands' of the Nile Valley and the Delta. The river Nile linked the two parts of the kingdom, and its importance as a communications route is indicated by a model Nile boat, complete with its crew of twenty oarsmen, from Beni Hasan that dates to around 1900 B.C.

Egyptian hieroglyphic script was used for inscriptions and sacred manuscripts until the conversion to Christianity in the fourth century A.D. Although awkward for writing other languages, it was an extremely efficient vehicle for the Egyptian language, which contained many groups of similar-sounding words. The script operates on the principle that signs may represent objects, ideas or sounds. A hieroglyphic inscription enables us to identify one of the most important objects on exhibition, which is a red granite offering table of King Senwosret III, who reigned between around 1874 and 1855 B.C.

Egypt possessed abundant natural resources, such as hard and soft stones and a variety of minerals. Copper was the most commonly used metal until the beginning of the New Kingdom in about 1550 B.C., when tin bronze became more available. The eastern deserts supplied gold and a colourful range of semi-precious stones. Jewellery worn by both men and women was made from silver, imported from the area of modern Greece and Turkey, and lapis lazuli which came from central Asia. The materials used and the styles changed over time, with major innovations occurring in the New Kingdom, c. 1550–1069 B.C. Semi-precious stones were imitated in coloured faience and glass paste. The exhibition contains an impressive range of jewellery made from a variety of materials, including gold, calcite, carnelian, amethyst, faience, shell and bone.

A group of cosmetic containers, a palette and grinder for preparing eyeliner and containers to store it, as well as bronze tweezers, mirrors and a razor, highlight the importance of personal appearance to the ancient Egyptians. Scented oils obtained from local trees or imported



Gold finger rings with images on religious themes. 1550 – 1295 B.C.



Calcite canopic jar of General Ptahirdis. Fourth Century B.C.



Top Left: Mummy coffin of the lady Tentdinebu, probably from Thebes. 945 – 716 B.C.

Top Right: Necklace of faience and carnelian from Thebes. After 700 B.C.

Bottom Left: Wooden kneeling figure. 664 – 525 B.C.

Bottom Right: Faience amulet of Sekhmet. Dated 1069 – 664 B.C.

from Asia were used on the body, while the principal cosmetic, used by both sexes, was eyeliner. Cosmetic containers are frequently found in burials, marking their importance in this life and the next.

Egyptian religion revolved around the sun god Ra, the source of life. At the moment of creation, his original form, Atum – 'all matter' – divided into different sections of the universe. Gods and goddesses embodied either broad elements of this world (for example, Nut, the sky goddess) or relations within it (such as the healing goddess, Isis, Sekhmet, goddess of fury, and Hathor, goddess of love). Each temple housed an image that was an earthly body for the spirit of the deity. Among the images on display are depictions of Osiris, king of the dead, Isis, goddess of healing and her son Horus.

Belief in life after death centred on the god Osiris, king of the dead, and Ra, the sun god. The dead dwelt safely with Osiris in his underworld so that their spirit might travel eternally through the sky with Ra. Survival depended on uniting body and spirit and keeping the body intact in the ground. To prevent the body from rotting, the Egyptians developed techniques of mummification that were perfected by around 1000 B.C. Following mummification, the body was anointed, stuffed and wrapped in layers of linen cloths. The mummy and coffin of the lady Tentdinebu illustrate the funerary arts of Egypt at its peak, in Thebes during the early first millennium B.C. Later mummies and coffins are also displayed, including that from Hawara, which dates to the second century A.D. and features a lifelike painting of the deceased, a young woman. Also on display are the mummies of cats and ibises which also accompanied the dead.

Tombs housed the preserved bodies and provided a space for offerings to the dead. At different periods, different types of objects were placed in the burial chamber beside the coffin to guarantee the prospects for a good afterlife. From the late Middle Kingdom until the Ptolemaic period, c. 1850–300 B.C., small figures of the dead person, called shabtis, were included in burials to perform any manual tasks that might be required of the deceased in the underworld. The exhibition features a number of examples made from pottery, wood, stone and faience.

In 332 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, then a province of the Persian Empire, and when he died, the Greek general Ptolemy became ruler of Egypt in 305 B.C. A Greek-speaking court at the new city of Alexandria now governed the land. Gradually, Greek culture eclipsed Pharaonic writing, costume and jewellery. Roman occupation, following the defeat and suicide of Cleopatra in 30 B.C., cemented this



change, and by the third century A.D. life in Egypt was similar to that in other eastern Roman provinces. Embalmers in Roman Egypt often mummified bodies very imperfectly; however, an idealised headpiece provided an eternal image of the deceased in either Pharaonic or Mediterranean style. In the Fayum area, many mummies had a Roman-style portrait, painted on wood, inserted into the wrappings.



Cypriot Late Bronze Age jug and tankard of so-called White Slip II ware. 1450 – 1200 B.C.

### Ceramics and Glass from Ancient Cyprus 2500 B.C. – A.D. 300

Located in the eastern Mediterranean, and rich in copper deposits, the island of Cyprus was a place where European and Middle Eastern cultures met and fused, giving the archaeology of Cyprus its distinctive character. It is this blend of cultural influences that is to be seen in this exhibition of ceramic and glass artefacts. These have been chosen from the museum's collection of around five hundred Cypriot antiquities, most of which were discovered in tombs during the nineteenth century. The artefacts range in date from the Early Bronze Age (2500 – 1900 B.C.) through to the Roman period (58 B.C. – A.D. 330). All periods of the Bronze Age, as well as the Cypro-Geometric, Cypro-Archaic and Cypro-Classical periods are represented by a range of finely decorated ceramic vessels and figurines. A pair of gold earrings represent the Late Hellenistic period that followed Alexander's capture of the island in 333 B.C., while vessels of glass and ceramic and two terracotta lamps date from the period of the Roman occupation. The style of the Roman lamps may be contrasted with that of an earlier lamp of native type in use during the period from 950 to 50 B.C.



Two Black Slip Bichrome III ware dishes, no locality. One handle is broken. The vessels date to the Cypro-Geometric period between 850 – 750 B.C.



Two terracotta figures of a horse and rider, probably from Amathus, dating to the Cypro-Archaic period between 600 – 480 B.C.



Pair of gold earrings with calf-headed terminals. Hellenistic period (310 and 50 B.C.).

## Kingship and Sacrifice

The properties of bogs are such that, occasionally, human bodies are preserved in them to an exceptional degree with hair, skin, hands, internal organs and other soft tissue intact. Two recently found bog bodies have provided important new insights into pagan Celtic times. Discovered in 2003 Clonycavan Man, from County Meath and Oldcroghan Man from County Offaly were the victims of human sacrifice between around 400 to 200 B.C. Detailed analysis of the bodies and research into other finds from bogs have provided radical new insights suggesting that these Iron Age sacrifices were associated with ancient sovereignty and kingship rituals. Two further bog bodies from Gallagher, County Galway and Baronstown West, County Kildare are also displayed along with weapons, regalia, clothing, chariot harness, feasting utensils, boundary markers, a decorated quern stone and a votive deposit of butter. The exhibition provides information on the extensive forensic work undertaken on the bodies, which are presented in the context of similar finds from Denmark, Germany, Netherlands and Britain.



The hand of a bog body found at Oldcroghan, Co. Offaly in 2003. A victim of human sacrifice between 400 to 200 B.C.

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Telephone: (01) 677 7444  
Fax: (01) 677 7450  
E-mail: [marketing@museum.ie](mailto:marketing@museum.ie)  
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