Venceslas Kruta



Celtic Art

PHAIDON

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Translated by
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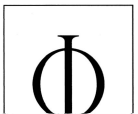

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INTRODUCTION



Detail of a ceremonial flagon with tubular spout from the grave of the princess of Reinheim, Saarland, Germany, about 450–400 BC

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'CELTIC ART'

When 'Celtic art' is mentioned today, the term evokes the art that characterized those peoples now known as 'the ancient Celts', that is the peoples documented in the fifth century BC to the north of the Alps and recorded by classical historians during the following centuries as they expanded their territory towards the south and south-east. Added to this are the extensions of this art movement into the British Isles and the decline in the power of the Celts on the Continent once Great Britain had been Christianized in the first half of the fifth century. The art of the Christian Celts is generally described as Irish. This is a situation that is not very different from that of Greek art, which right from the beginning was assumed to mean that of classical Greece, and did not include the Mycenaean art of the second millennium BC, nor the Christian art of Byzantium.

Thus 'Celtic art' can give the impression of being the artistic expression of all the peoples speaking the Celtic language. But, progress in linguistic research has led to the identification of Celts whose artistic expression does not fall within the usual scope of Celtic art. The art of the ancient Celts, who are now known to be of great quantitative and qualitative substance, did not come out of nothing, but was the result of a very long search for image-based expression, and the ideas common to the Celts since their origins vary according to the context.

So the geographical basis of this study has been broadened to include a selection of works by Celts situated in the Iberian peninsula. Any discussion of an abrupt break between the pagan and Christian art of Great Britain seems unjustified because of the novelty of the religious content.

In the epilogue, a few examples show the persistence of artistic concepts and approaches, which can be measured against the weight of the heritage of the Celts in the literature of medieval Europe.

THE REDISCOVERY

Intrinsic to the rediscovery of ancient Celtic artworks is their archaeological identification and chronological framing, which enables us to determine their provenance and trace their development. The first attempts to discover physical evidence of the Celtic past can be found in sixteenth-century Great Britain. Inevitably, attention focused on the impressive megalithic monuments associated with Druidic rituals, which were known from ancient texts and which left wide scope for the imagination.

The anachronistic link between those peoples now called 'the ancient Celts' and the monuments built between the fifth and third millennium BC by peoples that we now know to have been around much earlier than the ancestors of the Celts, was hugely successful in the historical imagery of the early nineteenth century. It even survives in the imagery of the 'Gauls' in a modern folk tale illustrated with success in the *Astérix* comic books.

It was not until 1874 that the Celts who invaded Italy and occupied most of Europe in the early third century BC were named after the Swiss site, La Tène, where archaeological remains characteristic of the second Iron Age were found. The recognition of the 'La Tène civilization' or 'La Tène culture' allowed the remains of the Celts to be identified in the regions that they occupied at the height of their expansion, which extended from the shores of the Atlantic to the Carpathian Mountains and into the heart of Asia Minor.

Confused for a long time with Etruscan imports, the artworks by the Celts during the La Tène period were for the first time identified as such by Adolf Fürtwangler, a German archaeologist who was a great specialist in Greek archaeology and a connoisseur of small artefacts. His conference presentation on the princely grave at Schwarzenbach, delivered in 1888 and published the following year, drew the attention of the academic world to the existence of Celtic art of the second Iron Age. The originality and importance of Celtic art was swiftly recognized. However, it took more than fifty years for the first book on Celtic art to be published, based on the systematic recording and analysis of the known works in most of the countries inhabited by the ancient Celts. In his *Early Celtic Art* (1944), the academic Paul Jacobsthal brought together several hundred objects, which he used to build up a chronology of the first three centuries of the art of the La Tène culture. He called the periods Early Style, followed by Waldalgesheim Style – named after the rich Rhineland grave that contained characteristic works – and a third phase where three styles with complex relationships were found together. These he named Plastic Style, Hungarian Sword Style and Cheshire Style, after the ambiguous nature of some masks, which reminded him of the fleeting appearances of the Cheshire Cat's grin in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. There followed books by other academics, such as John Vincent Stanley Megaw (1970, 1990) and Paul-Marie Duval (1977), who continued to record and study Celtic art. Martyn Jope (2000) completed the annotated catalogue of works from Great Britain, which Jacobsthal had been unable to continue.

At the same time as its scientific rediscovery, Celtic art aroused the interest of art lovers and artists. They identified the visual arts of the Celts as a far distant precursor of the break with the classical tradition, which was a feature of European art of the early twentieth century. Guided by intuition, they detected a strong spiritual presence in Celtic art, expressed by formal processes that they sensed as being related to their own. From Pablo Picasso's encounter with the astonishing painted vases in the Numantine Museum of Soria, to André Malraux's *Currency of the absolute* (1949), the creative thought of the modern era has been nourished by Celtic art.

This interest is particularly apparent in the work of the Surrealists during the interwar period, where African statues stood side by side with collections of Gaulish coins. Lancelot Lengyel produced a remarkable collection of photographs devoted to these tiny masterpieces and summarized the attitude of his fellow avant-garde artists: 'The message of the Gaulish mind is its opposition to the Greek vision of the static and anthropocentric world, to which it opposes the dynamic moving space of an infinite universe, still unfinished, that contains the absolute reality towards which mankind turns, perceiving the vulnerability of its existence when faced with the boundless sky' (quoted in *The Magic Art*, 1957, by André Breton). Although this intuitive assessment might appear grandiose, it expresses a fundamentally sound understanding of the spirituality of Celtic art, which was totally absent from its scientific analysis.

MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

One of the main reasons why Celtic art was slow to be accepted in terms of significance and originality is due to the fact that, unlike the great art of classical antiquity, it had left no architecture behind (its buildings having been made of wood) and very little sculpture in stone. The great wooden sculptures from the late second century BC, which were found in an exceptionally good condition in a well on the Fellbach-Schmiden site in Baden-Württemberg, demonstrate the level of excellence achieved by artists working in this material. Unfortunately, we can only imagine the use of such devices in architectural decoration.

Celtic art mainly involved creating small objects in metal or terracotta, such as jewellery, weapons, vases and coins. The practical use of these items brought constraints on decoration, which determined whether there would be any artistic content, what form it would take, and where and how it would be applied. Since this does not facilitate the comparative study of items, drawings of their developed decoration alongside the photographs are often required.

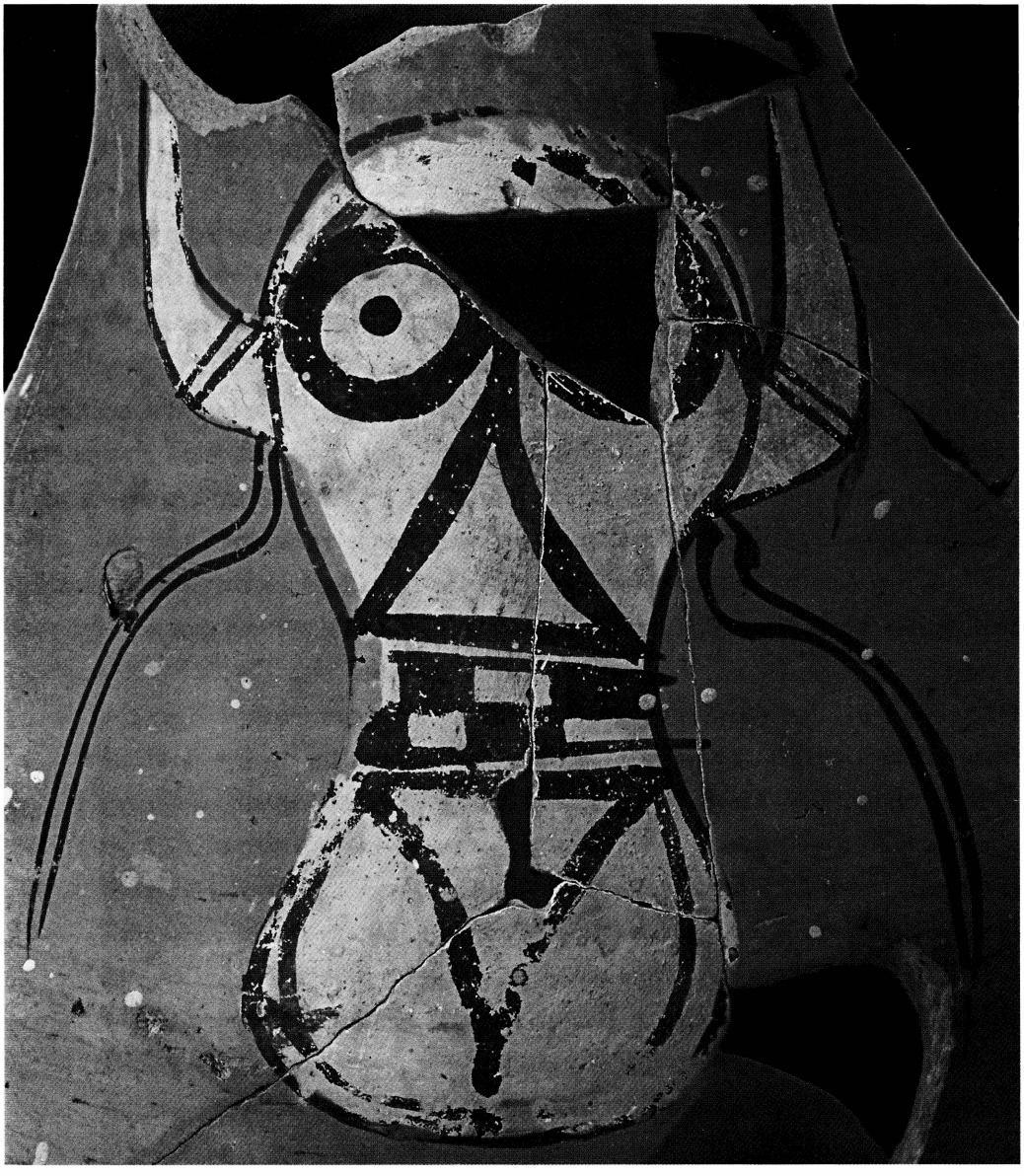
An examination of the works confirms the high level of technical skill achieved, especially by metal workers. The mastery of casting and beating bronze, and the virtuosity of blacksmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths and engravers are astonishing. Close-up photographs reveal the complexity and difficulty of execution of some openwork items using piercing, sawing and filing. They also show decorations that are so fine that they have escaped the attention of specialists for almost a century. We marvel at the carved ornamentation on coral and the engravings on die stamps used for producing coins by the hundreds, which have lost none of their quality, consistency and expressiveness.

THEMES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Research devoted to Celtic art was for a long time influenced by the fact that its repertoire mainly depended on Mediterranean, or perhaps even oriental models, appropriated from the nomadic peoples of the steppes of eastern Europe or from the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which in the late sixth century BC set up a short-lived *satrapy* (province) between the Danube and the Bosphorus. The identification of the provenance of Celtic imagery had assumed such importance that it had obscured the reasons for this appropriation and selection of images. So Celtic art became a derivative echo of the great arts of antiquity, which, depending on the author, was considered to be 'barbarian', or the result of an innate tendency towards abstraction. Thus, the content appeared to be secondary, or even negligible, since the art was considered to be fundamentally imitative and ornamental.

However, a study of the Celtic makers' repertoire and models, appropriated from whatever source, will reveal their intentional preferences for some subjects as themes for decoration over others. In other words, the same theme is illustrated by images for which models can be identified in different periods and different regions, and on different supports. This, for example, is how we can explain the undeniably surprising similarities found in work from the second half of the fifth century, between images inspired by the fixings on Etruscan flagons and the transformation of images on coins, borrowed from models on Greek coins from the third century BC.

A particularly clear instance of an enduring theme is the horse with a human head. It appeared for the first time in the second half of the fifth century, on the ceremonial flagon from the princely grave in Reinheim (Saarland, Germany). It has no exact equivalent in Mediterranean imagery, where the centaur – a grotesque creation which is also the result of the juxtaposition of a horse and a man – is represented either by a human torso that replaces the animal's head, or by the hindquarters of a horse grafted on to a man's back.



Painted jug known as 'the bull mask', Numantia, province of Soria, Spain, about 120–40 BC (see p. 153)

The human-headed horse reappears two centuries later on coins: either without any clearly identifiable model on coins from central Europe, or at the final stage of the metamorphosis of the horse-drawn vehicle represented on the reverse side of coins from Macedonia found in the north-west coastal regions of Gaul. This resurgence can only be explained by the intention to represent the sun god in both his human form and his animal incarnation. A plant device is added on to the statuette of the Reinheim flagon and on to some images on coins, thus bringing together in the same image symbols of the three forms of life: human, animal and plant.

A painted ceramic flagon, datable to the first century BC and without any relationship to the items mentioned above, derives from Numantia, the emblematic location of the Iberian Celts' resistance to Rome. It represents a man with an animal head, a horse or a ram: the same unusual combination, but pictured in reverse. This might be conceptualized as an image of a man wearing a mask, but this does not alter the importance of the coincidence.

Thus the determination of the exact relationship between the model and its Celtic reinterpretation holds significance. Indeed, what has changed or been added becomes a valuable pointer to the new meaning that the Celtic artist wanted to give to an image from another context.

So gradually the repertoire of Celtic art clustered around a few themes: the representation of the sun god as the source of different forms of life; that of oppositional principles and their regular alternation; and that of a world divided into four parts, determined by the journey of the sun and ordered around a common centre where the world tree is placed. This vertical axis supports the vault of heaven and links it to the earth and to the waters of the underworld, home of the dead and supernatural beings.

Celtic art is thus revealed as the product of a consistent search for images capable of illustrating those subjects, which are sometimes echoed in the works of classical authors that the Celts bequeathed to the medieval world. In other words, the ornamental and ostentatious appearance of this art appears to be intrinsically linked to its contents. This expresses the fundamental elements of a structured religious doctrine, controlled by an intellectual elite and converted by images into a visible expression of the privileged relationship of some members of the society with the sacred.

Images offer an invaluable opportunity to approach the spiritual world of the ancient Celts in a structured way, which is all the more valuable because it provides a direct message, where the only gaps are the result of our inability to decode all the intricacies.

PREHISTORIC EUROPE AND THE CELTS

For five centuries before the dawn of the Christian era, the Celts made up the largest known family of European peoples outside the Mediterranean. This, at least, is what is reported by Greek and Latin writers, who describe Celtic invasions into Italy and the Balkans, and credit them with huge lands, from the extreme south of the Iberian peninsula to the Carpathian Mountains, and from the southern reaches of the great plains in the north to the southern edges of the Alps. At the height of this expansion, Celts were present either permanently or temporarily in twenty-two countries of modern Europe: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and Turkey. They were probably also settled in Moldavia and the Ukraine. The Celtic peoples shared languages derived from Indo-European roots and, in order to record these, some of them, very early on, adopted alphabets borrowed from the Etruscans in northern Italy, the Phoenicians in the Iberian peninsula, and later from the Greeks and Latins.

However, they did not leave any documents comparable to those from the classical era. They were prohibited from recording in writing any facts that they believed belonged to the sacred, and therefore not only what we today would think of as religion, but also various spheres of knowledge. According to Julius Caesar (*Gallic Wars*, VI, 14), their intellectual elite, the Druids, 'believed that religion did not allow their teachings to be recorded in writing'. He attributed this to two reasons: 'because they did not want their beliefs to be revealed' and that 'if their pupils put their trust in writing they would neglect their memory'. This explanation is however not very convincing. We should probably interpret this rejection of writing as a consequence of the same attitude that the Celts had adopted towards the image: the conviction that the sacred cannot, by its very nature, be confined.

So the Celts left only short dedications linking the names or epithets of deities with the names of people; epitaphs and inscriptions on coins; and also a few legal documents plus some papers that reveal magic on the fringes of the religion. The most extensive known up to now is the five-year calendar found in Coligny (Ain, France), engraved in the late second century on a bronze plaque, even though this system had been replaced a long time earlier in Gaul by the Roman Julian calendar. This calendar must therefore have been used for religious purposes.

The ban on written records was not lifted until after the arrival of Christianity, too late for the Celtic countries on the Continent, which had experienced in the meantime a long Roman occupation, and where their social elite had already abandoned the traditional, exclusively oral teaching methods. Indeed, not only were these very demanding of time and memory, but they were also useless for those considering a career in an empire where the knowledge of Latin, the administrative language, and Greek, the language of culture, was essential. When Christianity arrived, only the Celtic areas of Great Britain, which were never or scarcely Romanized, still had an intellectual elite as a repository for the oral lore transmitted from generation to generation. The wish to present Christianity as the final triumphant stage of a tradition going back to the dawn of time drove the Irish monks in the early Middle Ages, who were also inspired by the living heritage of the Graeco-Roman culture, to record their ancient lore. They added subtle alterations to blur the pagan aspects so that they appeared as the direct inheritors of the Druids – an older intellectual class, recognized and respected by the secular powers.

The Celtic tradition then continued into the chivalric literature of medieval Europe, strongly imbued with themes that had indisputable Celtic origins. This is what happened with the tales

constructed around the legendary King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, distant descendants of the warrior brotherhoods who criss-crossed Europe in the fourth and third centuries BC.

The enthusiastic reception given to the Arthurian tales in areas formerly inhabited by Celtic-speaking people is confirmed not only by the many versions of the stories in vernacular languages, but also by the images that refer to it and that decorate buildings as distant as the cathedrals of Modena and Palermo in Italy. This interest can probably also be explained by the fact that the memory of the indigenous pre-Christian myths of former Celtic countries on the Continent was never completely extinguished. Furthermore, it is confirmed by the recurrence of themes originating there in popular traditions or legends about saints.

The heritage of the spiritual world of the ancient Celts is therefore abundantly represented up to our own time, but we have only indirect documentary evidence from the period when the Celts were at the height of their power. This evidence is often very distorted and scattered among many Greek and Latin writers. An analysis of textual data from antiquity and the Middle Ages shows that the roots of the mythical themes are very ancient. It enables us to determine the main features of the social and religious world in which these themes were created, then transmitted either intact, or modified as they were handed down the generations.



Two-headed sculpture, known as 'Hermes' from the Roquepertuse sanctuary, Velaux, Bouches-du-Rhône, France, about 460–420 BC (see p. 79)

THE CELTS' ANCESTORS

It now appears to be established that many of these themes do not only go back to the period that follows the historical emergence of the Celts in the fifth century BC, but can be traced back to their very distant ancestors, the people speaking Indo-European languages who became established in central and northern Europe in the early third millennium BC. We have no direct written evidence of the name, language, type of society, or religious world of these peoples. Establishing the linguistic aspects is therefore based on a comparative analysis of the languages in the Indo-European family, documented in Europe since the introduction of writing, and information gained from the Vedic texts of ancient India. An examination of the names of people and places, a selection of objects and concepts in the vocabulary, and preserved ritual formulas, has enabled us to link these Indo-European people with a theoretical model of a patriarchal society divided into three classes that reproduced the attributes of the major deities: the sacred and kingly, the warriors and the producers.

This general outline, checked against information provided by archaeological investigations and enriched with other more isolated facts, enables us to identify these distant ancestors of the Celts, Germans and other peoples from ancient Europe: important human groups who arrived in mass migrations from the great plains of Belarus, Ukraine and neighbouring regions in the late fourth and early third millennia BC. The 'Battle Axe people' – named after their typical weapons, usually made of polished stone but sometimes of copper, which were buried with the men – owed their mobility to draught animals and the wheel, both innovations for Europe. Their sound and efficient economy was based mainly on stock rearing and included other resources that were unknown up to this point, such as the domesticated horse. The newcomers buried their dead in individual graves, generally under a mound in order to mark the place, and followed strict rules for the orientation of the body, depending on the sun's progress and the sex of the deceased.

The most important element of the Battle Axe culture – confirmed by the burial sites used in the first half of the third millennium BC to the north of Alps, extending from what is now Poland to the Rhine valley – is named 'Corded Ware' after the decoration on its pottery, created by impressing a piece of rope or making an imitation of one. Apart from these restrained motifs, there is almost a complete absence of human or animal images, or even identifiable abstract symbols. This forms a marked contrast to the work of earlier peoples in central Europe, who had a taste for rich curvilinear or angular ornamentation on pottery. This is also very different to their many statuettes of women with exaggerated

sexual characteristics, emphasizing their link to fertility cycles and suggesting that they are identified with the Earth Mother. The world of the gods no longer features this Great Mother Goddess, the primordial couple or their direct descendants, conquerors of the initial chaos and the untamed forces that still threaten the newly established civilized order, but a masculine god associated with the sun, a far distant precursor of Apollo.

Towards the middle of the third millennium in central Europe, a new ethnic group emerged from descendants of this Battle Axe culture, probably mixed with some descendants of the indigenous people. These groups gradually extended the spread of Indo-European speakers and their innovations as far as the western reaches of Europe, following the sun's progress, the sun being at the centre of their beliefs. They are known as the 'Bell Beaker culture', after the characteristic shape of the vessel that accompanied them in their last journey and was probably intended to contain a fermented drink. The size and relative speed of the appearance of the objects that are a feature of this culture – from central Europe to Great Britain, the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, to Sicily and even to the western shores of North Africa – have sometimes been attributed to the spread of a style, rather than to human migration. But even if this theory cannot be totally excluded, it appears unsatisfactory. The only plausible explanation seems to be the movement of very mobile groups whose prestige won over the local elites to adopt the Indo-European dialect, which was then very gradually modified and enriched by the indigenous underclass.

Not all the regions where the characteristic features of the Bell Beaker culture appear – shapes and decorations on pottery, arrow heads and armbands in archers' equipment, flint or copper daggers – developed in the same way. However, it should be stressed that all those regions where languages from or related to the Celtic family were found, such as Liguria or Lusitania, were affected by this phenomenon. The basic split in Neolithic Europe, resulting from the introduction of agriculture via the two great waterways – from the Danube or from the Mediterranean – were replaced by the gradual formation of several large groups. These are mainly the peoples whose languages derive from Indo-European roots: in the north, the ancestors of the Germanic peoples; in the south and west, to the north of Italy and the south of the Iberian peninsula, those of the Celts and, still in Italy, the Italic peoples with more or less known languages – the Ligurians, the Veneti, the Latins and others; in the east, the Balkan peoples, including the Greeks, the earliest to record their language in writing. Alongside them, the earlier subculture is continued through the

scarcely integrated probable remnants of the descendants of colonists from the Danube, who arrived in the seventh and sixth millennia from Asia Minor, and also the distant descendants of the hunters from the late Ice Age, who retreated into the far north or into the mountains.

The third millennium was a decisive period in the formation of ancient Europe. Not only linguistic upheavals and technical innovations but also changes in religion reflect a new idea of society. As a champion of these new times, the masculine Apollonian deity, associated with the sun, probably explains the choice of the bow and its accessories rather than the axe as the symbolic object buried in the graves of the men of the Bell Beaker culture. Indeed, the bow alludes to an ability to strike at a distance in the same way as the sun's rays. The Mother Goddess does not disappear, but from now on takes on the role as procreator of new gods, among whom the only one to be shown in images or symbols associated with him is the sun god, sometimes with his twin, the moon god or goddess. The combination of these two aspects of the daily, monthly and annual cycles is the basis of the Celtic calendar, where skilful mechanisms were devised to bring the lunar and solar cycles into harmony. This has been recorded only from the second century of the Christian era, but it unquestionably dates from a much earlier time: some evidence enables us to place it in the second half of the second millennium at the latest.

Thus, at a time when they probably spoke only a form of Indo-European still close to its early third-millennium roots, the far distant ancestors of the Celts were already using some of the themes that fifteen centuries later made up the background of their descendants' artistic vocabulary: the horse and the sun wheel, which alluded not only to the movement of the sun, but also to the subdivision of the world into the four parts derived from its trajectory; the S-motif and the double spiral, schematic representations of the sun's journey between one midwinter solstice and the next, which were probably borrowed – along with the triskelion – from the symbolic repertoire of the Neolithic farmers.

However, only symbolic signs are found in the third millennium. These are usually the double spiral, made of gold or copper wire or, more rarely, engraved on flat stelae shaped as human silhouettes. This motif is combined with symbolic weapons – triangular-bladed daggers, axes or bows – or with discreet allusions to female sexual attributes. The engraved rocks in the natural open-air sanctuaries in Valcamonica and the Vallée des Merveilles are more explicit. Here we find an abundance of suns and stars, horn motifs, weapons and even horse-drawn chariots and ploughs, and also humans and wild and domestic animals. These images apparently

do not express a choice showing membership of a clearly differentiated ethnic community, but are evidence of the generalized impact of new beliefs in an environment where the newcomers are slowly merging with the indigenous peoples.

AT THE DAWN OF HISTORY, THE AGE OF HEROES

The progress of metalworking in bronze, widespread in central Europe from the late third millennium, provided tools that were more efficient and more easily renewable, while also equipping the warrior class with weapons that were both offensive and defensive. These were costly but very effective and reinforced their prestige and role in society. The following millennium is the legendary world of heroes, where human beings were thought to mix with the immortal gods, an age whose memory has been handed down to us through Greek mythology.

Indeed this is the period when part of Europe arrived at the threshold of recorded history, since the language on the tablets retrieved from the Mycenaean palaces is Greek and on them are the names of mythological gods later handed down to us by Homer, Hesiod and their successors. Even though it has been handed down to us as only a legendary tale, the Trojan War and



Stater with 'dragon, mare and foal', known as the unique example, believed to be from the land of the Aulerci Cenomani in the region of Le Mans, Sarthe, France, about 280–250 BC (see p. 140)

its context – the intention of the Mycenaean kingdoms to open up access to the Black Sea – its date (thirteenth century BC) and the real existence of some of those involved are confirmed by Hittite documents and archaeology.

Similarly, in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus' travels reflect the Mycenaean voyages in the western Mediterranean. These have been confirmed by discoveries of characteristic pottery as far away as Sardinia and the coast of Tuscany, and also in the Venetian lagoon and the Po plain, between Verona and the river, in a region that since time immemorial has been at the end of the legendary ancient trade route, the Amber Road, connecting the Baltic to the Adriatic. Unfortunately, we do not have comparable texts as old as these for the rest of Europe, which was then believed to be the far distant and mysterious world of the Hyperboreans, inhabitants of countries beyond the icy blasts of the North Wind and where Apollo, carried by a chariot drawn by swans, would go to spend part of the year. From these far distant lands came amber, the mysterious and magical material that appeared to be a petrified ray of golden sunshine. These vague echoes reflect the acute intensity of the north–south trading traffic, as is evident from archaeological remains, and represent only a part of the activity that led to the development of metalworking. These finds imply that there were regions rich in copper and gold ores, such as the shores of the Atlantic, the Iberian peninsula, the Alps, the mountains of Bohemia and the Carpathian Mountains, which accentuated the differences between these places and the regions without any special resources.

Non-Mediterranean Europe in the Bronze Age presents a unified picture due to this web of contacts, but probably also because of the common Indo-European heritage from the third millennium. This can be seen in the remarkable consistency of the figurative repertoire, which is well-evidenced in some regions. This is found in the abundant imagery of northern Europe, where razors with decorated blades and rock art are evidence of a rapid expansion in sea voyages and the boat is associated with the solar cycle like a symbolic image of a world surrounded by the ocean. A convincing attempt at the interpretation and sequencing of several hundred images from the Scandinavian Bronze Age relates the daily journey of the sun to the supporters found in later illustrated series from ancient Europe, which hold a similar meaning: fish, birds with hawks' beaks, horses pulling discs representing the sun, snakes or dragons with wavy bodies, and so on.

The equally rich Bronze Age imagery from the Carpathians is also devoted to solar subjects: waterfowl were most often arranged in long lines or harnessed in pairs to the disc of the sun, in a formula

used widely across regions of Europe during the first centuries of the last millennium. The symbols of the simple or double spiral or scroll, the S-motif, and the triskelion were assembled in complex three- or four-fold designs. The wheel or disc of the sun is obviously the centre of interest. Small terracotta or even bronze four-wheeled chariots appeared, intended for ritual use, where their movement probably simulated the progress of the sun. An isolated image of a two-wheeled chariot accompanied by schematic figures crowned with sunrays on a pot from the north-east of the Carpathian basin confirm the solar reference of the vehicle. This necessarily became a symbol of the daily journey, whereas the boat pulled by waterfowl seems to refer to the night-time journey on the ocean. There are, therefore, small differences between the meanings given to some elements in the repertoire of these two regions, both of which are particularly rich in figurative remains.

However, it appears that we cannot attribute the remains of either of them to the ancestors of the Celtic peoples. The language spoken by the people who inhabited the transalpine regions at this time is not well-evidenced. However, the continuous settlement traced locally from the late third millennium up to the emergence of the historic peoples helps us to recognize the two great cultural groupings of the second half of the second millennium, who then lived to the north and west of the Carpathian Mountains, the ancestors of the Germanic people and the historic Celts.

We can assume that the peoples speaking the Celtic language in the middle of the second millennium were made up of communities distinct from their neighbours in several large regions of Europe: the central areas, between the upper reaches of the Elbe and Alpine Piedmont in northern Italy, from Bohemia to the east of France, a large part of the Atlantic coast with Great Britain and, finally, inland areas of the Iberian peninsula. Strangely, it appears that these peoples did not express themselves figuratively by the same means as their neighbours to the north and west. This difference does not appear to have been caused by their technical abilities or the availability of metal. Perhaps we should see this reluctance as having a religious basis comparable to the Celts' attitude to writing. It was to take almost another millennium before they abandoned their restrained attitude to images and created a figurative language that fulfilled their needs, giving rise to one of the most original art forms of ancient Europe. However, a large amount of evidence confirms that their religious beliefs remained just as influenced by their Indo-European heritage and the dominance of sun worship as the beliefs of their distant ancestors, whose language was evolving quite differently.

The similarity of subjects and attitudes seen in groups, whose languages show that they belonged to the same Celtic family, but nevertheless had cultural differences, can probably best be explained by the continuity of religious background that they inherited from the third millennium. In other words, their jewellery, pottery and other objects, as well as their way of life, appear closer to those of their neighbours than to those of their distant cousins, despite the fact that they had different ethnic backgrounds to their neighbours. It seems, moreover, that their economies commonly included stock rearing, which was central to daily life, and the need to defend their herds – or increase them through daring raids – which encouraged the growth of a warrior class. The distant memory of this situation is well documented in Ireland, where the ownership of livestock took precedence over the ownership of land and was the basis of the individual's social status. This was the property used to calculate compensation after disputes and the business transaction was based on the transfer of cattle under certain conditions, where a 'man of property' is someone who owns livestock. The name of one of the great Celtic peoples, the powerful Boii from central Europe, comes from the same root as the word for 'cattle'. The *Boiohaemum* of the classical writers, the region belonging to the people who gave their name to 'Bohemia' ('land of the Boii') is also one of the regions where archaeological remains show unbroken settlement from the third millennium until the emergence of the historical Celts in the fifth century BC.

The heroic ideal, which is described in Homeric texts and Irish epics, must be the same as the one that inspired the Bronze Age warriors of inland Europe. The warrior elite's mount, the horse, which probably had been associated with the movement of the sun since its introduction in the third millennium, became the animal embodiment of the sun god. Indeed, the horse was to become one of the most frequent subjects of the slow growth of figurative art, which was a feature of Celtic culture during the first half of the last millennium.

FROM THE HYPERBOREANS TO THE CELTS, EUROPE ENTERS HISTORY

This was the period during which work in iron – a metal whose ore was widely available and easily accessible – spread across Europe. The oldest known iron object made on European soil, a small dagger from Gánovce, in Slovakia, comes from the middle of the second millennium BC. We know of a few more objects produced in its last centuries, but the rapid expansion of iron working began early in the first quarter of the following millennium. The art of working with iron became particularly widespread among the Celts who, within just a few centuries, achieved a mastery that still

astonishes us today. The techniques of iron working are very different from those for bronze working, where recycling salvaged objects made it easy to obtain metal for casting or cold working. With iron working, even if the worker starts with an existing object rather than the spongy mass obtained from the ore in the furnace, iron still has to be worked in the forge. The blacksmith's experience, his familiarity with a metal that can be worked only with a hammer and his ability to choose the right temperature for the required result combined to produce a new field where the Celts achieved unparalleled excellence. This is confirmed by the quality of some existing objects and by descriptions that have come down to us in written documents. For example, Pliny the Elder attributes the invasion of Italy by transalpine people to Helicon, a Helvetian blacksmith, whose art is said to have led him to Rome. When Helicon returned home, he took with him dried figs, grapes and samples of oil and wine, whose flavours persuaded his countrymen to conquer the countries that produced them.

This account not only reflects the reputation of Celtic blacksmiths, but it also recounts an event that had far-reaching consequences for the future of the Transalpine Celts: the intensification of trade between the Mediterranean and the lands north of the Alps. This was one of the results of the gradual colonization of the coasts of the western Mediterranean by the Greeks and Phoenicians, who were in search of metals and trade outlets. The Phoenician voyages appear to have passed through the mythical Pillars of Hercules (which flank the Strait of Gibraltar) very early on and reached the shores of the Atlantic. According to tradition, this happened in the last quarter of the second millennium, but so far the oldest archaeological finds go back only as far as between the ninth and eighth centuries BC. This was around the time of the legendary founding of Carthage (824–813 BC) and of Pithekoussai, on the island of Ischia, which was the first Greek colony in the western Mediterranean (about 750 BC). Some finds confirm the existence from that time of the trading post of Gades (now Cádiz) on the Atlantic coast. Materials from the ninth century BC, which were assumed to have come from the cargo of a wrecked ship found in the Odiel estuary near Huelva, 100 kilometres to the north-west of Cádiz, confirm the importance of the trade in metals along the Atlantic coast. The finds included a large number of bronze objects – swords, spearheads and ferrules among others – apparently intended for melting down. Among their very varied shapes, from various regions along the coast, were found devices characteristic of distant Great Britain.

The region of this discovery – situated between the Guadalquivir and the Guadiana rivers, an inland area rich in mineral resources –

is that of the legendary country of Tartessus, described by Herodotus as a kind of El Dorado of ancient times. The name of its king, Arganthonios, is clearly derived from *arganto* (the Celtic word for 'silver'), but there is no other existing evidence of the Celtic origins of these indigenous peoples. They adopted writing in the eighth century BC, but their inscriptions have not yet been decoded. The presence of Celts 'beyond the Pillars of Hercules', where they reached the borders of the Cynesians, the furthest inhabitants of Europe on the 'side of the setting sun', is well-reported by Herodotus (*Histories*, II, 33). However, this earliest written mention, which refers to the situation in the sixth century BC, probably does not relate to all Celtic-speaking peoples, but only to one of its tribes, the people in the south-western tip of Portugal, who were known later in Greek as *Keltikoi* or in Latin as *Celtici*.

The very strong influences from the East experienced in the Tartessus region led to local imitations of images brought by the Phoenicians. This new iconography, composed of monsters and plant motifs (sphinxes, griffons, palmettes), influenced the Greek world and the Italic peoples, especially the Etruscans in the eighth century BC. This fashion, known as 'orientalizing', radically changed attitudes to pictorial representation. It abandoned geometric art, where human and animal figures and plant motifs were only of secondary importance, replacing them with clearly identifiable subjects that almost exclusively belonged to these three categories. In central and southern Italy, imagery inspired by Graeco-Oriental themes was used, probably because objects of oriental origin arrived directly, and likely made with the help of craftsmen who came mainly from the Syrophoenician area, while the north of Italy remained true to the traditions of the Bronze Age. From the late eighth century BC, two trends can be seen side by side, which then gradually merge: the traditional themes handed down from the second millennium BC are replaced by the new images in ways that show that this is not a change in the earlier system of religious thought, but a new way of portraying it, enriched by the discovery of an opportunity to create an illustrated narrative.

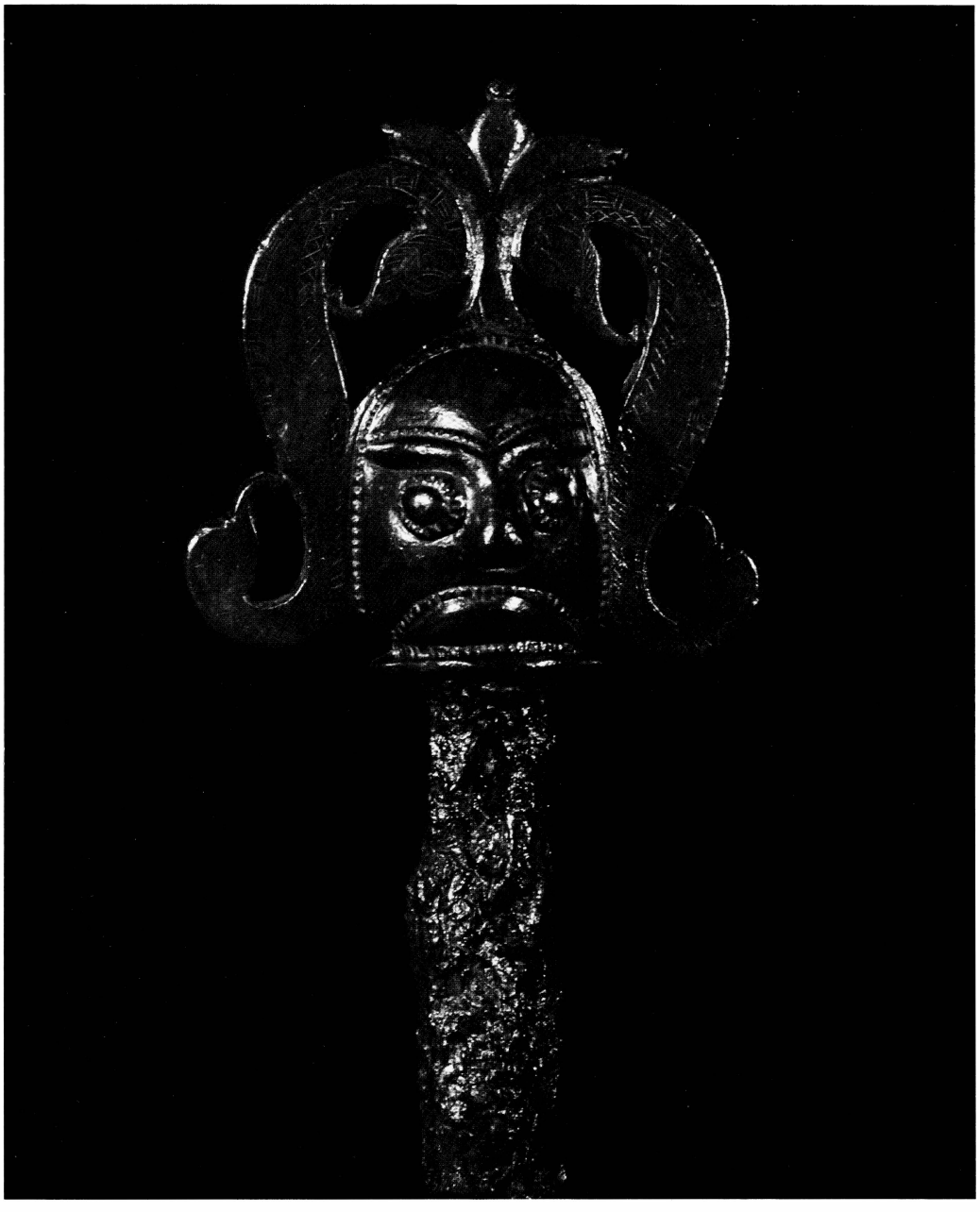
This is clear in northern Italy, where from the seventh century BC onwards the style known as 'Situla art' was developed. This name comes from the ceremonial bucket-like vessels used since the Bronze Age, which bore an ornamentation representing the symbolic repertoire of sun worship: waterfowl arranged in lines or harnessed in pairs to the disc of the sun; suns and stars to which horses and sometimes rudimentary human figures were added. The new orientalizing formula subdivided the surface of the vessel into horizontal bands in which scenes were represented. These small pictures were juxtaposed or arranged in sequences

and continue over several superimposed bands. Repoussé work is the technique used to create the figures and make them stand out in relief, with outlines and details created as line drawings on the obverse of the work.

These images have been interpreted as simple illustrations of daily life, intended to extol the importance of the social elite. However, everything points to the conclusion that they are figurative accounts of legendary or mythological stories, like strip cartoons narrating episodes in the history of the gods, the prowess of heroes, or the founding migrations led by birds. In short, themes that relate to particularly significant subjects for the community as a whole. The collective ceremonial use of these vessels is confirmed by the images that they carry, demonstrating that they are ritual instruments, and that they were given a place of honour during the musical performances that must have accompanied the recitation of epics where mythology and legendary stories were intertwined. The choice of these seemingly very consistent themes appears difficult to attribute merely to people's intention to celebrate in pictures an important figure's way of life.

A second major characteristic of Situla art is the lines of grotesque creatures from the oriental repertoire (sphinxes, griffons, winged lions) together with new animals or those already present in the European range of images: cattle, stags, rams or ibexes, and birds sometimes holding fish in their hawk beaks. The lids of the situlas, where these animals replace the themes of sun and stars, almost always arranged in a four-fold pattern, suggest that at least some of them might refer to important times in the solar year and therefore mark the introduction of the first zodiac symbols. A helmet from the seventh century BC discovered in Pitino San Severino, in the Italian Marches region, indeed shows a procession of twelve animals, which includes a ram, a bull and the fishes in their familiar positions.

Situla art had great success in Bologna, among the Veneti, the Picentes and other peoples along the Adriatic coast, and to the south-east of the Alpine foothills, but had only a slight effect on their neighbours (in what is now Piedmont and Lombardy), whose inscriptions in characters borrowed from the Etruscan alphabet confirm their Celtic origins. The only objects that derive from Situla art with orientalizing roots found up to now among these people (two lids decorated with animals) are imports from the neighbouring Veneti. Until the fifth century, the few locally made decorated situlas apparently preserved a process inherited from the Bronze Age of representing schematic figures by lines of dots. Almost three centuries earlier, this process had been abandoned by their neighbours. This is how the preliminary sketches



Linch-pin from a chariot in Oberndorf in der Ebene-Unterradlberg, Lower Austria, about 440–380 BC (see p. 66)

of scenes on the two situlas from Sesto Calende (Lombardy), which are exceptional within the local area, were made. This idiosyncrasy is doubtless the result of the Celtic peoples' reluctance to portray the human figure.

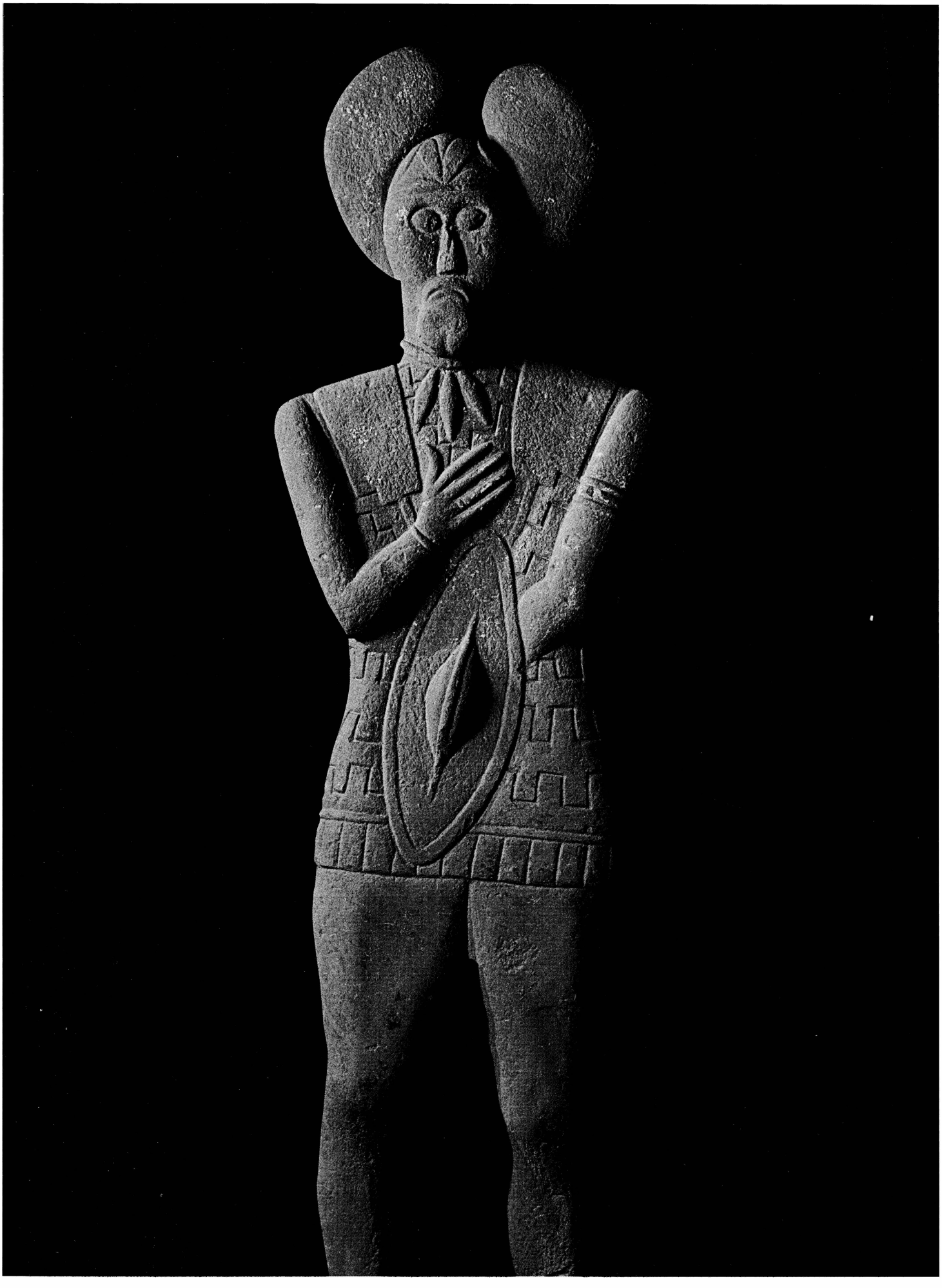
It was, however, the more or less direct influence of orientalizing imagery originating from far distant places, handed down through the art of the situlas, which would give to people of the fifth century the impetus to develop the figurative language of the Transalpine Celts. The oriental heritage, stripped bare of its descriptive and narrative aspects, would thus contribute to the birth of an art that succeeded in overcoming this reluctance by developing a profoundly original concept of the image. The figurative subjects of the Transalpine Celts – such as the horse, the rider sometimes shown with a sunburst halo, and also other symbols of the sun – are already widely recognized. Rarely, these

subjects are enriched with other images: for example, a figure playing a musical instrument (a lyre or a zither), or framed by a pair of animals, both of which probably refer to the Apollonian sun god. Thus, in spite of increased contacts between the transalpine and the Mediterranean regions, the art of the Celtic peoples in the seventh and sixth centuries does not appear to show significant innovations.

In about 600 BC, trade with the new Greek city of Massalia (Marseille) and with the Rhône valley, as far as the regions that bordered the upper reaches of the Danube, was added to the traditional trade between the Graeco-Etruscan, Celtic and Veneti trading posts set up between the Po and the Alps in the transalpine regions and northern Italy. Objects imported from both areas, especially ceramics and bronze utensils for serving wine, confirm that these two movements impinged upon the Celtic world.

These imported objects were concentrated in the surroundings of the aristocratic elite, especially the 'princes' who were distinguished from the rest of society by their exceptionally fine graves. It was among these people that, in about the mid-fifth century, we see the earliest borrowings from the Graeco-Etruscans and can observe how the subject matter was adapted to fit the final stage in the development of a system of religious thought based on Indo-European roots going back almost two thousand years. The borrowed images were carefully selected for their potential for their original meanings to be transformed and integrated into this system. Their transfiguration expresses the multi-faceted nature of the deity and his close relationship with all forms of life, to which he gives life in a cycle where heavenly light and the darkness of the deep, heat and cold, life and death alternate.

Given all this, there is nothing strange in the fact that the deity can appear as a human being as easily as an animal or plant, without any of them becoming dominant. The final stage in the approach of the Celtic artists is therefore an image that is not fixed or definitive, which allows the observer the freedom to interpret it in many alternative or complementary ways and, at the same time, to discover the underlying meanings that belong to the hidden world of the forces that give life to the universe.



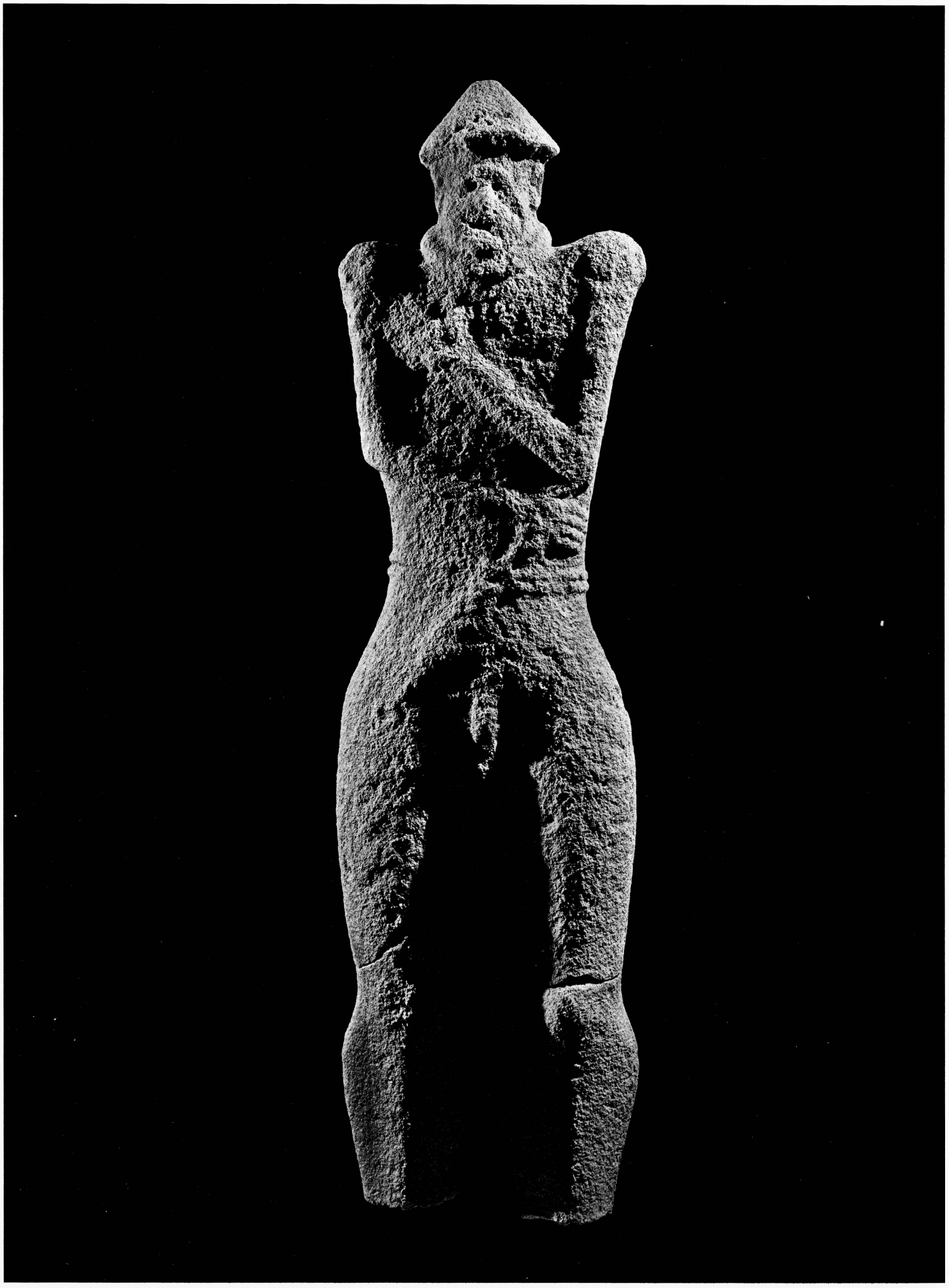
Standing statue from the group of monuments discovered in 1994 in Glauberg, Hesse, Germany, about 440–400 BC

See p. 80

I

THE ANTECEDENTS

Eighth–sixth centuries BC



Standing statue, which originally crowned a tumulus in Ditzingen-Hirschlanden, Baden-Württemberg, Germany, about 550–500 BC

See p. 39

The art of the Celtic people of inland Europe during the first centuries of the Iron Age is not at first sight very different from the geometrical figurative languages of other contemporary peoples in Europe, who had not yet been touched by the influences from the East that were then being spread and adopted in various parts of the Mediterranean world. The engraved or painted decorations on pottery, particularly that designed for funerary use, are mostly based on angular three-fold or four-fold motifs (chevrons, triangles and crosses) assembled in sequences that appear to be carefully constructed, but offer no clues to their interpretation. We can merely note the care sometimes given to the differentiation of repeated motifs belonging to the same group, which might include entities belonging to the same category, such as the months or the positions of the sun in the year, subdivisions of space or other analogous series. The S-motif, the triskelion, the sun wheel and other symbols in a repertoire inherited from the Bronze Age appear only rarely in these compositions. Noticeably more frequent are the swastika, a very ancient rotatory design, and circles that are either concentric or surrounded with dots, probably with an astral meaning.

Human or animal figures appear only rarely on a few items of pottery, but are more often found on bronze and terracotta statuettes, and also in the ornamentation of bronze objects, particularly women's belts in sheet metal, worked in repoussé. As also seen in the belts of Scandinavian Bronze Age women in the second half of the second millennium BC, which are skilfully decorated with chains of spirals, and in the distinct ones from other regions, the choice of motifs reveals a link between this kind of decoration and solar symbolism: a wheel or circle with sunrays; waterfowl in rows or harnessed in pairs to the sun disc; horses, with or without a rider who sometimes wears a sunray headdress. From this point of view, the repertoire of the Celts is scarcely distinguishable from that of their neighbours. The originality lies mainly in the form of the support materials, but this is only apparent when there are significant numbers of a series.

The Alpine site of Hallstatt, wealthy from extracting and trading the salt needed for preserving meat, has yielded a number of large fibulae, probably worn as a pectoral ornament by women who perhaps thus displayed a religious function related to the recording of time. The significance of this extraordinary jewellery comes from the fact that the most complete ones present undoubted

references to the calendar, their plates bearing solar symbols. The most elaborate show a two-horse draught symbolizing the daily summer journey of the sun, contrasting with the boat of the night-time journey, and the voyage across the cold waters of winter darkness. The seasonal migrations of the waterfowl, lined up in rows engraved or riveted onto the plate, might recall the same division of the year into two, whereas the number of the disc-shaped pendants, hung on small chains, appears to match, at least in some cases, the twelve months of the lunar year.

A fairly limited number of exceptional objects illustrates the themes that can be considered as specifically Celtic and also the influences exercised by the Mediterranean world on the Celts north of the Alps from the sixth century onwards. The first category includes, for example, a collection of terracotta grave-offerings from central Bohemia: here we see the triskelion and the sun wheel, accompanied by a small representation of a shield and an oak leaf. This reference to the plant world is exceptional at that time and bears comparison with the writings, obviously more recent, that tell of the Celts' worship of the oak, considered as sacred. It was one of the species identified as the world tree, which supports the sky and forms the axis of the world.

Another motif that was to be exceedingly popular during the following centuries was the figure, alone or duplicated, recognizable as the sun god, possibly his twin embodiment, framed by a pair of grotesque snake-bodied beings. The theme endures in medieval literature, where the annual combat of two dragons occurs in May in the centre of the territory, where the world tree, one of the embodiments of the god, holds the universe together vertically. The cyclical fight between the red and white dragons is, in this context, a symbolic allusion to the alternation of the two seasons of the year, the basis of the plant cycle bringing hope of new life.

The presence of these few but significant themes confirms that the concept of the universe based on the cyclical alternation of opposite and complementary principles – which would be one of the fundamental themes illustrated by Celtic art in the following centuries – already existed in the sixth century BC. This provides important evidence of the ancient roots of the religious belief system, which was to be illustrated by new imagery from the middle of the fifth century BC onwards.

For the most part, the influences from the Mediterranean are evident in stone carving, reserved for the elite of society, where anthropomorphic stelae built on the top of burial mounds of important people are sometimes replaced by statues clearly inspired by southern originals. For example, the Warrior of Hirschlanden, influenced by similar effigies from the Adriatic coast,

derived in their turn from Greek *kouroi* (statues of male youth) is represented as a naked hero with the insignia of his rank. The gesture of respect conveyed by the position of the arms suggests that this might be an evocation of the deceased hero addressing the gods. The statues discovered in the ditch of a quadrangular enclosure in Vix, sculpted into the mass of a stone cube, appear similar to the statuary of Magna Graecia, to the extent that it is possible to imagine them to have been made by a sculptor trained in that tradition. The crouching position of the man would seem to suggest an image of a heroic mortal rather than a god. The almost total absence of images of goddesses in the Celtic repertoire suggests that the statue of a seated woman could be interpreted in the same way, in spite of it seeming to have drawn its inspiration from the Greek model of a deity on her throne.

In anticipation of the flourishing of mature Celtic art around the middle of the fifth century BC, the works from the preceding centuries provide valuable evidence of the deep roots and consistency of the system of ideas that underlie this unique imagery. This deep-seated religious thought was not content with reproducing the surface appearance of the visible world. However, it had not yet found the means that would later enable it to reveal the invisible forces, which, in the eyes of the ancient Celts, ensured that the universe would keep on turning...

Votive symbols, from a cremation grave in Poděbrady, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 650–550 BC
Terracotta
Diameter of the wheel: 9 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The presence of these four symbolically important objects among grave goods, which included several painted vases and a large iron fibula in what is called the 'harp shape', is evidence of how old the characteristic themes are within the cults and iconography of the Celts: the sun wheel with four spokes, inherited from the Bronze Age, often associated with the horse and referring both to the movement of the sun and to the subdivision of space into the four cardinal points; an oak leaf, a revered tree associated with mistletoe; the triskelion, after the S-motif, the most frequent rotating sun symbol in the repertoire; the shield, a warlike emblem that would be offered in some sanctuaries in the form of miniature ex-votos right up until the Gallo-Roman period. They are all linked to different aspects of the great Apollonian sun god of the Celts, probably identifiable with the god Lug, of supposedly twin-born origin, who was known in various regions of the Celtic world.





Belt-chain with sun wheel, from a tumulus in Nemějice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 700–500 BC
Bronze cast in a mould (chains) and using lost-wax casting (wheel and birds)
Diameter of the wheel: 8 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

Since the second millennium BC the metal belts worn by high-ranking women, probably charged with a particular role (priestesses?), have generally been associated with sun-related themes. This exceptional example from the early Iron Age presents a wheel with four spokes and four birds drinking from a central dish. This evokes the life-giving force of the sun, the water made fertile by the sun's flames becoming the source of life. This belt is an intermediate stage, a precursor to the richly decorated belts of Celtic women in the third century BC. There, the sun theme would be represented by a hook with one end in the shape of a horse's head, an animal often appearing on the large belts in bronze decorated in repoussé work, contemporary to the example from Nemějice.

Seated statue of an armed man, from the ditch of a quadrangular enclosure in Vix, Côte-d'Or, France

About 500–460 BC
Carved limestone
Height: 46 cm
Châtillon-sur-Seine,
Musée du Pays Châtillonnais

This statue, decapitated in antiquity, represents a man sitting on the ground, with his knees drawn up against his body. He is probably naked, but equipped in the style of Celtic warriors known from images of the fifth century BC (pp. 76–77, 80): the lower part of his body is protected by a kilt of leather strips, his shins by greaves (visible on the left). He is armed with a shield bearing a boss that extends into a spine down the centre, which he is holding vertically in front of him in his left hand, and with a sword hanging at his right leg. This practice is known, both from written reports and from drawings and burial customs, to have been adopted by the Celts. As in Hirschlanden (opposite page), this might be a representation of the deceased or of an ancestor. His seated position is exceptional, and perhaps due not only to the optimum use of a cubic block of stone, but also to a desire to express a subordinate relationship to the woman of the couple (see below). Such a situation would tie in with what we know of the husbands of heiresses from royal Celtic dynasties.



Seated statue of a woman, from the ditch of a quadrangular enclosure in Vix, Côte-d'Or, France

About 500–460 BC
Carved limestone
Height: 62 cm
Châtillon-sur-Seine,
Musée du Pays Châtillonnais

Seated in a regal pose, probably on a throne according to the pattern of female deities from Magna Graecia, this high-ranking woman wears an open-ended torque, the ends of which turn down at right angles. This bears a vague resemblance to the example in gold from the nearby grave of the princess, famous for the wealth of funerary offerings that it contained, among which was the 'Vix vase', the largest bronze Greek *krater* known to this day. Forming a pair with the statue of a warrior found in the same enclosure, it might be a portrait of one of the members of the local dynasty accompanied by her husband in the context of an ancestor cult. These two exceptional sculptures are evidence of a strong if occasional influence from the Mediterranean world, conceivable on this site because of its strategic position on one of the main trading routes for tin, carried by river from the Atlantic coasts to Marseille. In fact, the fortified township of Mont Lassois, at Vix, controlled the trans-shipment between the upper reaches of the Seine and the Saône valley.





Standing statue, which originally crowned a tumulus in Ditzingen-Hirschlanden, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

550–500 BC
Carved sandstone
Height: 152 cm
Stuttgart,
Landesmuseum Württemberg

Found broken in three pieces at the foot of the burial mound, this life-size statue represents a naked man, armed with a double belt on which hangs a dagger with a circular pommel, and wearing a heavy closed tubular torque around his neck. The man is crowned with a conical headdress, which has an equivalent in birch bark found in the nearby princely grave in Hochdorf. The pose with the arms folded against the body might be considered as a mark of respect towards the tutelary deity. The figure is represented as a heroic nude, with the major insignia of his rank: therefore, it is probably the symbolic image of the deceased lying in the chief grave of the monument. This exceptional sculpture is generally compared with Greek models, which arrived via the Adriatic area.

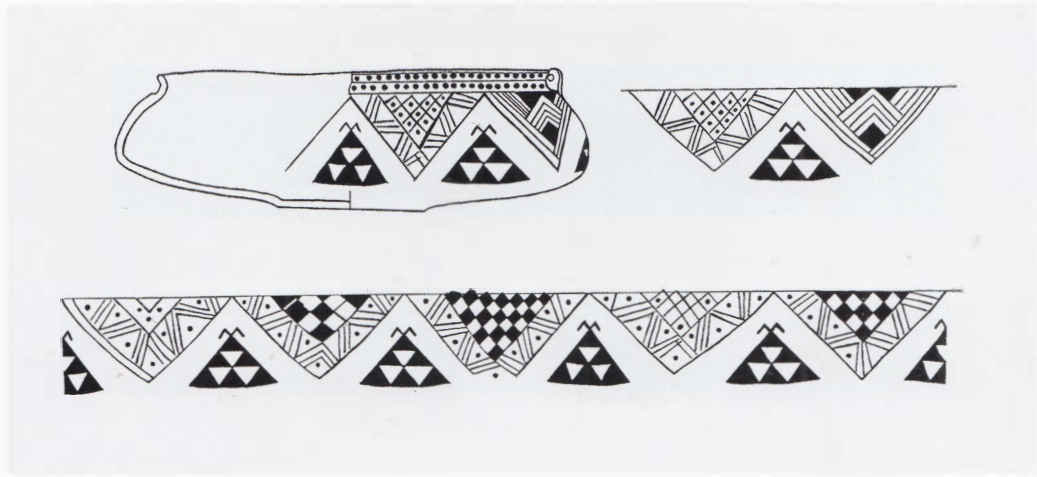
Basin with geometric decoration, from a grave in Straškov, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 650–500 BC
Terracotta painted with a tarry black material, probably after firing
Diameter: 23.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

Painted pottery had practically disappeared from inland Europe since the end of the fourth millennium BC and anything other than the simplest ceramic ornamentation was virtually nonexistent in the central and western area. This technique reappeared progressively from the seventh century BC onwards, as did decoration made by smoothing a graphited surface, particularly on vases designed for funerary use that accompanied the deceased and were therefore not subjected to prolonged use. In any case, they were often fired at a temperature that did not allow it. In general, the decoration is strictly geometric, as on this basin decorated with triangular motifs: at the bottom, seven triangles are crowned by a broken line of M-shapes, subdivided internally into nine triangles alternating between black and the colour of the ground; above, the same number of larger inverted triangles, are interlocking in the lower frieze; inside them, each one carries a different decoration. Geometric ornamentation of this type, using motifs common to a very wide geographical area, very probably constitutes the symbolic record of a message that would be understood by the people for whom these objects were made. However, the meaning of this continuous sequence, with its alternating, differentiated and identical three-fold motifs, is impossible for us to determine.











Large fibula with pendants, from grave no. 94 in Hallstatt, Upper Austria

About 600–500 BC
Cast bronze (figurines), worked in repoussé, hammered and engraved (plaque)
Height: approx. 33 cm
Salzburg, Carolino Augusteum, Salzburger Museum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte

Known from a series of examples on the same site, these large fibulae were probably the insignias of the specific roles of the women who wore them, as appears to be the case for the metal belts (p. 37). Indeed, these two categories of objects present complex combinations of solar themes: here, the boat, the twin horses draught of the heavenly chariot and the waterfowl. One pair of birds, cast in the round, is fixed to the plaque and frames the horses diagonally. These might suggest harbingers of spring and winter, the role that they play in their migration at the two great changes of season. Very sketchily engraved lines of these birds appear on the side of the boat, and also on the upper edge of the plaque. In this particular case, the twelve pendants might refer to the twelve lunar months. The entire configuration would thus form a kind of résumé of the Celtic lunisolar year, with an evocation of symbols relating to the dark, winter, night-time periods (boat and birds), and the bright, summery, daytime ones (horse draught). The woman who wore this exceptional ornament might have been responsible for monitoring and managing the calendar.

Pendant representing a horseman, Bohemia, Czech Republic

Precise provenance unknown
Attributed to the early Iron Age, 700–500 BC
Bronze, lost-wax casting
Height: 4.2 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This little statuette of an ithyphallic horseman would have been worn as a pendant, to serve as an amulet. From the second millennium BC onwards, the horse was associated in the figurative repertoire with the sun god: the horse accompanies the sun disc on its journey across the sky, or draws its chariot on its daily round. In the following millennium, it is an essential element of the visual repertoire among the Celts, and also among other peoples, from south-eastern Europe to the Iberian peninsula. We find it on the richly decorated women's belts made in repoussé bronze, on vessels of the same material and on other decorative or ceremonial objects. When the horse has a rider, he sometimes wears a sunray headdress to indicate his solar nature. This was to remain one of the most frequent themes in Celtic art during the last 500 years BC and is by far the most frequent image on the back of Celtic coins. With a human head and accompanied by a plant motif, the image becomes the great sun god, combining the three essential forms of life: human, animal and plant.



Statuette of a quadruped fixed to rings threaded on a double-twisted stem from a grave in Hradenín, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 750–550 BC
Bronze, lost-wax casting
Total length: 10 cm
Kolín, Regionální Muzeum

Rudimentary, but made very expressive by the rippling movement of the whole body (recalling the 'dragons' of the Scandinavian Bronze Age), the quadruped is impossible to identify with certainty. The animal might represent a supernatural being or might be a clumsy attempt at modelling a horse. The context of its discovery, probably one of the aristocratic chariot graves explored on the site, rather suggests the second possibility.





Dagger with figurative pommel, from grave no. 116 in Hallstatt, Upper Austria

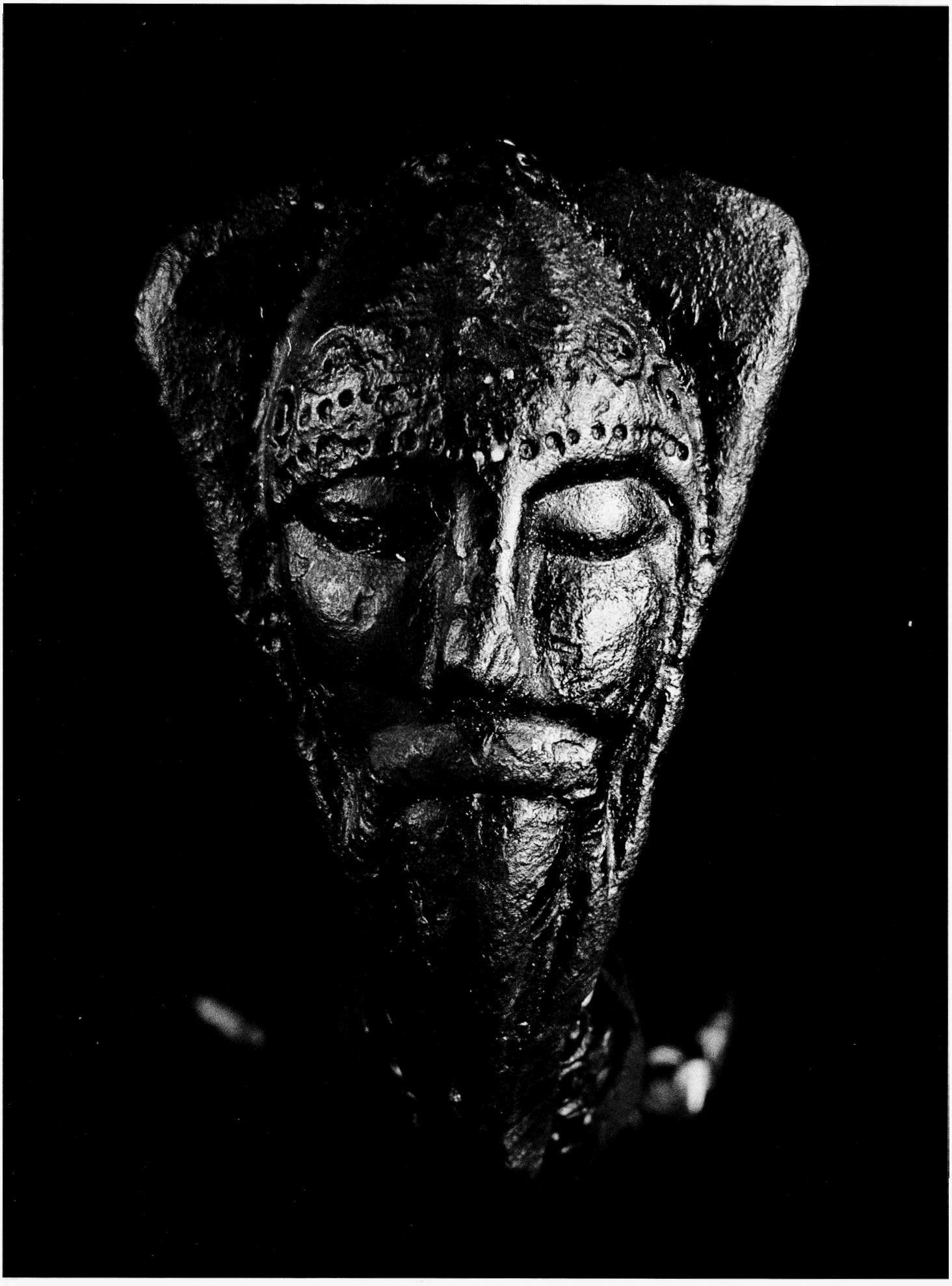
About 550–480 BC
Bronze, lost-wax casting on an iron blade, inlays of bone (or coral?)
Length of the handle: approx. 12 cm
Vienna, Naturhistorisches Museum

The openwork pommel of the handle of this high-quality weapon is formed from a pair of snake-bodied monsters, which surround two small spread-eagled figures, joined by their feet. They probably represent the two inseparable aspects of the sun: daytime and night-time. This is the duplicated theme of the 'master of the animals', one of the iconographic variants of the image of the god associated with the world tree, considered to be of Eastern origin. It appears on belt clasps and some other objects in the fifth century BC (p. 63). Under the simplified form of the 'pair of dragons', it was to become in the following two centuries the most frequently represented and widespread motif for military weapons, particularly sword scabbards (pp. 142–143).

II

THE BIRTH OF CELTIC ART

Fifth century BC



Fibula with human head, from Port-à-Binson, found in a ford on the Marne river, Marne, France, about 450–400 BC

See p. 68

The impulses that gave rise to the radical changes in the figurative language of the Transalpine Celts in around the middle of the fifth century BC originated mainly from the Mediterranean. Among the most obvious sources of inspiration were items for serving wine, imported mainly from Etruria. These were found at intervals all along the ancient trade routes for wine, coral and other luxury products, which were transported from northern Italy and Marseille to destinations as far away as the Atlantic coast, the Rhineland, the upper reaches of the Danube and Bohemia, where they were exchanged for metals, amber, slaves and perhaps food. Journeys by individuals or small groups coincided with the comings and goings of long-distance trade, reflecting the anecdotal evidence for the source of the invasion of Italy by people from transalpine regions: craftsmen such as Helicon, the Helvetian blacksmith mentioned by Pliny the Elder; the mercenaries employed by the Greek and Etruscan cities; and the Greek and Etruscan emissaries who tried to create a network of alliances in order to guarantee the safe passage of supplies. The emissaries accompanied the gifts intended for local chiefs, but could also lend their skills when necessary, as seen in one of the reconstructions of the ramparts of the Heuneburg hill fort, on the left bank of the Danube, below Sigmaringen, and to the north of Lake Constance. Its ground plan with quadrangular bastions and the use of mud bricks showed close parallels with Magna Graecia, especially in Sicily. However, these materials were unsuitable for local use.

The Celtic craftsmen were able to appropriate the models from the south to their own religious beliefs with the patronage of the upper classes that controlled the major trade channels. A catalogue of imported objects shows that these models were probably carefully chosen, since the ornamentation on bronze vases imported in the fifth century, mainly from Etruria, shows the Celts' preference for subjects that include symbols or images that would be easy to subsume into their system of religious beliefs and combine with existing imagery. This might explain the fashion for flagons with the lower fixing point of the handle shaped as a palmette accompanied by S-motifs. Here the Celtic creators rediscovered this ancient solar symbol associated with the world tree, which might be supplemented or replaced by an image of the deity. Another motif that appeared on the fixing points, the head of Silenus or Achelous, with animal ears and horns, was suitable for

evoking the image of this god who, being the originator of all life, could adopt a human form as well as animal or plant.

So it is not surprising that the Celts took to improving these familiar shapes with a few modifications and new associations of images that were better suited to Celtic beliefs. Changes, almost imperceptible at first glance, were enough to divert the model from its original sense and to introduce an alternative meaning that might escape the casual observer. An excellent example of this type of process is the decorative metalwork from Eigenbilzen that was inspired by a Graeco-Etruscan model of a frieze of palmettes and lotus flowers. The circular join that unites the ends of the petals on the floral motif does indeed lead to a new interpretation, that of a double leaf identifiable with the mistletoe, about which Pliny the Elder commented: 'The Druids have nothing more sacred than it and the tree which carries it, provided that it is an oak' and 'they see in it a sign that the tree has been chosen by the god himself' (*Natural History*, XVI, 249). In other words, this aerial parasite, which remains green while the tree dies during winter, has the same relationship to its support as the immortal soul has to the perishable body. Rather than being an attribute, the mistletoe is the vital substance of the plant embodiment of the god, the world tree that supports the world.

A double mistletoe leaf can also be adapted from the two trailing leaves of a palmette, which the Celts preferred to be three-lobed because of their attachment to three-fold symbolism. In the fifth century this became one of the fundamental motifs of the new vocabulary. It usually framed the face of the deity, but might appear alone, replacing the face of the god or the palmette. It thus often established a subtle system of equivalences, which gave an astonishing homogeneity to the imagery derived from Graeco-Etruscan models. However, the vocabulary of the initial phase of the second half of the fifth century was still not completely stable. Therefore many variants of the same theme can be seen. For instance, the pair of monsters associated with the deity or his plant embodiment might be different kinds of dragon with a snake's body, sometimes two-headed, but also sphinxes or griffons, which came directly from orientalizing imagery.

The best place to observe the links between the various themes in the new vocabulary is on the ceremonial flagons made by the Celts. These comprise two major varieties: the flagon with a spherical or double-cone body and a tubular spout; and that with a beaked spout and a slender upper body ending in a keel, and a wide, low-rounded shoulder inspired by Etruscan models, but differing from them as much in the choice as in the arrangement of the motifs. The handle-attachment remains a central feature,

but it is integrated into a design that, on different parts of the vessel, displays subtle references and interrelationships between the themes. These are all organized around the deity and his embodiments, symbols and supporters, with a special emphasis on the unity that he grants to the three forms of life: human, animal and plant. This principle might be expressed by uniting juxtaposed motifs in the same image – as revealed in the horse with a human head framed by a double mistletoe leaf on the lid of the Reinheim flagon – or simply by showing them on different parts of the vessel without amalgamating them in a single image.

We can also see a tendency to multiply interpretations by using signs disguised as anatomical features. Thus the S-motif might form eyebrows or the hair around the face, but at the same time recall the pair of dragons with snakes' bodies surrounding the deity's various embodiments. The same principle applies to the palmette and the mistletoe leaf. The new imagery appeared on all objects that were intended to emphasize the prestige of the elite. The complexity and richness of the message were determined by the size and the practical constraints of the support. However, the Celtic artists succeeded in illustrating the essential meaning, even on objects as small as fibulae.

The use of a pair of compasses to create designs based on the masterly relationships of Euclidean geometry reveals another little-known aspect of the concerns of the Celtic intellectual elite: an interest in mathematics, which has earned the Druids the right to be considered the scholars of Pythagoras. In fact this is the same knowledge, communicated only orally, that they must have used to update their lunisolar calendar and follow the movements of heavenly bodies.

The pictorial sword scabbard from the Hallstatt burial site is, along with the Gundestrup ceremonial bowl from three centuries later, an unusual and isolated work in Celtic art because it contains a narrative sequence. The explanation is the sporadic influence of the pictorial narrative of Situla art. However, this work is unquestionably Celtic, as shown by the techniques used (engraving rather than repoussé work), the plant-like appearance given to some parts of the horses' anatomy and the chape (point of the scabbard) formed by a 'pair of dragons', which enclose a palmette. Despite it being an exception, this work still contains the fundamental themes and specific attitudes of the new art.

Mask fibula from Parsberg, Upper Palatinate, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting,
the separate spring is lost
Length: 9 cm
Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum

The foot of this fibula is made up of a spherical head with protuberant almond-shaped eyes, semicircular ears with disc-shaped ends and a long thin moustache, which extends to the nape of the neck, so that the cheeks form a triangle with curved sides, a frequent geometric figure in Celtic works. The close-cropped hair starts from a boss at the root of the nose. The part opposite the bow, above the spring, represents a mask that combines human features – nose, eyes and headdress similar to those on the head – with pointed animal ears. A sort of tall triangular tiara with a three-lobed palmette at the top surmounts the whole. Above, where the lost separate spring would have been, an openwork element bears a pair of inverted griffons whose tails form a three-lobed palmette. The whole represents the god associated with the world tree, flanked by his monstrous supporters.





Mask fibula from a tumulus in Kyšice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting,
the separate spring is lost
Length: 6.1 cm
Plzeň, Západočeské Muzeum

With its exceptionally fine workmanship, this example of a figurative fibula has a foot shaped as a bearded human head with a moustache, a frequent subject of the initial period of La Tène Celtic art. On the end of the bow, two superimposed masks overlap with each other, in the same way as the designs shown on some fixing points of handles of wine flagons or other objects. As is often the case, they give to the human face shapes that suggest symbols (here S-motifs), plants (leaves) and animals (the small pointed ears of the upper mask), thus combining in the same image allusions to the three forms of life with the S-motif, symbol of the dynamic and cyclical force which guarantees their existence.

Circular, openwork phalera from the chariot burial of the 'Tomelle aux Mouches', Semide, Ardennes, France

About 430–390 BC
Sheet bronze pierced with a tool, central boss cast onto an iron stem, applied coral beads
Diameter: 13 cm
Charleville-Mézières, Musée de l'Ardenne

This is the one of the openwork items that are particularly numerous in the area of the so-called 'marnian' (named after the river Marne) La Tène culture in the Champagne region, whose meticulous workmanship in piercing and cutting is a technical tour de force and was probably very time-consuming. This is therefore a prestigious item whose symbolic significance is increased by the use of coral.

Around the central boss, between two concentric circles made of piercings defined by a sort of angular interlacing, there is a spiralling design made of five interlinked S-motifs. The points where they meet are decorated with monsters' heads whose open hawks' beaks are scrolled and whose eyes are formed by a coral bead. This is an original design based on the frequent theme of the dragon with a snake's body tracing an S-motif. Its head is probably borrowed from a griffon rather than a bird of prey.



Phalera from a chariot burial in Hořovičky, discovered in 1863, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Stamped repoussé bronze leaf fixed onto a bronze disc by an iron strap and a central conical part with a bronze profile
Diameter: 15 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This object, with its pendant and ten other smaller phalerae on which there is only a single row of heads, is part of the harness for the pair of horses drawing the chariot. A double mistletoe leaf encircles the round-cheeked heads and their headdresses are surmounted by two smaller leaves, which are of the same shape but bifurcating. This is a representation of the deity associated with this plant theme. The circular form of the object and the radiating arrangement of the heads emphasize its solar nature, as seen later on the Manerbio phalerae (p. 167). Since the horse – a reference to the movement of the sun – is the major animal embodiment of the god, its appearance on the ornaments of the horse-drawn chariot is understandable. Such images can also be found on the metal parts of this type of vehicle, particularly on the linch-pins. The association of the horse with a double mistletoe leaf and a human head is found as early as the fifth century BC.





Phalera with delicate openwork from the chariot burial in Cuperly, Marne, France

About 420–380 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting with design cut out free-hand with a burin
Diameter: 11 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

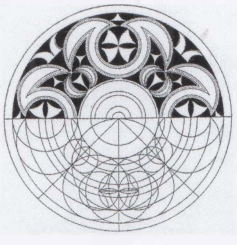
Created from a skilful design using a pair of compasses and workmanship of astonishing delicacy, this work shows exceptional technical prowess. The design follows the pattern alreadyillustrated by the phalera from Somme-Bionne (see below) – a circular field subdivided into four parts around a central space, which has a single pattern but overlaps a part of each of the four segments. This is the 'world image' as imagined by the Celts. Another way of looking at the design shows not only four-fold devices, but also two-fold lotus flowers, and three-fold triangles with curved sides making a fan-shape.



Circular openwork phalera from the chariot burial at 'l'Homme Mort', Somme-Bionne, Marne, France

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting
Diameter: 7 cm
London, British Museum

Designed entirely with compasses and based on the idea of a central space surrounded by four parts – the 'world image' – this work exploits the tension between solids and voids to offer the observer a game based on the subtle interlocking of different two-fold, three-fold and four-fold designs. Some of them might give a fleeting impression of images suggesting other subjects: leaves, lotus flowers and even a sort of horned mask. The rigorous geometric design, based on clever numerical relationships, becomes a starting-point for the observer's imagination.



Anthropomorphic fibula from burial site no. 74 in Manětín-Hrádek, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting,
with separate spring in the same metal;
originally inlaid with amber pellets
Length: 8.6 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

Descriptive or narrative works are extremely rare in Celtic art. This fibula is one of those exceptions. It represents a figure, probably a deity and not merely a mortal, with legs slightly bent to follow the form of the fibula derived from the Etrusco-Italic type known as 'Certosa'. The clothing is similar to that found on some other images from the fifth century BC: a long tunic reaching to just above the knees, clinging stockings and shoes with upturned toes. This costume is very similar to that worn by the figures shown on the plaque on the Hallstatt scabbard (pp. 76–77).







Bowl with elaborate stamped decoration from cremation grave no. 66 in Manětín-Hrádek, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Terracotta decorated with punches before firing
Diameter: 17.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This vessel with a central boss, perhaps used for ritual libations rather than for everyday use, shows some potters' remarkable mastery of adding complex decorations using several punches before firing. This technique was probably borrowed from northern Italy, where the fashion for it persisted between the river Po and the Alps for a long time after it had been introduced into Italy by the orientalizing fashion in the seventh century BC. Black varnished ceramics, particularly bowls with a central boss decorated inside, imported from Attica or imitated locally by Etruscan workshops, were a second source of inspiration.

Here, two concentric bands separated by double ribbing are defined on both sides by a single rib. They show, from the centre, a chain of wide S-motifs, which link together around double concentric circles. Smaller, double concentric circles flank the point at which they meet. Then there is a series of semicircles, with the convex side turned towards the centre, meeting between three plain circles arranged in a triangle. The insistence on the number three, endowed by the Celts with a special meaning, is clear. The quality of the carefully precise workmanship is an example of the level of skill achieved by some workshops in Bohemia.

Lenticular-bottomed flagon from a cremation grave in Hlubyně, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Engraved and stamped terracotta, decorated before firing
Height: 33 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The shape of this flagon, with a long straight flaring neck and a wide lentil-shaped body, is characteristic of the Celtic terracotta objects used for drink-serving in central Europe, invented probably by the Boii in Bohemia. They were clearly designed to contain and serve liquids. Their decoration was often inspired by that used on metal and was based on similar techniques. We even find decorations engraved directly onto the clay with compasses or in a free-hand style, often very similar to the ones decorating the body of metal flagons. Here, on the base of the neck and the upper part of the body, are several variants of the zigzag of leaves constructed with compasses, such as the linked semicircles and stamped concentric circles.



Painted cup with a boss inside the bowl from the bottom of excavated hut no. 345 in Radovesice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Terracotta decorated with reddish slip
Diameter: 27.5 cm
Teplice, Regionální Muzeum

Around the central boss, between a painted circle and the edge, three swans with necks gracefully curved towards the base, whose body shapes suggest the mistletoe leaf, are separated by diagonal S-motifs. The whole brings together the symbolic significance of the number three to birds associated with the sun, the S-motif and perhaps the plant attributed to the deity. This was probably a vessel used for libations or some other ritual activity. It is interesting to draw a parallel between this symbolic image and the importance given to the constellation of the Swan in the night sky at the beginning of the summer season on the Brno ceremonial flagon (pp. 120–123), a little more than a century later.



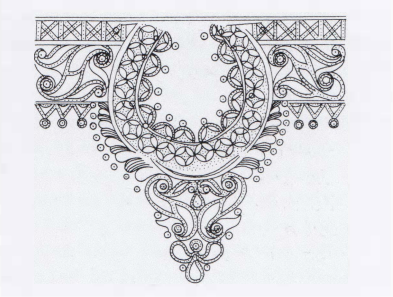


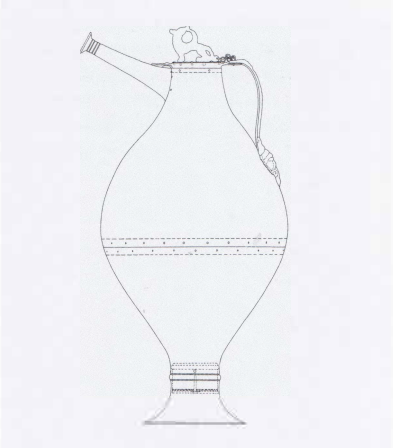
Flagon with tubular spout from cremation grave no. 2 in the Glauberg monumental site, Hesse, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting, hammered and repoussé work engraved with compasses and free-hand, strapping in iron, wood (inside the foot)
Height: approx 50 cm
Glauberg, Keltenwelt am Glauberg

Following the decorative formula applied to this type of ceremonial flagon with a double-cone or spherical body, the major figurative devices are modelled in the round or in relief, and limited to the handle and lid, which here bears a figurine representing a griffon, with its head turned backwards to meet the pointed end of its crescent-shaped wing. The upper fixing point of the handle bears a ram's head, and the lower point bears a human head crowned with three leaves derived from a palmette. Two lyre-shaped S-motifs frame the face with a moustache. Their scrolls surround the base of a three-lobed palmette under the chin.

The rest of the finely engraved decoration is made up of friezes on the neck, around the join of the spout, on the body and the foot. These are S-motifs facing one another, derived from series of palmettes, which suggest human masks, and also linked hexagonal rosettes of leaves drawn with compasses. A zigzag of leaves also drawn with compasses crowned with groups of three circles, arranged above angular twists, border the foot. Below the point where the spout joins, an engraved design, derived from a converted palmette framed with S-motifs, make up a schematic replica of the head on the lower fixing point of the handle.





Beaked flagon spout from burial site no. 1 of the Glauberg monumental site, Hesse, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting and engraved repoussé work, with iron strapping at the foot
Height: 52.5 cm
Glauberg, Keltenwelt am Glauberg

This slender flagon is very close in its general design to the example from the Dürrnberg (opposite). It has three kinds of decoration: figurines modelled in the round or in high relief, motifs created in repoussé work and subjects engraved free-hand. These are mainly on the escutcheon on the lower part of the handle-attachment, formed by a human head, and also on the lower part of the vessel, where there is a frieze of animals and winged monsters with human heads. The body of the flagon has double mouldings, starting from the shoulder and ending at the bottom in a three-lobed motif, which springs from the palmette.

The upper part of the handle-attachment is surmounted by a figure seated cross-legged, with his hands resting on his knees, dressed in armour of the same type as that represented on the stone statue found at the same site (p. 80). His headdress is made up of a band of S-motifs in relief, while the rest of the skull is smooth: is this a close fitting skullcap or a kind of tonsure, as seems to be the case on more recent figures (p. 158). The figure is flanked by two crouching sphinxes, with their heads turned backwards, towards him, and framed by a pair of S-motifs. In front of these monsters are horizontal human heads with pointed animal ears. Finally, the edge has pairs of mouldings, which end at the joint of the spout in scrolls in highly accentuated relief. The three figurines arranged on the edge are thought to represent the deity, flanked by his monstrous acolytes. The vessel has been directly associated with ritual drinking, specifically mead, which has been identified from the pollen found in the residues collected from inside.









Ceremonial long-spout flagon from chariot burial no. 112 in the Dürrnberg, near Hallein, Upper Austria

About 410–370 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting (handle, figurines on the edge, beak), hammered and repoussé work (assembled parts of the body)
Height: 46 cm
Salzburg, Carolino Augusteum, Salzburger Museum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte

This flagon is an example of the slender shape with a well-defined shoulder, of which terracotta models have been found on the site and also in other places. This, along with the double-cone with tubular spout, is the main type of Celtic vessel in this category, which was unquestionably used during communal ceremonies presided over by the person that they accompanied into the Other World. The upper fixing point of the handle bears a monstrous quadruped, whose body is probably inspired by a feline, but with a fleshy-cheeked human head embellished with two vertically striped S-motifs terminating in a scroll by way of eyebrows. The middle of the back has a succession of intertwined chevrons in relief, no doubt derived from a reinterpretation of the lion's mane on the original model. The leaf-like tail is an S-motif in relief, with vertical stripes on both sides of the central moulding. This monstrous being's chin rests on a human head, with almond-shaped eyes and long hair combed backwards, and surrounds ears formed by a scroll starting from the corner of the eye.

On both sides of the branches of the fixing point of the handle are monstrous quadrupeds similar to the one above, but distinguished by pointed animal ears, and an excessively long tongue, which turns into an S-motif and finishes in a scroll, to echo the tail. This strange extension of the face recalls the kind of proboscis on some monstrous creatures in the third century BC (pp. 127, 137). The lower fixing point of the handle is made up of a head, with a high headdress bound by a narrow beaded band, above which is arranged a pair of leaves with a single scroll that suggests the ears of an animal. The same image therefore brings together human, animal and plant aspects. The head is framed by two chains of S-motifs with a beaded contour, which at the bottom butts up against a three-lobed palmette, which has leaves that are separated by other leaves, this time with a scroll.
The shoulder of the vessel is decorated in relief with double leaves united by a circle. The body has long mouldings, which are arranged in an inverted 'U-shape', joined by a circle to a long leaf-like device, with a three-lobed palmette at its end.

Ceremonial flagon with tubular spout from the grave of the princess of Reinheim, Saarland, Germany

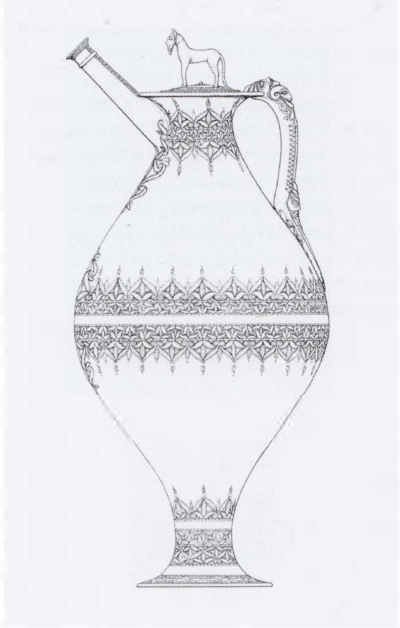
About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting (handle and statuette on the lid), hammered and engraved with compasses and designed free-hand (body of the vessel)
Height: 46 cm
Saarbrücken Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte

This ceremonial flagon is probably the oldest example of Celtic manufacture to show all the themes that made up the core vocabulary that from this point onwards would be used by Celtic artists. On the upper fixing point of the handle, there is a bearded human head with a moustache, a palmette as hair, the chin held between the horns of a ram, whose muzzle is extended by a three-lobed palmette, flanked by embossed circles arranged in a triangle.

The lower fixing point of the handle shows a similar head, whose base is framed by S-motifs extended by the leaves of a palmette on both sides of the midrib, which starts from the beard. The moulding between the two fixing points of the handle is edged with zigzags engraved with double lines, which have outside points marked with small stamped circles.

On the lid, the statuette of a horse has a human head framed by a double mistletoe leaf. This monstrous embodiment of the deity unites the three forms of life: human, animal and plant. A rich decoration of three-lobed palmettes, leaves, S-motifs and lotus flowers is engraved with compasses on the lid, edge, top of the tubular spout, neck, the body and foot of the vessel, including underneath. The whole flagon bears witness to the fact that the arrangement and style of the subjects on Celtic flagons were now totally free from the influence of the Etruscan models on which the early flagons were based.









Figurative fibula from a tomb under tumulus in Panenský Týnec, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 430–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting over the partially preserved side-opening spring
Length: 10.2 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The shape of this example of figurative fibula is derived from the Etrusco-Italic type known as Certosa, after the burial site in Felsina, the modern Bologna, dating from the fifth century BC. The foot is shaped like a sheep's head, without horns, and complete with a sort of crown. It is carried on a neck, decorated with bifurcating leaf-like scrolls hiding the catch. A hawk with open wings at the other end of the fibula is turned towards the catch, above the side-opening spring. Its beak is leaning on the start of the bow, which has a finely incised design of leaves and palmettes. This design is placed symmetrically around a central motif, a circle formed by four leaves, drawn with compasses, which border a square with concave sides filled with a 'basketry' design. This motif appears on other objects of the same period, and also on much more recent works from Britain. A similar chess-board design is used prominently under the spout of the ceremonial flagons from Basse-Yutz (next page).



Pair of ceremonial flagons from a deposit discovered in Basse-Yutz, Moselle, France

About 410–370 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting, red enamel melted onto the object and inlaid with coral
Height: 38 cm
London, British Museum



These two ceremonial flagons, identical apart from a few details, were found in circumstances that remain obscure, along with two vases of Etruscan origin of the form known as *stamnos*. This collection is the sole example of twin vessels for serving drinks known to this day. It therefore does not seem to be from a royal grave. This is why it has been described as a deposit.

The two flagons, of an exceptionally high quality, probably represent the most elaborate example of versions in the fifth and fourth centuries, known of to this day. We should note the subtle contrast between the decorated parts, embellished with coloured inlays, and the elegant simplicity of the smooth body, which enhances the curved surface.

The forequarters of a quadruped, whose claws rest on the flat edge of the vessel, which has a cylindrical body incised with lines to suggest fur, compose the handle. Behind the animal's head, a mane is suggested by an arrangement of S-motifs. On the back, there is a motif based on a double palmette, inlaid with enamel. This is the Celtic version of a feline, with a half-open mouth showing teeth, and with a head that seems to be more like that of a dog. A pair of similar animals, lying down, can be seen on both sides on the branches of the fixing point.

Above the end of the long lidded spout, decorated with an engraved double angular twist, is a small duck with eyes inlaid with coral. This would appear to float on the liquid being poured from the spout. The lower fixing point of the handle is made up of a head with a moustache and round eyes inlaid with coral, complete with eyebrows drawn as a pair of bifurcating S-motifs, and with a headdress formed of a palmette with a double leaf in the middle, flanked by scrolls and inlaid with enamel. The lower part of the face is framed by S-motifs, decorated with oblique streaks and a line of dots, with scrolls arranged under the chin. They suggest long hair with curly ends.

Under the spout, two symmetrical designs of palmettes, engraved and inlaid with coral, unfold on both sides of a square in a chequer-board pattern, its squares alternating between coral inlay and angular, twisting engraving. Above the base, a frieze forms a ring of interlaced S-motifs inlaid with coral, between two lines of rectangular inlays separated by small squares marked with a double circle. It is bordered with two friezes engraved with intertwined S-motifs, moving in opposite directions. This work has a well-conceived design and displays masterly workmanship, with devices that can all be found elsewhere.





Applied metal decoration from a harness with a pair of monsters, forming a 'zoomorphic lyre' from a chariot burial at the 'Tomelle aux Mouches', Semide, Ardennes, France

About 430–390 BC
Iron plaque covered with openwork and repoussé sheet bronze, and applied coral decorations
Height: 8.4 cm
Charleville-Mézières, Musée de l'Ardenne

This is a very stylized version of the theme of the world tree flanked by its monstrous acolytes: its plant aspect is suggested here at the top of the design by the double leaf topped by three hemispherical discs, and also by a branching double leaf in the centre. The two monstrous creatures' bodies, with duck's heads and beaks, create the loop surrounding them. Viewed upside down, the triangular image at the top suggests a human mask with strongly defined arched eyebrows formed by the necks of the pair of monsters. This is probably a representation of the sun god and the three forms of life: plant, animal and human, combined with the symbolism of the S-motif and the number three, and also the magical virtues of coral. This material was full of significance for the Celts. Probably because of its colour and marine origin, they must have seen in it a physical portrayal of 'fire in water', which expressed the fusion of the two elements, which they believed created life.



Openwork belt clasp from the Etruscan settlement at San Polo d'Enza, province of Reggio Emilia, Italy

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting and punched decoration
Height: 8 cm
Reggio Emilia, Musei Civici

This type of clasp, originally positioned on a wide leather belt, provided with rings to carry the sword, was widespread in the military elite's armour of the transalpine regions in the second half of the fifth century BC, but it has also been found in the north of Italy. The subject represented here is inspired by a theme originating in the east, known as the 'master of the animals'. Monsters with snakes' bodies, forming an S-motif, which ends in hawks' heads, frame the small figure with outspread arms, here representing the sun god. This is a version of the 'pair of dragons' in the Celtic warrior iconography, generally associated with warrior armour (p. 142). The figure is often replaced by its plant embodiment, a palmette, a symbol of the world tree, a theme that is sometimes combined with pairs of birds with curved beaks, crowned with a crest, occupying the top of the triangle. The isolated example of this clasp, south of the river Po, could be the result of contacts between Celtic peoples and the Etrurians on the Po plain, also confirmed by both objects and documents, in this case perhaps as part of mercenary activities.

Mask fibula from Nová Huť, Dýšina, Bohemia, Czech Republic

450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting,
the separate spring is lost
Length: 5.5 cm
Plzeň, Západočeské Muzeum

The foot of this figurative fibula is made up of a griffon's head with small ears, protuberant eyes and a long, curved beak, whose end meets the bow. On the bow are two human masks, one upside down, which are joined together by their hair. They appear identical at first glance, but are actually different: the one turned towards the griffon has small animal ears and the other has leaf-like devices that extend the eye and end in a scroll. This is an example of the twin-heads theme, which can be seen in a number of other works and is thought to represent the two aspects of the deity. The griffon recalls his link with the world tree and the pair of monsters who, through their seasonal confrontation, take part in an annual cycle, which is also the cycle of life and death.





Figurative fibula from burial site no. 1 of the Glauberg monumental site, Hesse, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting with separate spring, with iron hinge pin and coral beads at the ends
Length: 6.4 cm
Glauberg, Keltenwelt am Glauberg

The whole fibula is shaped as a griffon, whose head is turned towards its hindquarters. These bear a human head, with its chin leaning against the monster's wing. Here can be seen the head and monstrous animal association, presented in other contemporary works. Fixed to the hinge pin, a separate openwork element represents a pair of quadrupeds, in the same position as the griffon, arranged to form a triangle where the two angles close to the ends of the spring are filled by their heads and the third by their tails, joining to make a double scroll. The only unusual monstrous element of these animals is the goatee beard shaped as an S-motif, placed under their lower jaws. It recalls the over-large tail on the monsters on the edge of the Dürrnberg flagon (p. 59).



Openwork clasp with animals facing one another, from the belt from cremation grave no. 2 of the Glauberg monumental site, Hesse, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting, hammered and engraved free-hand and with a compass
Length: 10.2 cm
Glauberg, Keltenwelt am Glauberg

The quadrangular chape that covered the end of the leather band of the belt has an engraved decoration: in the centre, the cross-hatched bottom draws an unhatched tetraskele with branches formed by leaves. On both sides, a rectangle divided into three parts shows Saint-Andrew's cross, flanked by six-leaved rosettes drawn with compasses. The openwork hook shows the tree of life, a variant of the world tree, framed by monstrous animals creeping up the trunk, decorated with a narrow beaded band that is crowned by a double leaf on which is resting the curved beaks or muzzles of the monsters, probably inspired by a griffon. On their backs, a succession of leaves diminishing in size form a sort of crest or wing and S-motifs extend from their shoulders to their back feet. These create openings at the bottom, which suggest a shoe with turned-up toe, worn by the Celtic elite in the fifth century BC. In the centre is a sort of lotus flower. The actual hook is made up of a human head looking outwards. The upper part of the beaks or muzzles of the animals join this head like a pair of horns.

Statuette representing a lion with a ram's head in front of its mouth, from the back-fill of the excavated floor of the large building no. 1 in the quadrangular enclosure of Droužkovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting
Length: 5.2 cm
Chomutov, Oblastní Muzeum

This quadruped is based on the Etruscan lion, frequently pictured on flagons of this provenance, where the claws are indicated and there is a mane engraved on the neck. This statuette was probably originally fixed on the lid or edge of a ceremonial flagon of Celtic manufacture. The ram's head and the animal inspired by the felines on Etruscan models are frequent subjects on this type of vessel. There is nothing to suggest that this might be an example of the 'ravening beast', sometimes suggested for images of this type. Indeed, the feline's mouth is clearly closed. This is one example of the cumulative juxtaposed devices that typify Celtic art.



Linch-pin from a chariot in Oberndorf in der Ebene-Unterradlberg, Lower Austria

About 440–380 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting
on a stem of engraved iron
Overall height: 18 cm
Stadtmuseum St. Pölten

A distinctive feature of this head is a long narrow moustache, which cuts through the lower face and is reminiscent of a similar detail on the head shown on the foot of the Parsberg fibula (p. 50). Its headdress is a three-lobed palmette framed by a pair of monsters with S-shaped bodies and hawks' heads at both ends. This representation of the sun god and his grotesque acolytes shows the S-motif, his main symbol, and also devices representing the three forms of life: human, animal and plant.







Figurative fibula from Ostheim, Lower Franconia, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting,
the separate spring is lost
Height: 8.5 cm
Jena, Sammlung Antiker Kleinkunst

This small masterpiece is a good example of the remarkable mastery achieved by Celtic artists by the last decades of the fifth century BC. The griffon's head on the foot, crowned with a crest, the human mask at the other end, with a moustache that might be considered to be a schematic small ram's head, one of the recurrent themes in Celtic art, and also the side decorations on the bow, are all created from a mistletoe-leaf design. The whole then gives an opportunity for many interpretations, suggesting different themes. The three forms of life (human, animal and plant) are combined in a beautifully balanced piece with masterly workmanship, with themes that are similar to other creations from this period.



Small human head (probably the foot of a fibula) from a cremation under a tumulus at Kšice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 460–430 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting
Height: 1.6 cm
Stříbro, Městské muzeum

This masterpiece, so tiny that only by enlarging it many times can its expressiveness be seen, is a real tour de force, which announces the future prowess of the coin engravers. It required extraordinary skill to create the model in wax. However, a few imperfections in the casting appear on the nose and the front of the ribbed band, which makes up the border of the headdress with a hemispherical skullcap and shows that the technique of casting was not fully mastered.

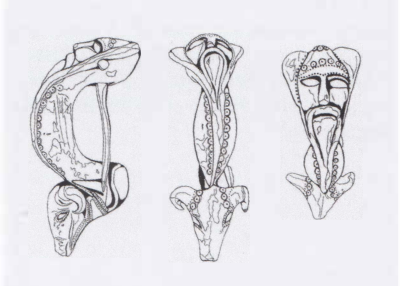
The face is a simplification of a palmette framed by scrolls, a motif known as a 'pelta' because it resembles the shape of a Greek shield. This detail, and also the full moustache and the long triangular beard, indicate that this was probably a representation of the same male deity found, for example, on the Port-à-Binson fibula (next page) or on the lower fixing point of the handle of the Waldalgesheim flagon (p. 89).

Fibula with human head, from Port-à-Binson, found in a ford on the Marne river, Marne, France

About 450–400 BC
Solid bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 5.3 cm
Épernay, Musée Municipal

This exceptional piece of jewellery is one of the two examples of fibulae found in France where a human head is associated with that of an animal. Here can be seen two images on a backing that remains functional, although it has a shape that suggests the S-motif, the fundamental symbol in the Celtic vocabulary. At one end, above the hinge of the separate prong, there is a head suggesting a bearded man with a moustache, surrounded by a double mistletoe leaf; at the other end, forming the foot, there is a ram's head. This small object brings together, in a masterly short-cut, images of the three forms of life: human, animal and plant.

On the other figurative fibula discovered in France (near Pontarlier, Jura) are representations of a human head, with exaggerated S-shaped eyebrows, and a ram's head. The association of god with the image of the ram is seen on many Celtic objects, such as wine flagons and torques, from different regions and periods (p. 172). There might also be a discrete suggestion of this association on the Ostheim fibula (p. 67) and on the head on the obverse of a much more recent coin from the Coriosolites in Armorica.





Clasp on a belt from a grave under a tumulus in Želkovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Cast lost-wax bronze, hammered sheet metal and engraved rocked-chisel decoration
Height: 6.2 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This object, characteristic of the warrior armour of the second half of the fifth century BC, is composed of two parts made in different ways: the hook shows an expressive full-face mask in high relief. The rectangular chape, which covered the end of the wide leather belt, is decorated by two finely engraved bands with right-angled lines bordered by a succession of zigzags. The contrast between the two parts is certainly deliberate and very effective. It emphasizes the mask, built up by juxtaposing simple shapes (that could belong as much to the plant world, for example the three-lobed palmette in the upper part) to create a stylized human face or even, in the lower part, an animal head. This shows the intentional emphasis on the three-fold aspect that has been suggested by the triangular form of the mask: the palmette and the three devices, which crown it above, the eyes with the goatee beard (or mouth?) below.
This is a vigorous and effective, carefully executed creation, which is rich in meaning.



Belt clasp from the princely grave in a tumulus explored in 1851 at Weiskirchen, Saarland, Germany

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting, inlaid with coral
Width: 7.5 cm
Trier, Rheinisches Landesmuseum

This type of clasp, where the hook is combined with a large ornamental plaque covering the fixing at the end of the leather belt, is characteristic of the armour of important people in the warrior elite from transalpine regions. The examples found are distributed throughout the north of the Alps, from the Rhineland to the western reaches of the Carpathian basin. The theme represented here is the major divinity, the sun god associated with the world tree. His head, crowned by a pair of horizontal S-motifs, is in the centre, as on other objects of this type, above a double leaf in coral, arranged to suggest a lotus flower. Two pairs of winged sphinxes, with heads crowned with the characteristic S-motif crest, frame the central motif. Here they replace the more usual monstrous companions of the deity, griffons or dragons with snakes' bodies. Although rare in Celtic iconography, the sphinx appears on a few objects in the initial period.

Small dagger with triangular section blade and a handle shaped as an animal, from the settlement at Soběsuky, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 460–420 BC
Carved antler
Length: 16.4 cm
Žatec, Regionální Muzeum K. A. Polánka



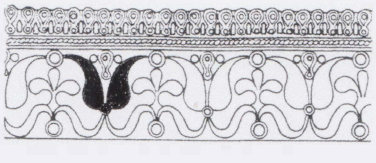
This is the only example known up to this day from Celtic sources of this type of object, the use of which has still not been identified. Could it be a tool used in weaving, or an object of ritual? The care taken in making it suggests the high rank of the person who used it and the importance of its function. It is also one of the rare works where the influence of the animal art of the nomads of the steppes on the formation of Celtic art can be seen. They all derived from the eastern central area in the initial phase of the La Tène culture, particularly from Bohemia and surrounding regions. Skilfully placed to meet the functional requirements of a handle, the quadruped -- wolf or dog – shown running at full stretch, is decorated with scrolls. The presence of devices with symbolic significance is found on other Celtic representations of animals of the same period (pp. 76–77). It makes up one of the specific features of their art.

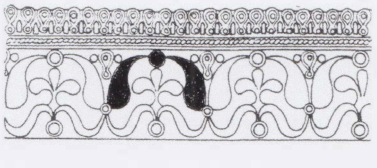
Openwork applied metal decoration for a drinking horn, from the princely grave discovered in 1871 in Eigenbilzen, Limburg, Belgium

About 450–400 BC
Cut-out gold leaf and repoussé work
Length: 20 cm
Height: 5.7 cm
Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire



This band encircled a drinking horn belonging to a set of objects for serving drinks, which also included a flagon of Celtic manufacture and indicated the high rank of the person. The work is a perfect example of the adaptation of a frieze of alternating palmettes and lotus flowers – a plant design from the Graeco-Etruscan vocabulary. Apart from the usual abridged version of the palmette to three leaves, associated with the symbolic importance of this number for the Celts, the main difference as compared with the model might seem to be insignificant: small circles join the ends of the lotus flower petals. They can be interpreted as having two meanings: the original one, which held no interest for the Celts who knew neither the plant nor its symbolic importance; and the one that sees in the petals joined at the point a representation of the double mistletoe leaf. This was a fundamental motif in Celtic art, often used as a simple sign, along with the palmette, the other symbolic representation of the world tree, remarkably fashionable throughout the whole era of Celtic art.







Four torques and three bracelets from a votive deposit, Erstfeld, Canton of Uri, Switzerland

About 420–380 BC
Lost-wax gold casting or cold moulding, assembled by soldering
Diameter: 15–17 × 13.5–15.5 cm (torques), 7.5 × 7.5 and 7.5 × 8 cm (bracelets)
Zürich, Landesmuseum

This important deposit of four torques and three bracelets made of pure gold was discovered under a rock by chance in 1962 during building work at the head of a valley leading to several Alpine passes, including the Saint-Gothard pass, the route towards the Ticino region and Italy. This is therefore most probably a propitiatory offering made before crossing the Alps.

The three openwork torques bear an exuberant tangle of figures on almost half of the circumference, modelled in the round, and so both surfaces can be read. The centre of the composition on the two most complex examples is made up of a bird with folded wings, flanked by two stalked pear-shaped designs that suggest acorns rather than yew berries. They are resting on the heads of figures facing the inside of the torque with their noses touching the bird's tail. They are sharing the lower part of their bodies with a grotesque being, facing outwards, with a horned, bearded head, and surmounted by pointed animal ears. There follows a bird with an identical head, looking towards its tail. The three heads are connected by braids in a kind of basketwork. Finally, a ram's head with an open mouth is alongside the opening. On the other side it is faced by a head with animal ears, surmounted by an eight-leaf palmette where the highest leaf is replaced by a triangle topped by a hemispherical bump.

The third torque has a smaller composition, without the central bird. The globular berries in the centre are again resting on the back of the head of a figure whose lower body is shared with a grotesque bearded figure wearing a kind of pointed bonnet. The back of his head is turned towards the globular berries. Near the base, a kind of braid ends in the hand of his joined brother. It is followed by a bird with a long fanned out tail, whose beak is confronting the little man's face. Above, a goat-like animal with long horns turned down along its back, with feet turned outwards and its head with an open mouth near the torque's opening. On its other side, is a basketwork checkerboard followed by a rough mask topped by a nine-leaf palmette. These astonishing sequences of interwoven images are unusual both because of the complexity of the themes and because of their execution. However, we can still identify some elements of themes that are widespread. We can make some comparisons with contemporary objects from Bohemia, particularly because of the use of the basketwork motif (pp. 61, 75).

Two of the bracelets bear an original variant of a chain of S-motifs, probably inspired by the foliate scroll. The third have two nodes decorated with a zigzag of leaves and flanked by masks topped with basketwork ram's horns and framed by S-motifs at the end formed by a five-leaf palmette.

Torque with fused buffer from the votive deposit in Erstfeld, Canton of Uri, Switzerland

About 420–380 BC
Lost-wax gold casting or cold moulding, assembled by soldering the two halves
Diameter: 16 × 15 cm
Zürich, Landesmuseum

This torque differs from other examples from the archaeological find in terms of its shape with fused buffers. On both sides of the central moulding, decorated with a zigzag of leaves and simulating connecting small buffers, is a monster with a bird's body, with large talons, and wings, tail and neck formed by semi-palmettes. Its head with long ears and almond-shaped eyes, topped with a palmette, looks vaguely like a bovine animal but also like a human being. This is therefore a grotesque collection of elements belonging to the animal, human and plant world, and surprisingly close to the much more recent decoration on the spout of the Brno jug (p. 120). A pair of S-motifs start from the claws of this grotesque creature and end in a five-leaf palmette. Finally, on the other side of the moulding at the points where the jewel opens, a three-lobed palmette springs from a small pair of facing horizontal S-motifs.



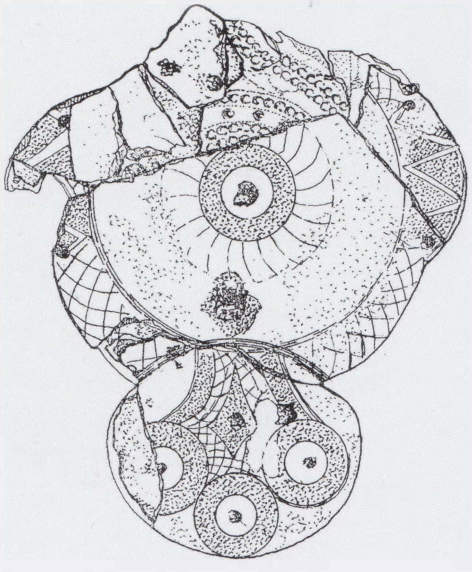
Applied metal decoration showing a mask crowned with a double mistletoe leaf, from princely grave no. 1, explored in 1849 in Schwarzenbach, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 450–400 BC
Cut-out gold leaf and repoussé work
Height: 3 cm
Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung

The princely grave of Schwarzenbach has yielded a large number of objects that represent the initial phase of Celtic art, such as the covering in openwork gold leaf for a hemispherical bowl. Here the process of converting the frieze of palmettes and lotus flowers, like on the Eigenbilzen's applied openwork (p. 70), was extended, parts of the original design having been cut out and reassembled differently. The items from this site made it possible for the academic Adolf Furtwängler to confirm, in 1888, the existence of a specifically Celtic art. The human mask on this applied metal decoration, with ears suggested by scrolls, is framed by a double mistletoe leaf, which points to the divine nature of the figure being represented. This image enables us to dismiss the idea that the double mistletoe leaf motif represents exaggerated ears, which has sometimes been suggested.







Ornamental plaque from the royal grave under the tumulus in Chlum, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 450–400 BC
Bronze plaque, one side engraved using a pair of compasses, the other side with repoussé work covered in gold leaf
Width: 5.2 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

Originally decorative cabochons, most likely of coral, were fixed with iron nails. Others were arranged in the central medallion, of which the bronze moulding remains, and some were also set in the triangular cut-outs on the sides of the leaf.

The impression of rigorous symmetry achieved by folding down two perpendicular axes provided by the pairs of large S-motifs, arranged as lotus flowers or open palmettes, mask the ubiquity of three-fold devices. There are lateral plant motifs, and groups of three beads or cabochons, and the fifteen beads surrounding the central medallion, breaking the symmetry of the whole. Finally, there are the triangles, concave on two sides and convex on the third – a frequent motif in the Celtic vocabulary.

The back of the plaque shows a geometric design engraved with compasses, in an arrangement that corresponds exactly to the one on the front: a central medallion, groups of three circular motifs at the ends, open triangles on the sides towards the outside. If this is the first version, its faithful copy on the other side argues in favour of the importance of the image's meaning and a function that was not merely decorative. This is probably an abridged version of the 'world image' of the Celts, as shown on *omphalos* monuments (pp. 81, 104, 185), and also on a large number of other objects. It originates in the sun wheel with four rays, a frequent symbol since the second millennium BC. The Irish Christian cross (pp. 200–201) provides evidence of the longevity of this symbolic arrangement.

Ceremonial bracelet from the princely grave, explored in 1874 in Rodenbach, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax gold casting
Diameter: 6.7 cm
Speyer, Historisches Museum der Pfalz

The elaborate figurative decoration arranged on both sides, along almost three-quarters of the edge of the solid band, combines relief with openwork and modelling in the round. The centre of the design is made up of a mask with eyebrows formed by a pair of S-motifs, crowned with eight shapes on stems, which are a fairly faithful representation of yew berries, one of the Celtic sacred trees. They are arranged so that only five of them are visible on each side. This central image of the deity identified with the world tree is flanked by rams lying down, their heads turned backwards towards a smaller mask, crowned with a single spherical berry on a stem, which this time could be a mistletoe berry. Between this berry and the muzzle of the animal, above its back, is a row of ten small shapes on stems. An identical ram is placed symmetrically on the other side of the small mask, followed by two interlinked S-motifs perpendicular to the band. Below them, a ring moulding and a pair of S-motifs, forming a lyre and crowned with a palmette, might suggest a face.



Ring with double mask from the princely grave explored in 1874 in Rodenbach, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 450–400 BC
Lost-wax gold casting
Diameter: about 2 cm
Speyer, Historisches Museum der Pfalz

Two expressive masks facing in opposite directions, with narrow moustaches meeting the temple, are joined by their hair, formed of three-lobed palmettes, which start from the root of the nose and are flanked by S-motifs. Wide leaves in a single scroll frame the bottom of the face, in a commonly found design, particularly on flagons, jewellery and even on coins. The theme seen here is the twin heads, an image of the deity in his double aspect, found on many other objects.





Ring from the region of Hořovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 430–400 BC
Lost-wax gold casting
Height of the bezel: 2.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

Without any known context, this ring with a large lozenge-shaped bezel is an example of the remarkable mastery achieved by Celtic goldsmiths in Bohemia from the second half of the fifth century BC. It is one of the rare finds known to date. At first sight, it appears to be a purely ornamental design, a skilful assemblage of scrolls and bands of a 'basketry' design, a motif that appears in this period in the same region on the Panenský Týnec fibula (p. 61) and on the Erstfeld torques (p. 71). Parallels can be drawn with the chequerboard pattern on the Basse-Yutz flagons (p. 62). In the subsequent years after it was made, it would become one of the characteristic designs in British art. On a closer look, it can be seen that it is made up of allusions: the suggestion of twin-horned heads, separated by a central boss and a horizontal line in relief. The same theme is shown on the opposite, narrow part of the ring. The base of the leaf across the diameter, borrowed from a palmette, is framed by two circles in relief, with which it forms a very schematic human face, similar to the ones found on works in the following centuries. It is therefore a very restrained example of the repeated theme of two twin heads, found on fibulae from the same period in Bohemia.



Engraved plaque from the front of a sword scabbard with chape from grave no. 994 in Hallstatt, Upper Austria

About 440–400 BC
Engraved sheet bronze
and lost-wax bronze casting (chape)
Overall length: 79 cm
Maximum width: 6 cm
Vienna, Naturhistorisches Museum

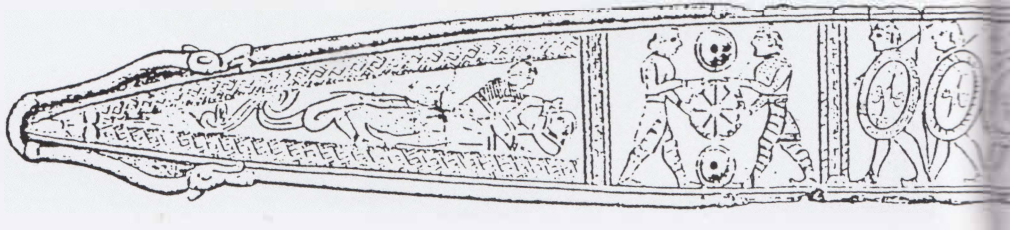
This scabbard, along with the more recent Gundestrup cauldron (pp. 168–171), is one of the two major Celtic works with a narrative theme currently known. It probably represents particularly important mythological or symbolically significant ideas. This type of representation is here the result of the sporadic influence of Situla art from northern Italy.

On the central part a procession is shown (from right to left) of three foot-soldiers holding spears and oval shields with distinctive decorations. They are followed by four riders, with helmets, carrying spears and, in one case, a sword with a characteristic chape, carried on his left side, contrary to the usual Celtic practice. The horses, whose tails and other details differ, are wearing harnesses hung with circular phalerae, which was a standard practice in this period. This military procession is very similar to the theme on one of the plaques on the Gundestrup cauldron.

Two pairs of figures facing one another and holding a sun wheel, on either side of the middle ground, are wearing the costume of the Celtic elite in central Europe: brightly striped woven stockings and a full-skirted jacket. They most likely represent the two aspects of the sun, night-time and daytime, winter and summer. The triangular space at the point is framed with angular interlacing, starting from a palmette. Inside, there is an unfortunately damaged scene, showing an individual on the ground struggling with a monstrous being. The chape is formed by a pair of dragons with snakes' bodies and head with a curved beak and small ears, joined at the lower ends of their bodies. These are the monstrous companions of the world tree, represented here by a palmette engraved on the point of the plaque.











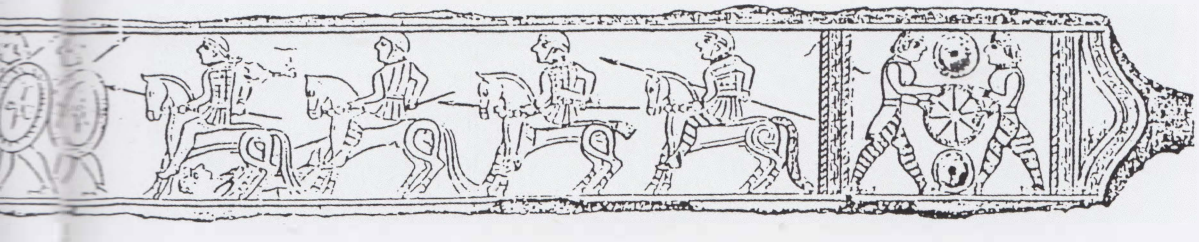


Figure seated cross-legged, from the Roquepertuse sanctuary, Velaux, Bouches-du-Rhône, France

About 460–420 BC
Carved stone, originally embellished with painted details
Height: 100 cm
Marseille, Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne

The Roquepertuse sanctuary, situated in a rocky amphitheatre, was explored mainly between 1919 and 1927. Originally it had a doorway decorated with sculptures and included niches for the display of human skulls.

This figure is seated cross-legged, a characteristic position for Celtic statuary up to the Gallo-Roman period. It lacks its head and arms but is wearing armour with a quadrangular back plate and a neck-protector, similar to the one on the Glauberg statue (p. 80). This back plate, along with the rest of the clothing, was decorated with geometric motifs painted in black and in red, including variations on the chequerboard pattern. The statue's left hand was placed against the chest. The figure is wearing an arm ring above the elbow. Several fragmentary statues of this type have been found in Roquepertuse and other sites. They are generally considered to be effigies of heroic ancestors.











Two-headed sculpture, known as 'Hermes' from the Roquepertuse sanctuary, Velaux, Bouches-du-Rhône, France

About 460–420 BC
Carved stone, originally embellished with painted details
Height: about 20 cm
Marseille, Musée d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne

Two heads joined at the back in the same way as effigies of the Roman Janus, a very old god of beginnings and endings, are shown with two heads facing in the opposite direction, one looking forwards and the other looking backwards. They are separated by an incomplete cylindrical moulding, tapered towards the base, a kind of large claw, above the joining point. The expressive, angular appearance of these faces is perhaps partly the result of the almost total disappearance of the paint, which would have indicated the beard, moustache, hair, eyebrows and pupils of the eyes. It is not, therefore, an image suggesting a war trophy of severed heads, but a representation of the two-headed deity, well known in the Celtic vocabulary. The broken moulding could in this case be the remains of a double mistletoe leaf, which would have crowned the piece, rather than the end of a hawk's talon crowning everything, which would be more appropriate for severed heads. If it is indeed a double representation of the deity, this sculpture is the central image of the sanctuary. This would confirm that its creators and the users of this place of worship belonged to the Celto-Ligurian culture, because it is unquestionably a subject within the Celtic vocabulary. The cultural links, which became more marked in the fifth century and connected the region to Celtic finds from further north, would support the first interpretation. This presence could be explained by the attraction of the nearby Greek colony of Massalia (Marseille).



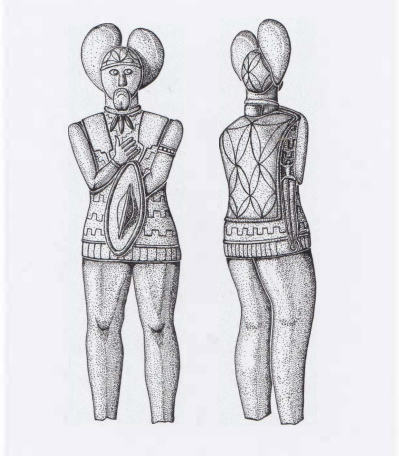


Standing statue, from the group of monuments discovered in 1994 in Glauberg, Hesse, Germany

About 440–400 BC
Carved red sandstone
Height: 186 cm
Glauberg, Keltenwelt am Glauberg

This exceptional example of sculpture from the initial period of Celtic art was discovered, lying on its back, in the wide, deep circular moat of a monument, which is approached by a long straight path, bordered by ditches. There is a central empty pit and two off-centre graves in this space, probably originally covered by a mound. Fragments of three other similar statues were found during the excavations. The ensemble might have been a sanctuary dedicated to the worship of legendary ancestors, with a cenotaph and the graves of two of their assumed descendants, rather than a reused individual grave.

The figure is shown, in the same way as at the earlier Hirschlanden find (p. 39), as a heroic nude, with the insignia of his rank, defensive and offensive weapons, a torque and a headdress, including a palmette and a double mistletoe leaf, the god-like attribute of immortality. It has the same pose as the Hirschlanden figure, with its hand placed obliquely against the top of the chest, but reversed because of the shield, suggesting respect or prayer. The armour with shoulder straps, probably made of leather or padded cloth, with a neck-protector, is worn over a kilt of hanging strips. The back plate is decorated using a pair of compasses with a pattern of leaves. The oblong shield has a protruding boss shaped like a mussel shell. The short sword with an anthropomorphic handle and circular chape is carried on the right side, in accordance with Celtic practice. This is the same type of equipment as can be seen on other works from the same period. The torque, of the same type as the example made of gold from grave no. 1 in the monument, cannot be used to identify the statue with the dead person in this grave, but gives a valuable clue to the link between the statue and the period when the figure was buried.







Carved pillar from Pfalzfeld, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

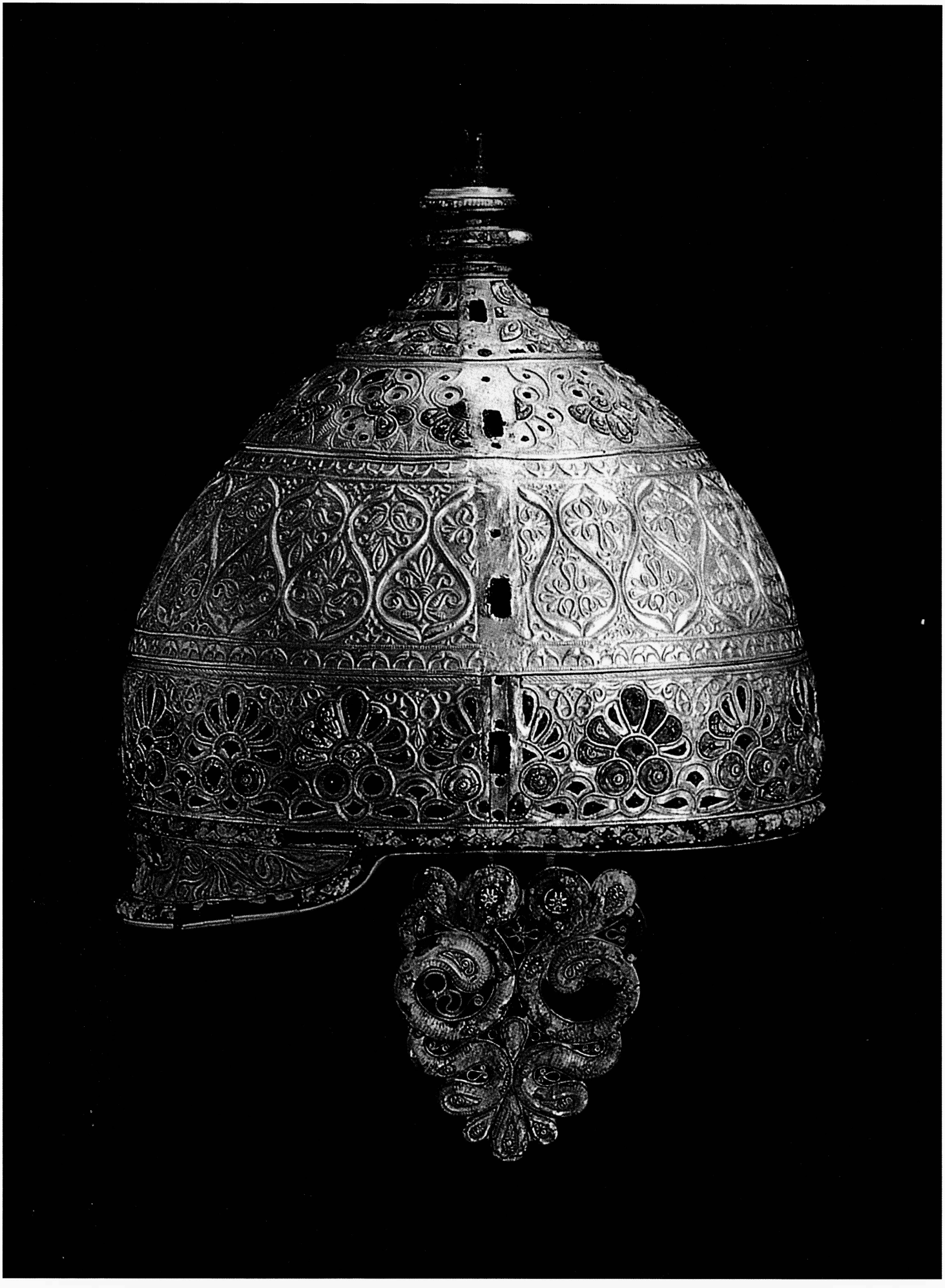
About 450–400 BC
Carved sandstone
Height: 148 cm
Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum

This quadrangular-section pillar is probably the oldest known *omphalos* from the Celts. It is a symbolic monument that indicates the point where the vertical axis joining the underworld and heaven meet the world of the living, the presumed location of the world tree (pp. 104, 183). This place was the centre of the subdivision of the world into the four cardinal points, with a fifth part being the common central space, which was an expression of unity, created by taking a section from each of the four parts. This concept is preserved in many place names of Celtic origin derived from *mediolanum*, which means 'centre of the territory': Milan, Malain, Meillan and many others. Above a hemispherical base with a chain of S-motifs, the four surfaces carved in relief show panels, with a rope pattern surrounding the same design: a pear-shaped face, with a palmette as hair, and crowned with a large double mistletoe leaf. Under the chin, there is a three-lobed palmette, a design frequently seen in Celtic iconography, which is flanked by pairs of interlinked S-motifs. Above the head, a pair of S-motifs arranged in a lyre shape reach downwards in a triangular motif, from the palmette with S-motifs on the sides, followed by a zigzag of leaves drawn with a pair of compasses. The deity, identified with the cosmic tree, thus grants his protection to the four parts of the world.

III

ECHOES OF ITALY

Fourth century BC



Ceremonial helmet, discovered in 1981 in the Les Perrats cave, Agris, Charente, France, about 380–340 BC

See p. 101

The earliest documented event in the history of the Celts is the movement, around 400 BC, of large groups of Celts from beyond the Alps down into Italy, attracted by the promise of wealth and opportunities from stories told by those who had lived there. We have a brief record of the events, which resulted in them capturing Rome in 387 BC, mentioning the name of Brennos and the legend of Juno's sacred geese, which saved the Capitol, and also valuable clues to the names of the tribes taking part in the invasion and the lands that they occupied in the peninsula.

A comparison of the archaeological and historical data has also enabled us to identify at least two of the regions where these transalpine invaders originated and, towards the late fifth century BC or early in the following century, to discover demographic changes so sudden and so wide-ranging that only the departure of a large part of the population can explain them. One of these is Champagne – the homeland of the Senones, who settled on the Adriatic coast, in the area that is now known as the Marche – and the other is Bohemia, named after the Boii, who became their neighbours in the Emilia-Romagna region. The Cenomani settled to the east of the native Insubri, between the river Po and Lake Garda, but their name apparently means 'people from afar', and simply indicates their foreign origin compared with their neighbours. They probably came down from the Swiss plateau and had nothing to do with the Cenomani branch of the Aulerci from Gaul, who gave their name to the town of Le Mans.

The rapid integration of the newcomers and their direct contacts with society in the Greek and Etruscan towns in the peninsula had an inevitable impact on their artistic expression. This was because the artists from beyond the Alps were attracted to and impressed by the ingenious and complex designs of palmettes embellished with foliate scrolls, which featured sinuous interlacings that created shapes close to the fundamental symbols of the themes that they had brought with them through their wanderings from their homelands.

These designs also offered new opportunities for inventing shapes that suggested the multi-form and fickle nature of the deity. The flowing momentum of the foliate scroll was particularly suited to rendering the cyclic alternations in time, the opposing and inextricably linked principles that, in their view, were embodied in the succession of day and night, the fortnightly cycles from the full to the new moon and back again, the bright and dark solar

seasons, and the regrowth of plants after the winter hibernation, a symbol of death preceding new life.

Some of the works by Celtic artists found in Italy, and mainly datable to within a few decades of them settling in the peninsula, illustrate the passion for novelty, which followed the first contacts. This is true of the Filottrano torque and several decorated scabbards, foremost among which is one also from Filottrano, together with helmets, fibulae, metal decorations from wooden objects and other items. The type of support and the context indicate that a close link existed between these artworks and a warrior elite, men being buried with their weapons and their partners. The grave goods they come from are sometimes exceptionally rich, as in the case of certain graves belonging to Senones on the Adriatic. However, some might also have belonged to individuals who had nothing else to distinguish them from their contemporaries.

The situation is similar in regions beyond the Alps, where innovations spread rapidly through the comings and goings of individuals attracted by the opportunities that were offered in the peninsula and the trade in coral. The colour and marine origin of this magical substance evoked for the Celts the life-giving force that fire was believed to give to the dead primeval waters of the Other World.

The region most directly affected was the Swiss plateau, a natural crossroads of the routes, which led to the original homes of the people who had migrated towards Italy. There we find many richly decorated fibulae with a foot generally shaped out of a coral disc cabochon, some of which are so close to Italiot models, particularly from Campania, that we might assume that they are imports from the Celto-Italic community, or at least the work of craftsmen trained in it. This might also explain the discovery of outstanding works, which are quite isolated and without the slightest local association: the ceremonial helmets from Agris and Amfreville, and the jewels belonging to a high-ranking woman buried in Waldalgesheim, in the Rhineland, with a ceremonial jug in the local style and a two-wheeled chariot. Some people have interpreted the group of objects in this grave as the work of a creative genius who shaped Celtic art, drawing inspiration from the fittings on the imported bucket in the grave, made in Tarentum or Campania. However, the hypothesis does not stand up to detailed examination; these objects were not created by the same person and draw inspiration mainly from Celto-Italic models or those deriving from them, apart from the ornamentation of this particular fitting.

A more obvious example of the occasional influences then exercised by the culture of the peninsula is an exceptional series

of vases from the Champagne region, directly inspired by the outlined red-figure technique of the Greek and Etruscan potters, produced in a workshop near Reims. From successive local imitations, we can follow the increasing failure to master the initial principle, which finally results in its reversion to a direct rendering of the subjects, painted on the background and from then on stripped of their initial coherence and meaning.

The innovations brought to the transalpine regions in the fourth century BC were to have a decisive influence on the development of Celtic art, not least through the large number of new variants in the chains of palmettes and the flowing patterns based on the foliate scroll, which were extremely popular. The novelty which they seem to have found the most attractive was the transformation of the palmette and its components into an all-purpose image of the deity, which can be read in various ways to reveal its human, animal and plant aspects superimposed, sometimes associated with fundamental symbols. This type of image, remarkably suited to the concept the Celts had of the protean nature of the gods, is indisputably the most innovative and original feature of their art.

Buffer torque from a woman's grave from Courtisols, Marne, France

About 330–300 BC
Lost-wax cast bronze
Diameter: 15 cm
London, British Museum

The edge of the hollow circular buffer has a succession of S-motifs, which have worn away. On the end of the bangle a pair of facing S-motifs frame a head, the buffer crowning it like a headdress. Eyebrows are suggested by a pair of S-motifs, and a schematic ram's head is placed under its chin.

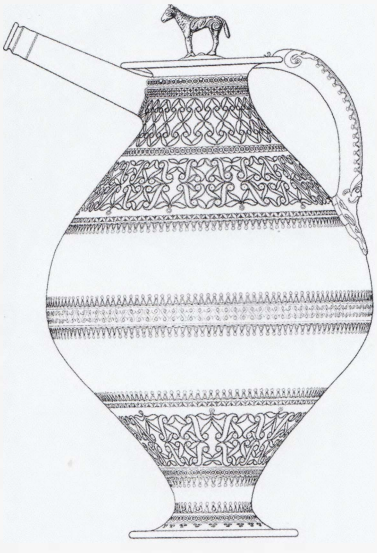
The other head is inverted, with its chin curiously flanked by a pair of S-motifs rotating clockwise, perpendicular to the axis of the design, breaking its symmetry. A pair of facing S-motifs starts from the eyebrows and ends in a three-lobed motif, derived from a simplified palmette, which surmounts the head. In the centre of the bangle, a large S-motif derives from the transformation of a pair of broadening foliate scrolls, which feature double shoots, with flowers originating from palmettes, which have become peltas in the fusion of the three parts. At each end is a schematic ram's head.











Ceremonial jug from the princess grave, discovered in 1869 in Waldalgesheim, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 360–320 BC
Cast and beaten embossed bronze, engraved with compasses and a free-hand design (vessel formed of two halves joined by solder and a foot); the handle and lid were cast using the lost-wax process
Height: 36 cm
Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum

The vessel belongs to the tubular spout family, found in the region from the second half of the fifth century BC, with a good example from Reinheim (p. 60). However, its proportions and details of its ornamentation show significant differences, probably due to its later date.

The upper fixing point of the handle shows the head of a ram in low relief. On the lower fitting is a high-relief head with a moustache and beard, crowned with a double mistletoe leaf and framed with a reversed pair of dragons with hawks' heads and hooked beaks, crowned with an S-motif crest. On the lid is a small statue of a horse, whose body is decorated with a palmette. The scrolls on its base cover its haunches; the leaves at the side can be seen as the beast's protruding ribs. The horse has become plant-like, symbolizing its divine nature. The body of the vessel is richly engraved, with two key themes, based on superimposing two sequences formed by the transformation of chains of palmettes, which combine leaves, S-motifs and triskelions.

Woman's jewellery set made up of a torque and a pair of bracelets from the princess grave discovered in 1869 in Waldalgesheim, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 360–330 BC
Lost-wax cast gold
Maximum present diameter: 21 cm (torque) and 7.5–8 cm (bracelets)
Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum



This beautifully made jewellery is the culmination of major changes originated in the Celto-Italic area, along with the Filottrano torque (in front) and other representative works. These are isolated finds in the Rhineland, as they come from outside the region, where they were discovered, and where there are no known precursors or even other contemporary works with the same principles.

The flat end of the buffer carries a bead-edged circle of four rotating leaves. The design running around the outside is derived from a series of palmettes framed by foliate scrolls. The palmettes have become peltas; the shoots have become separate leaves. The moulding at the end of the bangle bears a variant of the same motif: the peltas enclose a central rosette and are connected by tendril patterns, which suggests both an S-motif and a triskelion. The same transformation is found at the base of the pyramidal design of palmettes, which decorate the bangle. The facing S-motifs, along with star shapes, and the vestigial heart shapes of the palmettes appear to suggest, especially when reversed, a kind of mask, crowned with a double mistletoe leaf, or even a pair of dragons.

On the bracelets, the middle section shows two strips decorated with a chain of diagonally superposed peltas, with human masks, complete with S-shaped eyebrows between them at each end. These are probably a variant of the 'lover's knot', borrowed from the Graeco-Italiot repertoire. The stamps and strips, which outline the middle ground, are decorated with a series of crosses, perhaps intended to suggest a very simplified ram's horn. On each side there are designs derived from a condensed version of the torque's major decoration: a tendril pattern of S-motifs and triskelions crowned with a palmette.



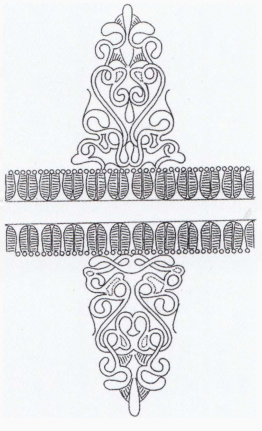




Buffer torque from a wealthy woman's grave in burial site no. 2 in Santa Paolina, Filottrano, Ancona, Italy

About 380–350 BC
Solid gold casting,
lost-wax technique
Diameter: 15 cm
Ancona, Museo Nazionale delle Marche

This characteristic model of jewellery, developed by the Transalpine Celts, is decorated here with two variations on the same Italiot model, from Campania or Tarentum: a design of palmettes and foliate scrolls that is found, for example, on the handle fittings of some bronze buckets. When the object is seen from certain angles, the modifications and the scroll on the support reveal the fundamental symbols, the S-motif and the triskelion, as well as fleeting suggestions of human heads, with or without double mistletoe leaves, and possibly even animals. This is one of the major works that illustrate the development of new forms of expression by the Celtic groups settling in Italy. They draw their inspiration from a first-hand discovery of the Graeco-Etruscan repertoire. This torque has, in common with some examples from the Champagne region, the probably deliberate feature of presenting two variants of the same design. This might be the same idea of identical principles, opposed but inseparable, which is expressed by some double masks of the previous century.



Upper piece of the yoke ornament from the harness of the chariot from the princess grave, discovered in 1869 in Waldalgesheim, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

About 360–320 BC
Lost-wax casting with inlays of coral (openwork part), bronze sheet with repoussé work and applications of red enamel (base)
Total reconstructed height: 19 cm
Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum

This piece of equipment for a ceremonial two-wheeled chariot, probably more ornamental than functional (rein-rings?) was most likely placed in the centre of the yoke. It has two parts: a base made of two quadrangular pieces of sheet metal, fixed on both sides to the yoke, and above it an openwork circle. The two components of the lower part show on both sides a forward-facing bust of a figure, crowned with the double leaf, the arms raised in the gesture known as the supplicant. It is wearing a torque and the bust is covered with a tendril pattern of plants. The chest was emphasized with two cabochons, probably of red enamel, to accentuate the front of the figure and to copy the contours of the leaf inside the relief.

The upper openwork piece is a circle with a circumference originally inlaid with coral. It is subdivided into four unequal parts by bands containing a pair of foliate scrolls of S-motif. Around the outer edge, an openwork tendril pattern combines peltas, S-motifs and triskelions. The inside of the circle is divided into two unequal parts by a horizontal strip inlaid with coral cabochons. The upper, larger part contains a pair of water birds arranged as a mirror-image, which are perhaps cranes, with eyes defined by coral cabochons.
On the base, a pelta is framed by foliate scrolls, which form triskelions and S-motifs. The subject might be an original variation on the idea of the four parts of the world, the birds being one of the variants that frame its central point, the world tree.







Ornamental disc discovered by accident in 1882 in Auvers-sur-Oise, Val-d'Oise, France

About 380–350 BC
Bronze disc, backed with a sheet of bronze with repoussé work, covered in gold leaf, pierced to take coral inserts; enamelled in red directly onto the object (central boss and heads of the two retaining rivets on the edge)
Diameter: 10 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles

Three-leafed palmettes, formed partly by the curves of the S-motifs around them, radiate from the central boss along two perpendicular axes. The whole recalls human masks with eyes made of leaf-shaped pieces of coral, set into the curve of the S-motif. Seen from the other way, another mask appears, with eyes formed by the same leaves, from which spring S-motifs that resemble heavy eyebrows. The whole is crowned with three leaves, the central one made of coral.

This is probably one of the earliest attempts to develop a multi-purpose image, offering several alternative interpretations. It combines, in an inseparable whole, elements that not only evoke symbolic signs, but also suggest human, animal and plant forms.

The overall shape of the object enables it to be classified as an 'image of the world'. The three enamelled studs might indicate its main axis, charting the progress of the sun from east to west. Note the importance of the three-fold principle, illustrated clearly by the coral inlays.

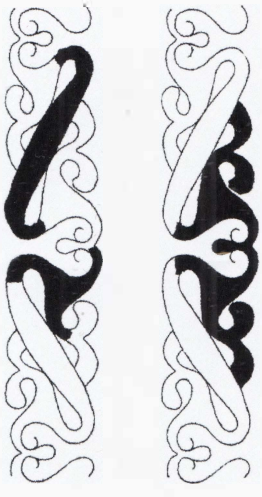
Plate from a sword scabbard from the grave in burial site no. 25 (the attribution to no. 22 is believed to be wrong) in Santa Paolina, Filottrano, Ancona, Italy

About 380–350 BC
Bronze repoussé-work panel
Maximum width: 5 cm
Total length: 67.5 cm
Ancona, Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche

Based on the transformation of a frieze of palmettes bordered by a foliate scroll, this work illustrates the approach and the skill of the artists who settled in Italy. Since the S-motif linking the palmettes was already present in the original, it was only necessary to combine them with the palmette that grew from the base of the foliate scroll, in order to obtain the second fundamental symbol of the Celtic repertoire, the triskelion. Removing all but the central leaf of the palmette, but retaining the scrolls at its base, results in a representation of an allusive human face. The way in which the remaining foliate scroll is positioned to the side might suggest a stag's horns, and therefore the god or avatar known later by the name of *Cernunnos*, 'the Horned One'.

The same image thus combines both fundamental symbols, the S-motif and the triskelion, in one image alluding to the deity, which evokes the three forms of life: human, animal and plant. This rich and subtle work, the starting point for some of the repertoire of scabbard ornaments in the following century, is a landmark in the general development of Celtic art. It serves as a prime example of an image that the initiated can read in different ways to discover several superimposed meanings.









Pair of openwork decorations, probably for a drinking horn, from a grave with no background information in Čížkovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

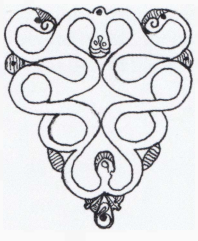
About 360–340 BC
Lost-wax cast bronze
Height: 6 cm
Litoměřice, Oblastní Muzeum

The two designs on which these openwork pieces are constructed differ in their use of either a continuous sequence or a juxtaposition of motifs, but they are based on identical plans, borrowed from an Italiot pattern similar to the one decorating the Filottrano torque (p. 91).

The first is formed by double tendril patterns of a pair of foliated flowered scrolls of palmettes, which start from the neck of a small human head, seen in front view, and develop into a continuous design of triskelions, which meets a second human profile, turned towards the right. A palmette is placed at the lowest point of the design.

The second is arranged around a front view of a human head, with its eyes and mouth open. Its chin is flanked by two leaves, which curve away in opposite directions and extend down into a pelta, a Celtic variant of the palmette. The sides of the head are framed by the rounded ends of a pair of scrolling leaves, which bear an almond-shaped motif like an eye above the hair, forming a sort of ram's mask. A pair of horizontal S-motifs that face each other is positioned above. The whole is thus a reminder of the intertwining of the three forms of life. These works are very rich in meaning and are also an example of the theme of twin heads.





Fibula with disc-shaped foot and richly decorated bow from grave no. 50 of the cemetery in Münsingen-Rain, Canton of Berne, Switzerland

About 350–320 BC
Lost-wax cast bronze
and composite coral cabochon
Length: 6.5 cm
Berne, Historisches Museum

This fibula with a disc-shaped foot, which is known as a Münsingen type fibula, along with the coral used for the cabochon, is an example of the strong influence exerted by Italiot models, probably originating in this case from the Campania region. Although less richly decorated than the similar fibula from grave no. 49 on the same burial site, the ornamentation on this fibula's bow is also based on variations on a palmette design, modified to reveal schematic faces combined with plant motifs, leaves and palmettes, and to accentuate the fundamental symbol, the S-motif. The sides of the spring show an ancient motif from the repertoire, a zigzag of leaves drawn with compasses, one of the forms of the sequence, which alternates between high and low.



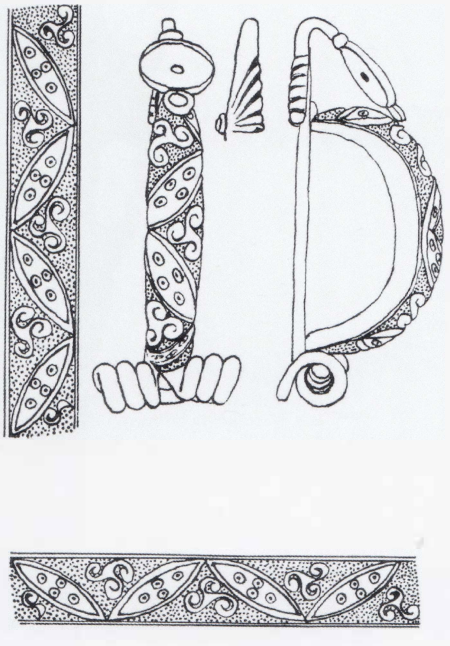


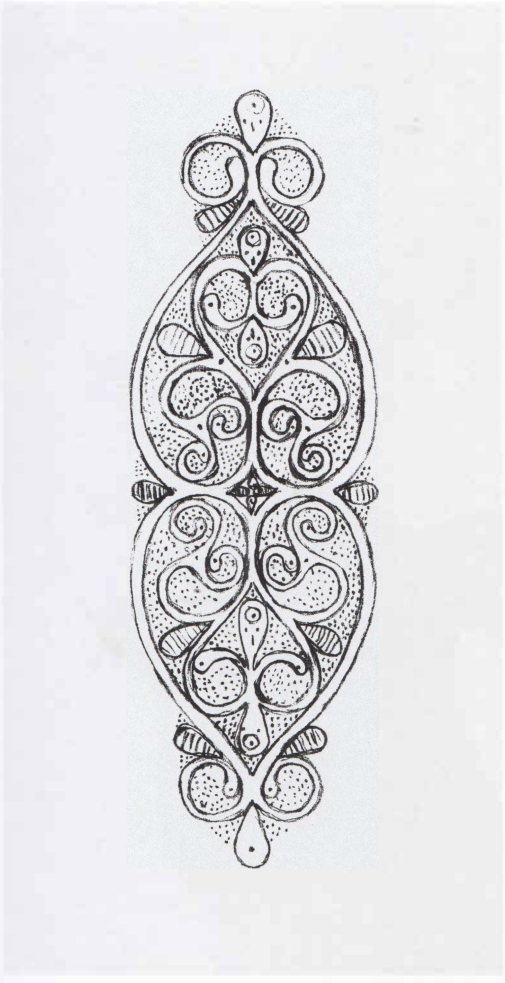
Fibula with decorated bow from a burial site in Toužetín, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 320–280 BC
Lost-wax cast bronze;
the cabochon, probably made of coral,
has disappeared
Length: 6.4 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This example is drawn from the rich fibulae with a disc-shaped foot, found mainly on the Swiss plateau. At the place on the bow, generally covered with plant designs derived from the Greek repertoire, it has a decoration based on two traditional motifs: the zigzag of leaves drawn with compasses and the triskelion. This could be seen as a more abstract version of a foliate scroll with the shoots replaced by triskelions, or a chain of palmettes transformed in the same way. The arrangement of triskelions on both sides of the zigzag allude to the solar cycle and makes an interesting comparison with other sequences built up of alternating motifs, especially the foliate scrolls.









Fibula with disc-shaped foot and richly decorated bow from burial no. 49 of the cemetery in Münsingen-Rain, Canton of Berne, Switzerland

About 350–320 BC
Lost-wax process cast bronze
with chased design, and applied coral
on the foot and the spring
Length: 8 cm
Berne, Historisches Museum

This sumptuous fibula is an eloquent example of the changes that occurred in the designs of palmettes and foliate scrolls, borrowed directly from the Graeco-Etruscan repertoire after the invasion of Italy in the early fourth century BC. The concentration of works of this quality on the Swiss plateau is the result of its role as the region's trading centre for transalpine traffic.

The arrangement of the design and some alterations on the fibula accentuate the basic symbols of the Celtic repertoire, the S-motif and the triskelion, and from some viewpoints suggest fleetingly the presence of human or monstrous faces. The gaps in the relief decoration are engraved with extraordinarily fine curvilinear motifs, scarcely distinguishable to the naked eye. The presence of almost invisible elements has been identified on several high-quality works from this period. It is probably the result of competition between craftsmen highly in demand for their expertise, and for the magical efficacy attributed to these secret symbols.





Buffer-ended bracelet from a grave in Sedlec, Kutná Hora, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 320–280 BC
Lost-wax cast bronze
Diameter: 7 × 6 cm
Orlík castle, collections of the Prince
Schwarzenberg

The decoration, which covers the complete edge of this arm ring, a work that is characteristic of the Celtic workshops in Bohemia and Moravia around 300 BC, is derived from the transformation of a frieze of palmettes.

The purpose of the exercise was to modify the shapes of the Celto-Italic models by accentuating the basic symbols in the repertoire, introducing more if required. The palmettes have been replaced by medallions showing S-motifs, which are surmounted by a pair of leaves with scrolls turned towards the outside, to give the appearance of horns or eyebrows. The symbolic appearance is therefore heightened and made explicit. Thus we see an equivalent grammar of ornamentation, also suggested in other sequences with alternating reversed motifs, for example the decorations on the bow of the Toužetín fibula (see opposite).

Quadrangular harness fitting, incomplete, from the chariot grave at 'Mont de Marne', Condé-sur-Marne, Marne, France

About 380–350 BC
Openwork iron plaque
with finely sculpted coral inlays
Width: 6.4 cm
Châlons-en-Champagne,
Musée d'Art et d'Archéologie



Pieces of coral form stylized faces, arranged symmetrically along two perpendicular axes, set diagonally from one corner to another of the plaque; and where they cross, there is a large cabochon with radiating ribs. A pair of eyes is formed by cabochons with concave centres, from which spring mistletoe leaves, their rounded ends meeting above. A semicircular piece forms the lower part of this mask. The leaf-shaped pieces of coral are very delicately sculpted with plant motifs, derived from the transformation of foliate scrolls.

This type of ambiguous portrait of the deity, with multiple meanings, is typical of artistic innovations by the Celts who arrived in Italy in the fourth century BC. The whole echoes the theme of the 'image of the world' with the four quarters arranged around a common centre, each of them being watched over by the tutelary god, as seen on the older *omphalos* pillar in Pfalzfeld (p. 81).



Fibula with disc-shaped foot and with a finely decorated bow from a grave in Berne-Schosshalde, Canton of Bern, Switzerland

About 360–330 BC
Cast lost-wax process silver;
the coral cabochon on the foot
has disappeared
Length: 6.2 cm
Berne, Historisches Museum

The rare metal used by the Transalpine Celts, as well as the style, richness and delicacy of its decoration, reveal the likely Celto-Italic origin of the object, or at least that of the craftsman who made it. The bow is decorated with pairs of foliate scrolls and flower motifs of palmettes, which spring from an S-motif. Where these adjacent S-motifs meet is marked on both sides by a single vestigial palmette leaf. The whole appears to suggest a distorted mask with eyes formed by curves of the shoots of foliate scrolls from the two adjacent S-motifs. The finished result is very close to the frieze on the Filottrano scabbard (p. 94), though based on a related but different design. The expressed intention, however, appears to be the same. This is an example of the time when plant motifs from the Graeco-Etruscan repertoire began to change into images where plant, human or even animal elements were fused.

Ceremonial helmet from a hypogeum in Canosa di Puglia, Puglia, Italy

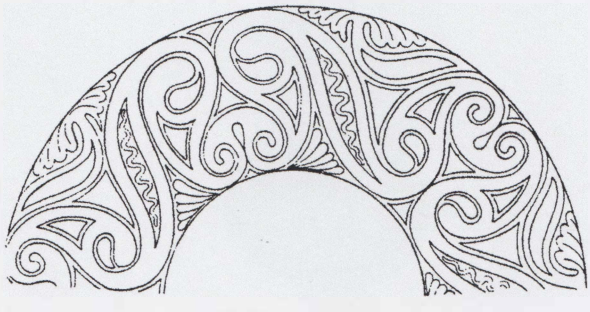
About 380–350 BC
Iron skullcap, covered with a sheet of bronze with pierced and repoussé work;
pieces of coral are inserted into the spaces
Height: 25 cm
Berlin, Collection of Classical Antiquities,
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

The central band of the three sections, which once adorned the helmet, edged with half ovals, has disappeared. The arrangement of the decorations on similar ceremonial helmets from Agris and Amfreville suggest that it might have been a sort of gold crown.

The two other bands bear patterns based on a series of alternating, inverted palmettes, joined by S-motifs. It is modified at the base so that the two superimposed peltas are linked by double triskelions with centres formed of coral triangles, emphasizing the three-fold concept.

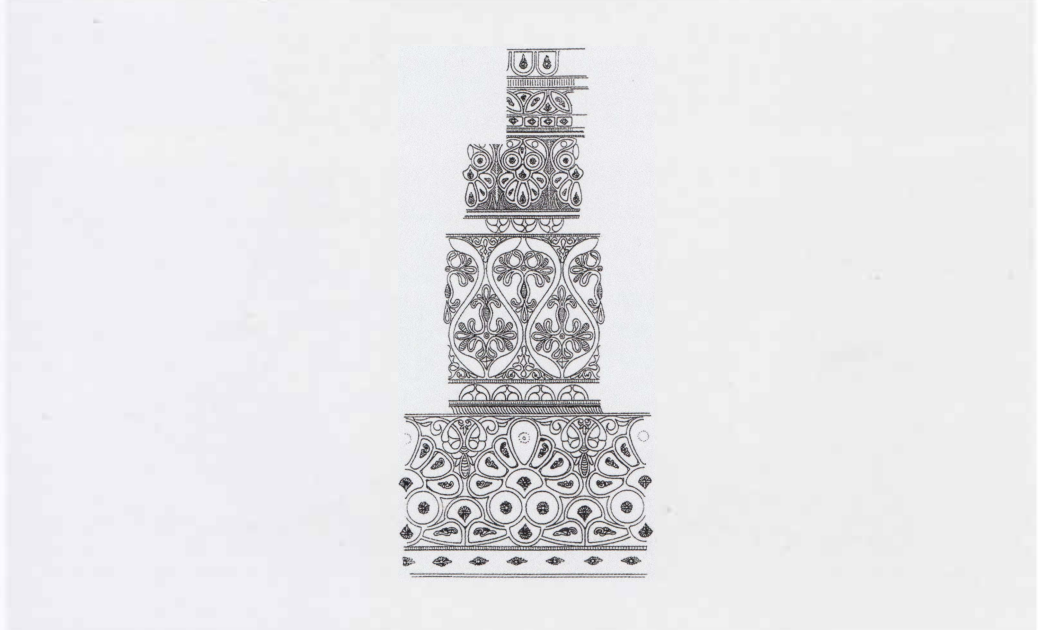
At the top, the initial design is a string of S-motifs formed of foliate scrolls, which open out to meet at a point crowned with a palmette, transformed into a pelta. The coral embellishments, in the form of triangles and leaves, suggest the presence of a sort of mask, made up of the first shoots of the foliate scroll, with curves tracing two leaves nested in each other. On each side of these evocative masks, there are suggestions of triskelions echoing the main theme of the lowest section. This is a masterpiece, subtly balanced and richly endowed with alternative interpretations.











Ceremonial helmet, discovered in 1981 in the Les Perrats cave, Agris, Charente, France

About 380–340 BC
Iron skullcap, covered with a sheet of bronze with repoussé work, with applied gold leaf, and pieces of coral held by ornamental rivets
Height: 22 cm
Angoulême, Musée de la Société Archéologique et Historique de la Charente

The rich decoration of this exceptional work, designed for display rather than combat, is divided into three main sections, separated by narrower bands. The central section is a transformation of a series of palmettes linked by large S-motifs: within each field in a three-fold design, three-leaved palmettes rise from pairs of leaves, possibly representing a sort of mask, in this case animal rather than human.

On each side of this large band are lines of designs, derived from palmettes, embellished with pieces of coral fixed by little ornamental-headed rivets. Above, five-leafed palmettes are modified in a way that suggests the beard of a face with a broad triangular nose and large round eyes, framed by a pair of mistletoe leaves, on a background of small palmettes and triangular half-palmettes. Below, seven-leafed palmettes form the hair of a similar mask, which can be inverted, becoming a bearded face crowned with horizontal horns. This is therefore a variant of the theme of the double head. Rows of double leaves, arranged to form peltas, separate these three sections. This general arrangement probably indicates a reference to the three worlds: heaven, earth and the underworld.

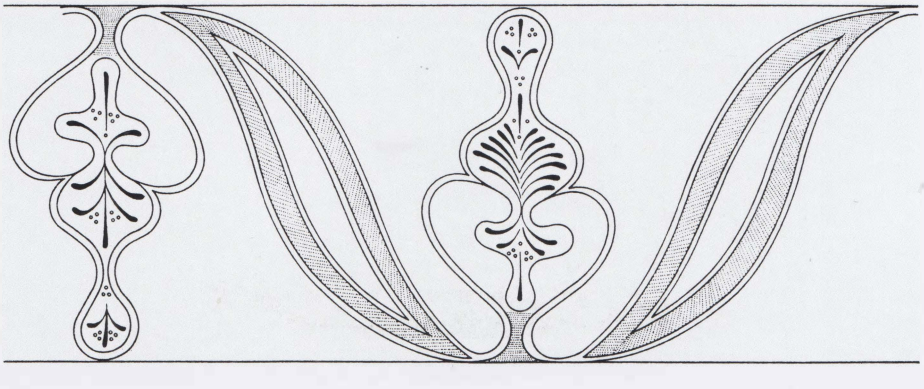
The design of the cheek-pieces is based on two superimposed pairs of S-motifs positioned face to face, supporting a palmette. The whole is inlaid with delicately ribbed coral and fixed with ornamental-headed rivets, displaying sprays of leaves and palmettes. The central scroll, distinctly larger, is the rotating design, which results when an S-motif is drawn within a circle: two leaves intertwined, one solid, the other hollow, a design that appears again in the Chinese *yin-yang*. It expresses the same idea of two opposing, but inextricably linked principles that alternate in a continuous rotating movement. The last pierced part contains a monstrous snake with horns, possibly those of a ram, whose body forms a series of S-motifs and repeats the shape of the pair of leaves intertwined in a circle. In the other spaces, circles, double spirals, S-motifs, stars and quatrefoils, the latter probably representing a reduced 'image of the world' are ancient and frequent elementary shapes from the symbols of the sun.

Situla with finely incised decoration from the tumulus of Kernevez, Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Finistère, France

About 380–340 BC
Terracotta with decoration engraved with a pointed tool after firing
Height: 26 cm
Morlaix, Musée des Jacobins

The decoration on this bucket-shaped vase is based on two large S-motifs combining double palmettes and appears to belong to the same stylistic trend as works such as the flagons from Basse-Yutz (p. 62), or the metal objects from the Champagne region with a finely engraved decoration, which was probably a harbinger of the initial phase of Celto-Italic art to cross the Alps. They bear resemblances to the decoration of the Canosa helmet (p. 100) and other works by Celts settled in Italy. There are echoes of the vases from Champagne with an outline decoration, inspired by the red-figure technique, with which the Brittany vase shares the horizontal bands containing wavy lines, which frame the main motif. Here again we find the three-fold aspect, in the compositions of palmettes and in the triangles formed of three circles. However, here the ambiguity of the palmette is noticeably less accentuated, which might indicate that the local assimilation of this process remained incomplete.







Baluster vase painted in outline, Beine-Prunay, Marne, France

About 360–320 BC
Terracotta with a painted design inspired by the red-figure technique
Height: 35 cm
Reims, Musée Saint-Rémi

The series of four alternating S-motifs, outlined in black (second firing) on the reddish surface of the vase (first firing), is formed by an arrangement of divergent foliate scrolls, linked where they meet a pelta. This is a simpler version of the ornaments on the upper section of the Canosa helmet (p. 100). We even find the three-fold theme, with three leaves arranged inside a triangle. The delicate positioning of this frieze carried over a circular convex surface is evidence of the remarkable skill of the craftsman.

This vase is an example of the occasional introduction into the Champagne region of a technique derived from the red figures of Greek and Etruscan potters, probably by a local craftsman who had spent time in Italy, or perhaps came from the Celto-Italic community to settle near Reims. These vases were probably first created by a single craftsman or in a single workshop, and then imitated increasingly in the region, with greater or lesser success, sometimes displaying a complete misunderstanding of the principle of creating designs by outlining. This technique came back into vogue in the second century BC, with some very beautiful pottery from the centre of France (pp. 151, 154–156).



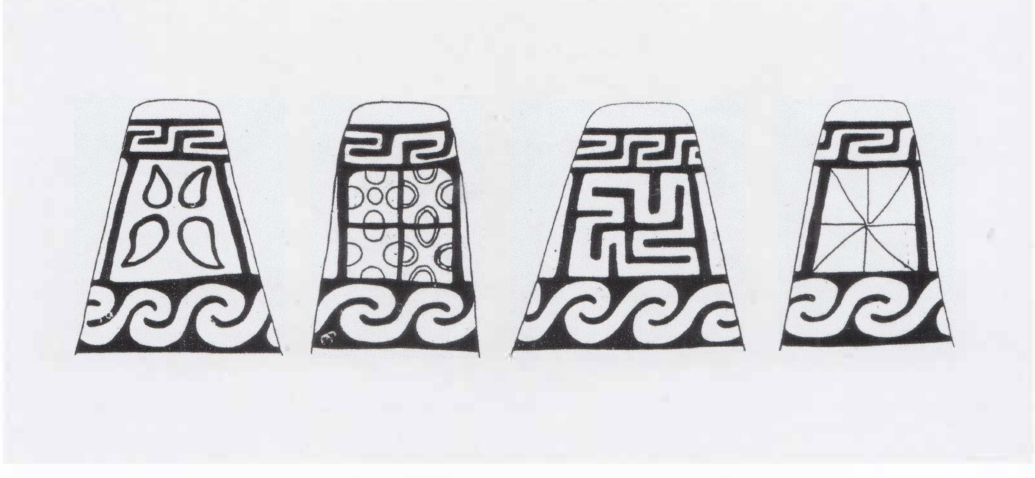
Pyramid-shaped stele from Kermaria, Pont-L'Abbé, Finistère, France

About 360–300 BC
Bas-relief carved stone
Height: approx 85 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

This stele in the form of a truncated pyramid is one of the best examples of a Celtic *omphalos* (pp. 81, 185). It was conceptualized as the meeting-point of the two main axes at right angles around which the universe was horizontally constructed. Two diagonals connect the corners of its flat top; their intersection indicates the position of the vertical axis, the world tree, and the four sides of the pyramid suggest the four quarters of the world.

Each side bears a different design, all of them with a four-fold structure: a swastika; a quatrefoil; a square divided by diagonals and perpendiculars into eight equal triangles; a square subdivided into four by lines, each section with semicircles disposed similarly on the sides; and a single circle in the centre of the top left-hand square. These circles and semicircles are single in the two squares on the left-hand side, double in the ones on the right. Meanders – curved at the base and angular at the top (the waters beneath the Earth and the heavens above?) – encircle the pyramid, giving a unity to the various parts.





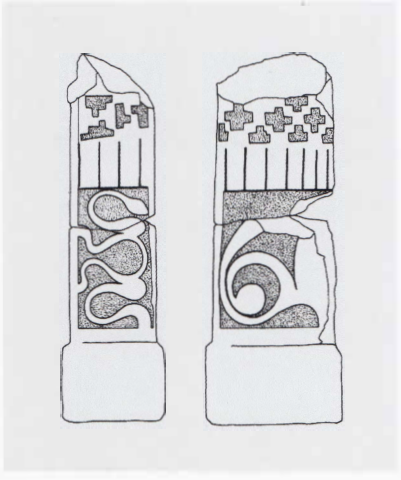


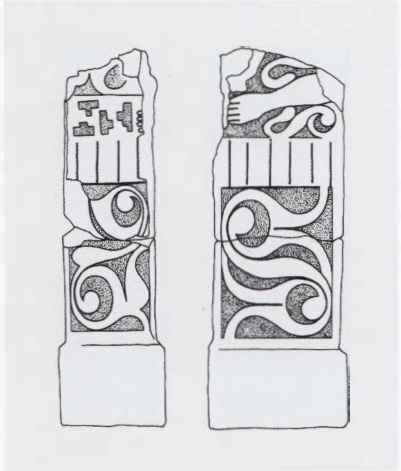
Pillar statue accidentally discovered in 1864 in Waldenbuch-Steinenbronn, Bade-Württemberg, Germany

About 360–320 BC
Carved stone
in low and high relief (arm)
Height: 125 cm
Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg

This quadrangular section pillar was originally topped with a human bust of which there remains only the left forearm, folded over the right of the abdomen. The four surfaces are decorated with panels showing various motifs arranged vertically, that come from different sections of a Celtic version of the chain of palmettes framed by foliate scrolls. The relief squares of the upper part, arranged so as to define hollow crosses and Ts, appear on fibulae from Switzerland and central Europe that can be dated to the middle of the fourth century BC.

This pillar could be a special form of the *omphalos* associated with the image of the deity, in which case the various motifs on the four panels would symbolize the four divisions of the world.

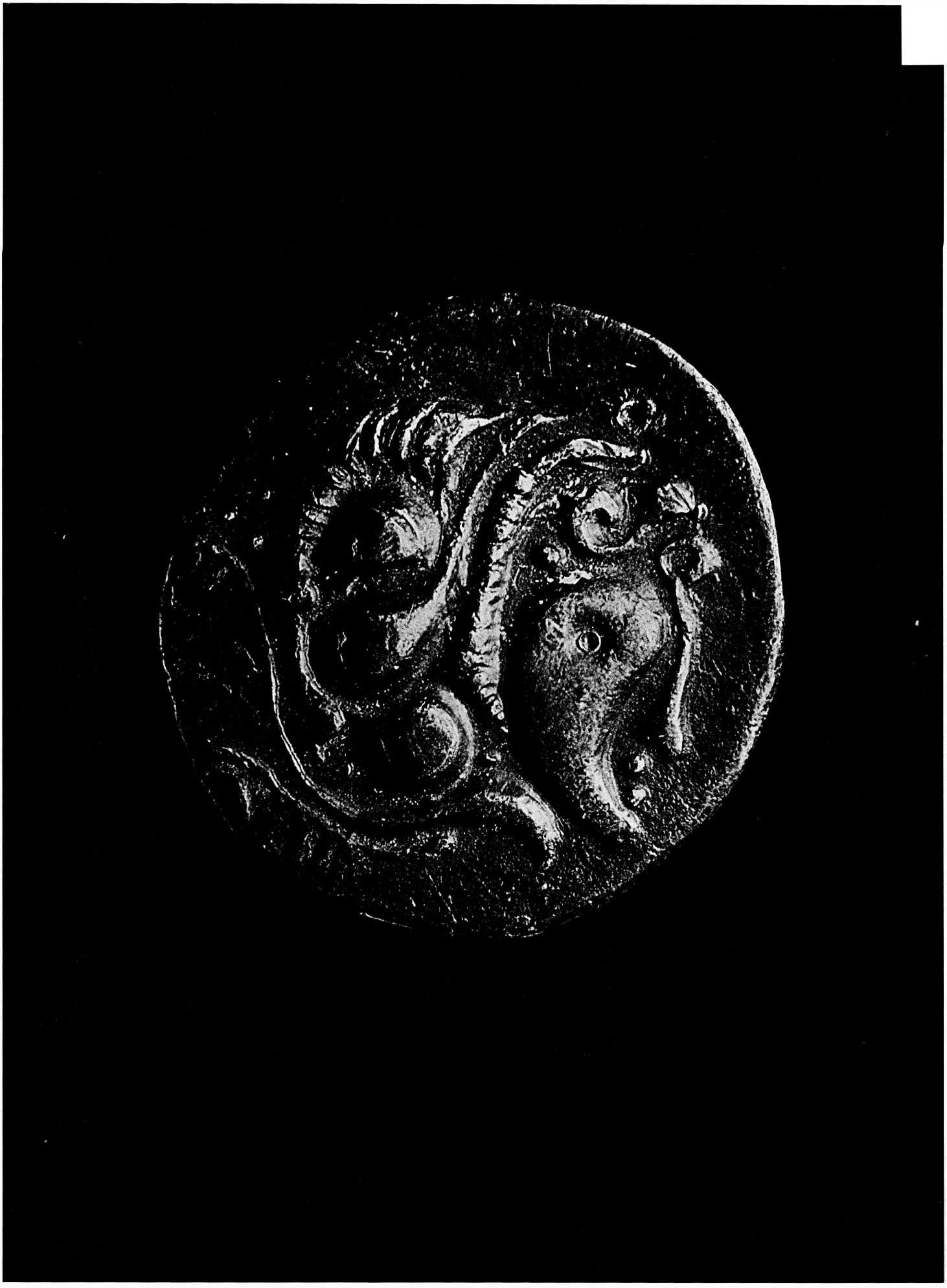




IV

THE HEIGHT OF CONTINENTAL ART AND ITS INFLUENCE

Third century BC



Tetradrachm of the Danubian Celts, inspired by a coin of Alexander the Great, from Modruš, Croatia, about 280–250 BC

See p. 139

As the ancient historians recorded, the descent of the Celts from north of the Alps into Italy was accompanied by equivalent movements towards the east, to those regions of central Europe, which had been partially emptied of their inhabitants at the time of the migration into Italy. Thus, in Bohemia, nearby Moravia and certain neighbouring regions extending as far as the north-west of the Carpathian basin, armed groups arrived and settled from around the middle of the fourth century BC onwards. In some cases, their origin becomes apparent through the objects that they brought with them. The most characteristic appear to come from the Swiss plateau and the Rhine valley, thus suggesting that this was in fact the migration briefly described a few centuries later by Caesar concerning the origin of the Volcae Tectosages, the 'Falcons (not "Wolves") looking for a home', a people who, in the third century BC, played a part in all the major enterprises in the historical record. Caesar says: 'And there was formerly a time when the Gauls excelled the Germans in prowess, and waged war on them offensively, and, on account of the great number of their people and the insufficiency of their land, sent colonies over the Rhine. Accordingly, the Volcae Tectosages seized on those parts of Germany which are the most fruitful [and lie] around the Hercynian forest, [...] and settled there. Which nation to this time retains its position in those settlements, and has a very high character for justice and military merit' (*Gallic Wars*, VI, 24).

It was from this milieu, imbued with a warrior ideology – which carries far distant echoes of the Irish *Fianna* cycle and the Arthurian legends – and where the military brotherhoods flourished, that men were recruited for the great expedition, which in 280 BC brought the Celts to the walls of Delphi, to the shores of the Black Sea and even into Asia Minor. The success of this adventure was facilitated by the experience and knowledge of the world of the Mediterranean city-states, which the warrior elite had acquired during their mercenary service. It brought this dynamic element of Celtic society a prestige far beyond that of other peoples of the same descent. It conferred on their culture an unprecedented influence among neighbouring or newly integrated people, such as the Germans, the Pannonians, the Illyrians or the Thracians.

On the ceremonial jug of Brno are decorative but accurate transcriptions of sections of the starry sky as they appear on the dates of two of the major Celtic festivals, *Beltane* and *Samhain*.

This seems to prove that the background to the characteristic works of this period was set by the doctrines of the intellectual elite, the Druids. Some of these holders of knowledge certainly took part in elaborating the heroic ideal that inspired the groups of adventurers then roaming across Europe, in search of opportunities to display their courage and their military talents. They travelled with their families and sometimes settled where the density of previous settlements and the natural conditions enabled them to become dominant and practice an economy where cattle-rearing, which guaranteed mobility, always played a leading role.

The art of this turbulent period, transported and distributed by a very mobile military elite, was dependent on the glorification and display of values related to the warrior profession. Works of quality, combining a mastery of content and workmanship, were items of military equipment – weapons, insignia, chariot brasses or horse brasses – or jewellery, which distinguished women of rank, wives of the men buried with their weapons.

Iron and bronze work had achieved an exceptional level. Evidence of the former, for example, can be seen in the richly decorated sword scabbards and jewellery, such as the fibulae from Conflans; and of the latter can be seen in the Danubian anklets and the imitations of the goldsmiths' and silversmiths' techniques, filigree and granulation. Unfortunately, the skill of these craftsmen is only apparent in a few items of jewellery, mostly derived from votive offerings. At that time, there was an unprecedented development in the use of glass, which offered a new area for the Celts to display their taste for colour.

Finally, the introduction of coinage, a consequence of the rapid expansion of the trading classes, opened up an area of imagery where craftsmen rapidly overcame the constraints imposed by coining. The need to invent subjects that, in a limited space, were differentiated and rich in meaning encouraged artists to scale new heights of their imagination and led them to use all the resources of the few dominant subjects to their best advantage.

Thus a repertoire was renewed through the intensive exploitation of a few ancient themes, but was imbued with an iconography occasionally supplemented by borrowing from hitherto unknown models.

This illustrates the triumph of a process that consisted of using precise shapes to create images that lend themselves to alternative readings. These readings depend on the intellectual disposition of the viewer, along with their imagination, attitude and circumstantial factors such as the fall of light on the object. In this interactive dialogue, the work becomes a channel for the imagination, which, for a brief moment in time, provides unique access to the ineffable world of the sacred.

The historian Diodorus Siculus describes the amazement of Brennos – one of the chiefs of the great expedition of 280 BC, which took an army of Celts as far as Delphi – when he found himself in a Greek temple face to face with statues of gods represented in human form. For him, it seemed ridiculous to believe that the gods could be happy at being reduced to the condition of mere mortals through imagery. Although the authenticity of his remark cannot be verified, it clearly expresses the difficulty that an ancient Celt had in conceiving a divine image that did not articulate the ability to take many changing forms of life. This is what Celtic artists from this period succeeded in doing, with masterpieces that display a hidden richness that never ceases to amaze us.

Linch-pin from chariot grave no. SP 1002 in 'La Fosse Cotheret', Roissy-en-France, Val-d'Oise, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting on an iron stem
Height: 11.5 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

On the barrel-shaped head of this item unfolds a composition derived from the transformation of a chain of double palmettes linked by S-shapes, a motif found in a form close to the initial model from Celto-Italic society a century earlier. Here, the side scrolls have become hemispherical protuberances, encircled by the ends of the S-shapes, which become the eyes of an upside-down suggestion of a face, whose nose is the central leaf of the upper palmette. At its tip is a similar little mask reversed, perhaps a variant of the sort of wart seen on contemporary works. Only the central leaf of the lower palmette remains, in low relief emphasized by dotted lines.



Linch-pin of chariot with the head of a hawk, *oppidum* of Manching, Bavaria, Germany

About 250–200 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting on an iron stem, set with red enamel
Height: 11 cm
Munich, Archäologische Staatssammlung

Identified as an owl or another night-time raptor of the *Strigidae* family, this head shows its characteristic curved beak, but seems to combine it with some human features, such as the heavy eyebrows tracing the outline of the almond-shaped eyes, and cannot be mistaken for the ear-tufts of a bird. Finally, the two triangular inlays on the top of the head separate three branches that suggest a palmette. This might therefore be an image of a monster, perhaps a variant of the griffon head.





Linch-pins of a chariot from the monumental domed grave under the tumulus at Mal-Tepe, Mezek, Bulgaria

About 285–280 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 10 cm
Sofia, Nacionalen Archeologičeski Muzej

Items from the fittings of a chariot (linch-pins, rings and others) the manufacture of which attributes them to a central-European workshop, were discovered in the entrance corridor of a much older aristocratic Thracian grave with a dome, perhaps deposited as a trophy in a reused tomb. A link between these objects and the great expedition of 280 BC seems very probable, because the works that most resemble their design and manufacture come from central Europe, from the area then occupied by the Volcae Tectosages.

Two human heads with almond-shaped eyes, and a prominent nose and mouth, are represented in profile, framed above and below by large S-motifs, forming the shape of a horizontal lyre. This is a side view of the subject, represented full-face on other chariot linch-pins of the same period. The large S-motif at the top, forming the eyebrows and hair, loops forwards around a hemispherical bulge. This can be interpreted as the eye of a hawk's head seen full-face, which occupies the position where the top of the two human heads should be. Below, the two globular ends of the two lower S-motifs might be seen as the top of a stylized mask. One other detail, which might well hold importance, is the sort of wart on the noses of the heads, which appears on other works in a similar stylistic vein.

Linch-pin of chariot from 'La Courte', Leval-Trahegnies, Belgium

280–250 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting on iron stem
Height: 8.4 cm
Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire



The head of this item, shaped as a quarter sphere, carries an image in relief, centring on an ambiguous mask, which is assembled from features that might be human (the narrow slanting eyes and heavy eyebrows), animal (snout, muzzle or nose), plant (ears or leaves) or symbolic (S-motifs, eyebrows or horns).

This ambiguous quality, which opens up the possibility of alternative readings, was certainly the artist's intention, thus managing to portray the protean nature of the deity and to suggest the three forms of life. The image might equally be that of a man, a ram or even a wild boar, as well as taking the form of mistletoe leaves.

Anklet of hollow egg-shapes from a burial site discovered in 1894 in Plaňany, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 280–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 13.5 x 12 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum



From the first half of the third century BC onwards, anklets made from hollow egg-shapes became the main item of jewellery denoting women of high status in the Danube region of central Europe. So bronze craftsmen focused their efforts on decorations in this category of jewelled rings and mastered the art of lost-wax casting. The ornamentation of these anklets is built up almost exclusively from fundamental symbols, generally cast in a high relief: here, two vertical S-motifs curl around a central medallion, which bears a little horizontal S-motif curving in the opposite direction.



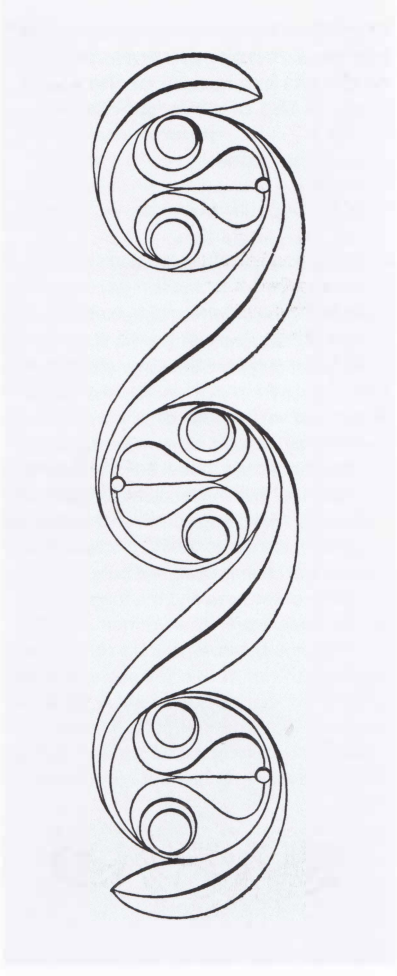


Terret ring from a set of chariot equipment from the Paris area; no details are known of the exact place or circumstances of the discovery, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 8 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

The lower part of the item, used to fasten it to the yoke, bears a triangular head in well-defined relief, with bulging eyes and eyebrows formed by a pair of large S-motifs – their terminal scroll encircles a hemispherical protuberance. The massive ring is decorated with a chain of S-motifs linking together circular masks derived from the transformation of a palmette: the scrolls at the base form goggle eyes, and the central leaf, which alone remains, has become the prominent pear-shaped nose, with a small round bump, a sort of wart, on its tip. This detail, which is certainly significant, is present on other works that might be considered as contemporary.





Linch-pin forming part of chariot equipment from the Paris area; no details are known of the exact place of the discovery, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting on an iron stem
Width: 8.5 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

The rectangular plaque of the pin carries a human face in high relief. The larger ends of two pairs of S-motifs – placed back to back – frame the face. The upper curve starts at the root of the heavy prominent nose, that has a kind of round wart at the end. It is surmounted by the only remaining leaf of a palmette and with a sort of globular wart at its tip. These S-motifs form the heavy eyebrows and end in a scroll encircling a hemispherical prominence. The bulging almond-shaped eyes, half open, with their hooded eyelids, replace the inside scrolls of the upper S-motifs. The lower S-motifs frame the bottom half of the face and a well-drawn mouth. The very expressive ensemble, if seen from above, might suggest the head of a hawk, with the nose taking the form of a beak. Thus the whole is an effective evocation of the three forms of life: human, animal and plant.





Ring forming part of chariot equipment from the Paris area; no details are known of the exact place of the discovery, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 6.5 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

The ornamentation, which covers the circumference of the object, follows the same format as the terret ring from the same collection (see p.115). It too is derived from the transformation of a chain of palmettes, which are linked by S-motifs. However, in this case, the mask formed out of residual elements of the palmette has been replaced by expressive 'naturalistic' faces, which have an accentuated asymmetry: the eye to the right is closed, whereas the other is open and bulging. The shape of the nose and the fringe of hair serve to underscore this asymmetry. Finally, two small protuberances, split like coffee-beans, appear on the left cheek. The entire face thus acquires a grimacing quality and an increased dynamism. The linking S-motifs have smaller S-shapes that turn in the opposite direction, with scrolls ending in hemispherical knobs.





Situla handle-mount in the form of a grotesque animal from a rich votive or funeral hoard, La Mailleraye-sur-Seine, Seine-Maritime, France

About 280–200 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 9.7 cm
Rouen, Musée Départemental des Antiquités

This exceptional object was found among a rich collection of items, which might have belonged to an aristocratic cremation grave, or perhaps multiple graves. However, the unusual richness of this archaeological find and, notably, the presence of several individual weapons, which generally only appear singly, suggest that it might have been a votive offering.

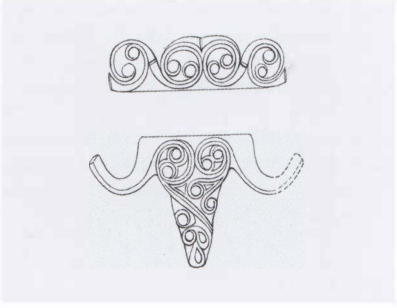
Originally fixed to a bronze vessel inspired by a Hellenistic shape, this decorative fitting represents the head of a monster, probably a variation on the dragon theme, which was greatly appreciated at that period. Some of the anatomical details with a beaded outline are drawn from the plant repertoire: for example, the distorted mouth in the shape of a double mistletoe leaf, and probably also the ears, and similarly the ears of the little animal head, perhaps a dog, seen at the bottom of the item. The bulging almond-shaped eyes in their hollow sockets enhance the visual impact and the effectiveness of this figure, which carries great expressive force.



Cutlass handle from the dwelling of Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
on the tang of the iron blade
Length: 9.3 cm
Brno, Moravskė Zemské Muzeum

The exceptional quality of this handle suggests either a ceremonial use, or the important social position of the owner of the cutlass, or even both. Covering the cylindrical support almost totally, a complex interweaving of double S-motifs with scrolls that end in hemispherical protuberances reveals, depending on the angle of view, allusions to several kinds of masks. The design and manufacture of this work is quite typical of the skill of Celtic artists in central Europe at the height of their productivity.



Openwork bracelet from a grave discovered in 1894 in Prague-Podbaba 'Juliska', Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 280–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 8 cm
Prague, Muzeum Hlavního Města Prahy

This masterpiece of lost-wax casting is composed of four identical elements, arranged on two levels and partially overlapping. Each element is ordered around a right-angled moulding, decorated with a line of chevrons and connected by X-shaped stems, to two similar mouldings, which are a little smaller.

Imitations of filigree and applied decoration adorn some parts of this delicately framed bracelet, based on a general arrangement that suggests the 'image of the world'.







Belt clasp from grave no. 17 in Loisy-sur-Marne 'La Vigne aux morts', Marne, France

About 280–250 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 5.5 cm
Châlons-en-Champagne,
Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

The starting point for the composition on this belt clasp, an object of functional importance, was a palmette framed by S-shapes. But all that remains of the plant motif is the central leaf, forming the nose of a grotesque face. Its eyes replace the scrolls at the base of the palmette. The plump cheeks are triangles with curvilinear sides, a frequent motif in the Celtic repertoire. Small animal ears point upward, either side of the forehead, which is divided by a deep central frown line and crowned with horns, which meet to form the ring where the belt itself was fixed.

Assembled thus, these elements might suggest a second reading: two monsters with snakes' bodies, positioned face to face around the central palmette, symbolized by the remaining leaf. This is therefore a work of unexpected richness, whose design and manufacture are very close to some creations of the same period from central Europe.





Bracelet with two hollow egg-shapes from a woman's grave no. 31 in Brno-Maloměřice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 270–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 8 x 8.5 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

Although this bracelet was found in a grave at the same burial site, which produced the remarkable ceremonial jug, it dates from later and belongs to the period just before the site was abandoned, about the middle of the third century BC.

Its main decoration is found on the C-section that connects the two ovoids on which an S-motif with spiral ends, extending into scrolls turns in the opposite direction. This is therefore the start of a divergent foliate scroll. The plant theme is also present on the bangle, with its hints of a schematic mask resulting from the transformation of a double palmette: in the upper one, the three residual leaves represent the hair; in the other, only the central leaf remains to form the pear-shaped nose, with its clearly defined bump. This detail is found in other contemporary images (p. 115). Almond-shaped eyes replace the scrolls at the base of the palmettes. In this simple but effective image, the human, plant and symbolic elements are inseparable.

Bronze decoration from a ceremonial wooden jug, found in an isolated ditch (probably a votive deposit) on the burial site of Brno-Maloměřice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 290–280 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Total height of the restored vessel: 48 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum





This collection of items was discovered in a burial site, at the bottom of an isolated ditch surrounded by an empty circular space, suggesting the presence of ancient earth moving, perhaps in the form of a burial mound. The absence of other objects indicates that it was probably a deposit of a votive rather than a funerary nature – the importance of the ceremonial jug and the putative monument argue against this supposition.

This is indisputably one of the creations that best represent the art of the Celts at its height, not only in the remarkable quality of craftsmanship, with the subtle reliefs of the wax model rendered through impeccable casting, but also by its thematic consistency. Here we find the themes that had been represented since the second half of the fifth century BC on ceremonial jugs and other objects – the face of the great male deity, the monstrous animals, the plant motifs – but the way they are assembled is new and original.

We see the insistence on a theme closely linked to the warrior class of Celtic society, the dragons with a griffon's head and the body of a snake, frequently found on sword scabbards where they are generally seen as a heraldically arranged pair (pp. 142–143). This pair of monsters form the ring on the lid of the jug: the first one is easy to distinguish, its head with a hawk's beak and a crest on the back, clearly inspired by the image of a Hellenistic sea-dragon. The second, woven into the first, is less apparent and might pass for a sort of tail to the previous one. However, closer examination reveals its beak turned upwards, its eyes, and also its characteristic crest feathers. This might well be an evocation of the temporary outcome of the seasonal battle of the two dragons, referred to in a medieval Welsh text and located 'in the middle of the island'. This symbolic place, which is supposed to be the point at which the world tree stood, is indicated here by the openwork four-leaved rosette in whose centre the statuette is placed.

The item that covered the base of the tubular spout is a representation of the twin faces, a frequent theme in Celtic art. Below is a head, which in profile might appear human, but when viewed full-face reveals a boar's snout. This animal, which was respected and admired for its strength, was an emblem found on military insignia and accompanied the horse-god on coins (pp. 163, 169, 172). The bell of the war trumpet, the *carnyx*, was shaped like a boar's head. With its staring, almond-shaped eyes, and thick eyebrows accentuating its effect, this head is crowned with a sort of tiara, which wraps around the cylindrical spout, and displays an upper surface that ends in a three-leafed palmette. At the same time, this palmette is the lower extremity of the second face, the upper one, and a sort of extension of its chin. This face, perhaps originally completed by







a central part carved into the wood, wears a sketchily presented pair of horns.

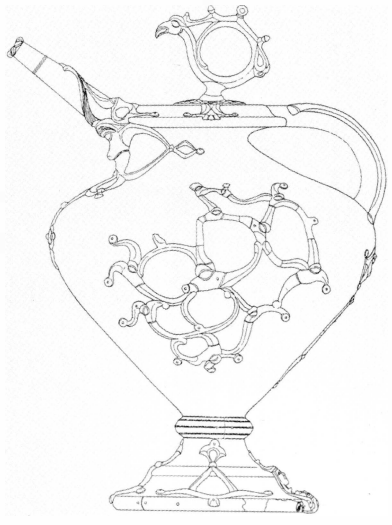
The belly of the jug bears two appliqué networks, different from each other and without any obvious pattern to them, based on monstrous heads with large almond-shaped eyes, hooked beaks that can hardly be distinguished from the plumes or crests of feathers on their heads. However, they are indeed grotesque creatures belonging to the same family as the dragons on the lid. Here, their bodies entwine and eddy in a sort of whirlwind, without beginning or end, fleetingly suggesting, here and there, an S-motif or a triskelion.

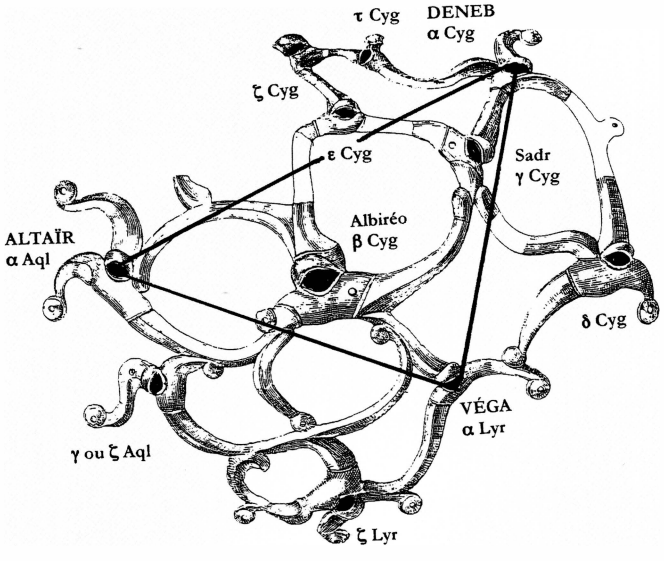
The explanation of this strange and apparently illogical arrangement was discovered in the dominant constellations of the night-time sky over Brno at two of the major Celtic festivals. The first, *Beltane* – whose date, determined by the heliacal rising in 280 BC of the star Aldebaran (α *Tauri*), corresponded to 14 June in today's calendar – was the start of the bright season of the year. The sky at the beginning of the night was then dominated by the 'Summer Triangle', which was formed by the main stars in the constellations of Cygnus, Aquila and Lyra; these are the three 'Summer Beauties' Deneb, Altair and Vega. They are represented here by the eyes of grotesque creatures, with other stars visible to the naked eye in a sector of the sky centred on Albireo (ß *Cygni*), and the main stars in its constellation.

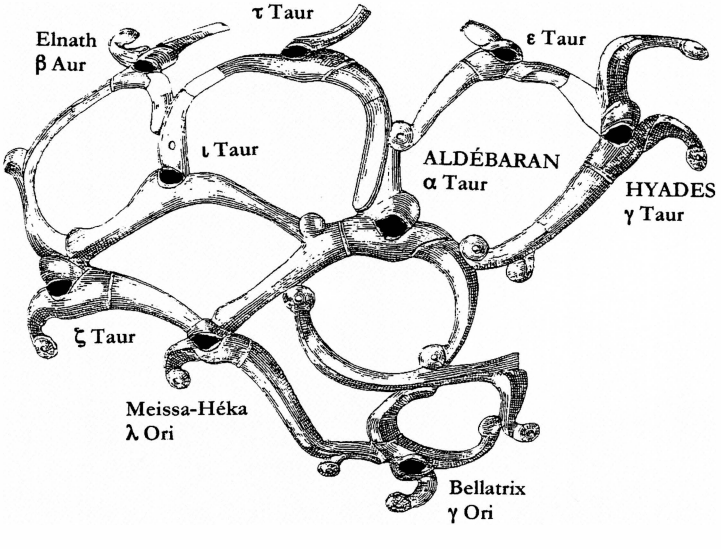
The second network refers similarly to the night-time sky at *Samhain*, the new-year festival that heralds the beginning of the dark season. Its date was determined by the heliacal rising of the red star Antares (α *Scorpii*), which in 280 BC corresponded to our 21 November. The sky at the beginning of the night was then dominated by the constellation of Taurus. These, the eyes of the second network adorning the belly represented the stars of its 'horns' and also a few stars belonging to the neighbouring constellations Orion and Auriga, centring on Aldebaran (α *Tauri*). Two other smaller mounts probably used pairs of eyes to symbolize the two main stars in the constellation of the Twins (*Gemini*), which rose before the sun at the summer solstice and after the sunset at the winter solstice.

When the jug is vertical, the images of latticework on the belly correspond to the vault of heaven at the time of the festival of *Samhain* but it has to be tilted to pour the liquid for it to match the sky at *Beltane*. It thus becomes possible to associate a ritual action with a precise date.

Therefore, this is not only a major work of art, but also rare evidence of the astronomical knowledge of the Druids, the intellectual elite among the Celts. Their collaboration in the design and creation of this work appears unquestionable and confirms the care that was taken over the definition of its content and the choice of resources, which allowed it to be converted into images.











Third century BC

Torque from a cache of two gold ornaments, probably votive, discovered by accident in 1885 in Lasgraïsses, Tarn, France

About 280–260 BC
Gold, hollow lost-wax casting
or cold moulding, assembled by soldering
Diameter: 17 cm
Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond

At first glance, this ornament gives the appearance of a wild disorder of plants, but in fact it is the result of a formal development of repeated patterns. The inspiration was probably derived from the floral crowns of Hellenistic jewellery, where a ribbon is represented twisted around various flowers, forming tufts separated by diagonal bands. This pattern was applied to the rear two-thirds of this torque; the remaining third around the ends, the circumference is covered with intertwined designs in relief, flower-buds and floral devices, some of which suggest the mistletoe flower, combined with S-motifs.

This exceptional ornament is one of the rare male torques worn by chiefs that we know of. They are mentioned in the written record and appear on the images of Celtic warriors passed down from Antiquity, but never occur in warriors' graves in the La Tène period.









Armband from a cache, probably votive, discovered by accident in 1885 in Lasgraïsses, Tarn, France

About 280–260 BC
Gold, hollow lost-wax casting
or cold moulding, assembled by soldering
Diameter: 9.8 × 7 cm
Toulouse, Musée Saint-Raymond

The previous torque and this armband, probably left as a votive offering at a place of worship, make an exceptional pair. Here we have the jewellery of Celtic chiefs referred to in written descriptions of battles between the Roman and Celtic armies. For instance, the torques and bracelets of leading warriors are mentioned in the account given by Polybius of the battle of Telamon in 225 BC, based on the evidence of a Roman historian who allegedly took part in the event. This type of male ornament is not found in graves after the fifth century BC, but it is frequently cited in lists of plunder from Roman victories in the third century BC.

This armband is based on the same design as Danubian hollow-cup jewellery. It is made from two superimposed rings assembled into a single band, as shown by the double connecting pieces between the parts decorated in high relief and the alternating distribution of the four fields surrounding the central floral motif. As on the torque found with it, the botanical nature of the ornamentation is obvious and the image of the mistletoe flower is also recognizable.

Bracelet decorated with human faces from the grave of 'La Charme', Troyes, Aube, France

About 280–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 7.9 cm
Troyes, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

Four groups of twin masks in low relief adorn the circumference of this bracelet, with its C-section band. These human faces, with their broad triangular noses and almond-shaped eyes, are linked together at the tops of their heads; they are flanked by S-motifs, often associated with depictions of the deity. Under their chins, a palmette, transformed into a pelta, retains only the central leaf, in the middle of a fan-shaped ground. Here, the four-fold repetition of the theme of the twin heads probably corresponds to the four parts of the 'image of the world'.





Sword scabbard with three horses, lake site of La Tène, Canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

About 280–220 BC
Iron sheet worked in relief and engraved
Width: 5 cm
Neuchâtel, Laténium, Musée d'Archéologie

This decoration is unique among the iconographic repertoire of scabbards, but it illustrates current themes from the repertoire: the horse, the animal incarnation of the sun god and the three-fold principle, combined with the presence of plant elements.
The three horses are arranged in a triangle: the upper one is running towards the right, its head turned backwards; the bottom two are represented face to face, in a symmetrical arrangement, their forelegs bent. The ear of the top horse forms an S-motif; the lower pair of horses feature normal ears, but their tails flourish into scrolls. Scrolls also appear beneath their muzzles and the rear of their bellies – an atrophied hind leg or a penis. The triangular space between their chests, with its two scrolls, has a hint of a very schematic mask.

These 'vegetative' horses derive from the same principle as the statuette on the lid of the Waldalgesheim ceremonial jug, from the previous century (p. 89).





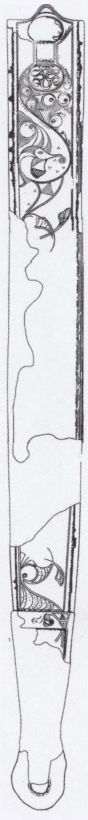
Detail of the back of a sword scabbard from a cremation grave in Cernon-sur-Coole, Marne, France

About 280–260 BC
Iron plate with free-hand engraving
Width: 5 cm
Châlons-en-Champagne,
Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

This sword scabbard is one of the major works of Celtic art, both in the refinement and complexity of the decoration and in the remarkable mastery of its execution. Unfortunately, only part of the reverse is well preserved, where the ashes of the deceased have protected it from corrosion. The very severe rusting of the front prevents its ornamentation from being reliably reconstructed.

In spite of the appearance of great freedom and the impression of a spontaneous creation based solely on the imagination of the engraver, the part of the back that remains was derived from the rigorously principled transformation of a symmetrical composition of pairs of snake-bodied monsters in an S-motif combined with a chain of palmettes. The whole design was then cut in two down its length and further modified. What we see now, therefore, is half of the central palmette (on the left), the great S-motif that represents the body; the head of the dragon, extending forwards into a sort of spiral butterfly tongue, reversed from its usual position. Lower down appear a set of patterns derived from cutting up and reassembling the row of palmettes.





Harness attachment showing a monster, from chariot grave no. SP 1002 in 'La Fosse Cotheret', Roissy-en-France, Val-d'Oise, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 7.6 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale



The upper part of the monster, its head crowned by a triangular plume, its neck covered with a vague mane and its body formed by an S-motif, is framed in a sort of circular medallion. The three leaf-shaped voids are arranged to form a three-fold rotating motif. Another vertical one is found below, inside the scroll drawn by the lower part of the monster's body.

Fibula with large bow in the form of an openwork rosette and disc-shaped foot from grave no. 3 at Orainville 'La Croyère', Aisne, France

About 290–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting, altered later by cutting and by adding appliqué items; foot and spring with carved bone bead; bone or coral cabochon now lost
Length: 14.2 cm
Diameter of the openwork disc: 9.9 cm
Soissons, Musée Municipal



This openwork disc, which perhaps originally formed the lid of a wooden vessel, was later transformed into a fibula. The disc originally bore eight ambiguous masks in low relief, resembling a ram as much as a man. The scrolls that start at the nose and form the eyebrows might be interpreted as horns. These masks are arranged around a central mask in a circle, which is similar but larger in appearance, whose square chin might equally be a muzzle. The peripheral masks are joined together and connected to the centre through a network, which probably expresses the multiplicity of links uniting the different parts of this whole, their interdependence and their convergence about the centre. Therefore, this is certainly a composition of symbolic value, probably an original variation on the 'image of the world', where the association of man and ram, a frequent theme in Celtic art, is subtly portrayed.



Buffer torque from a grave in Pogny, Marne, France

About 240–200 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 11 cm
Châlons-en-Champagne,
Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

Remarkably effective in its great simplicity, the design of the pair of S-motifs back to back might be intended here to suggest the head of a horse, or a human head, crowned by the buffer with its horizontal S-motifs, a symbol associated since the fifth century BC with the image of the sun god, whose animal embodiment is the horse.



Openwork lid of a wooden vessel from chariot grave no. SP 1002 in 'La Fosse Cotheret', Roissy-en-France, Val-d'Oise, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 21 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

At the centre of this remarkable object is a triskelion, its arms encircling three hemispherical bosses, which themselves carry three similar motifs, arranged to suggest caricatures of human profiles, for which they would form the eye, the nose and the mouth. The hair is suggested by triangles filled with lines converging towards the back.

Around this central medallion appear three monsters. Their bodies are formed by S-motifs, their heads have an almond-shaped eye, small ears and a sort of mane. Each one looks like a horse, but its muzzle is extended into a sort of raised trunk. This, together with the tail end of the monster in front, encircles a hemispherical element, marked with an S-motif coiled around two round protuberances. The monster is clearly a variant of the dragon, not unlike the figure on the scabbard from Cernon-sur-Coole (p. 127).

The outside band consists of a continuous chain of five monsters, similar to the previous ones, but with a very short body and a wide-open mouth. The top jaw also forms the lower extremity of the body of a similar but smaller monster, on whose head the lower jaw rests.

Torque from a woman's grave no. 2 in Villeseneux 'La Barbière', Marne, France

About 290–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 15.1 cm
Épernay, Musée Municipal

The same motif is repeated three times on the ring, which opens by removing one segment, in such a way that is characteristic of the three-fold torques among the Senones. It is a head seen from the front, in a triangular formation, framed by S-motifs, which start from the base of the nose, form the eyebrows and end under the chin in a scroll. At right angles, on the sides, are two heads looking in opposite directions, of the same type but smaller, with the central leaf of a palmette under the scrolls of the S-motifs. This composition, based on patterns derived from the palmette between S-motifs, exalts the three-fold rhythm of the torque as a whole and discreetly suggests the twin deity.





Item in the form of a bovine head from the chariot equipment in the Mal-Tepe tumulus, Mezek, Bulgaria

About 285–280 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter of the trumpet-shaped disc: 10.3 cm
Sofia, Nacionalen Archeologičeski Muzej

This item, whose function is hard to determine, was probably fitted on the yoke. It consists of a moulded stem, one end of which bells out into a wide trumpet-shaped disc, its rim decorated with a chain of S-motifs in relief. The other end, designed to fix onto the support, suggests the head of a cow or a bull. The details in high relief are borrowed from the repertoire of plants and symbols: a three-lobed palmette springs from scrolls with hemispherical ends, suggesting eyes; other similar shapes might represent the nostrils. The surface from which these features stand out in relief is finely engraved, with curvilinear patterns, almost imperceptible to the eye. There is a functional ring through the muzzle, which blends perfectly into the whole.



Ring from the equipment of the chariot from the Mal-Tepe tumulus, Mezek, Bulgaria

About 285–280 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Maximum diameter: 9 cm
Sofia, Nacionalen Archeologičeski Muzej

The figurative element on the top of the ring itself carries a mask in high relief on both faces, developed out of a pelta, a motif derived from the Celtic transformation of the palmette. Large S-motifs start at the bridge of the nose, surmounted by a little three-lobed palmette, and end in scrolls. The globular ends of these can also be thought of as the eyes of small rudimentary masks, to be seen from the side.

Belt clasp, neighbourhood of Křivoklát, context unknown, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 260–180 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 9.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

This remarkable item is the epitome of the three-fold principle, very present in Celtic works: three medallions grouped in a triangle each bear three hemispherical bosses with a tiny sphere at their tip. This motif is probably developed from simplified triskelions in high relief, well-evidenced in the third century BC in central Europe. At the end of the object, a zoomorphic hook, which is probably a reference to the head of long-necked water bird, again forms a triangle with the pair of cow's horns at its base.

This curious combination might be seen as a subtle reference to the Swan and the Bull, the stellar protagonists seen in the networks on the Brno jug (pp. 120–123). The horns crown the upper medallion in such a way that it becomes the echo of a head. This is therefore an ensemble of symbolic elements barely hinted at, ideal food for the viewer's imagination. The whole has an astonishing power and monumentality, created with a mastery of the space and volume and workmanship, worthy of the best sculptors of the present day.



Hemispherical, applied decoration in relief, discovered by chance in the region of Alençon, Orne, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 4.8 cm
Alençon, Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la Dentelle

The complex appearance of the high-relief decoration of this item is mainly due to the different sizes of the hemispherical elements that surround the spiral ends of the three S-motifs that compose them. They are smaller in the centre, where the triangular elements filling the space between the scroll and the S-motif give them the appearance of leaves. On the outside, they are larger, more prominent and decorated with an engraved, concave-sided triangle. Thus the whole suggests the triskelion and enhances the three-fold appearance.







Fitting in the shape of a human head, forming part of chariot equipment from the Paris area; no details are known of the exact place or circumstances of the discovery, France

About 280–260 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 2.9 cm
Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
Musée d'Archéologie Nationale

This little head is strangely restricted at mouth level, emphasized by a moulding running all around this high relief. It seems unlikely that this represents a mouth or a moustache; the way it is arranged suggests rather a sort of gag – or a closed torque, in which case the head would only be the upper part. There are parallels in certain images of human heads from the second half of the fifth century BC (pp. 50, 66). Below, a hemispherical boss seems to indicate the mouth or emphasize the chin. Prominent almond-shaped eyes flank the broad triangular nose.

Part of an anklet of hollow egg-shapes, Uhřice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 280–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 8 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

What appears at first sight to be a disorderly, 'cubist' set of ornamental shapes, is based on a large S-motif. Its arms enclose hemispheres, split in two across the middle and thus resembling flower-buds. The central part of this S-motif bears a curvilinear tetraskele, which is formed by the juxtaposition of hemispheres, turning in the same direction as the S-motif. The combination of angular shapes, extending from the ends of the S-motif with planes that are flat or convex, and arranged in high relief, produces different effects, depending on the angle of view and the lighting; it distracts the viewer's attention and thus almost completely masks the nature of the symbols represented.



Anklet with three large hollow egg-shapes, Batina, Croatia

About 260–220 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 8 cm
Vienna, Naturhistorisches Museum

As the main symbol of high-status women among the Danubian Celts of the third century BC, anklets made of hollow egg-shapes developed in this region, during the second half of that century, into oversized forms. Here, the three large smooth ovals are testimony to the level of skill achieved by the founder and take the three-fold shape to new heights of symbolism.

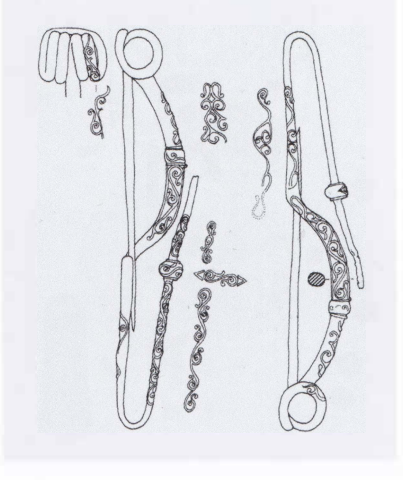




Fibula with long foot fixed to the bow, decorated with foliate scrolls, grave in Conflans 'Les Grêves', Marne, France

About 280–250 BC
Wrought iron, decorated perhaps using one or more stamps
Length: 16.5 cm
Troyes, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

Admirably preserved, probably due to the particular conditions of a cremation grave, this object, with the other fibula from the same site (see p. 137), illustrates the extraordinary skills of the Celtic blacksmiths of the third century BC. The foot with its little round bead, the bow, the catch and even the outer coils of the spring, are decorated with various arrangements of foliate scrolls, drawn by lines in relief, closely related to models from the Mediterranean.



Buffer torque, woman's grave in the 'Les Jogasses' burial site, Chouilly, Marne, France

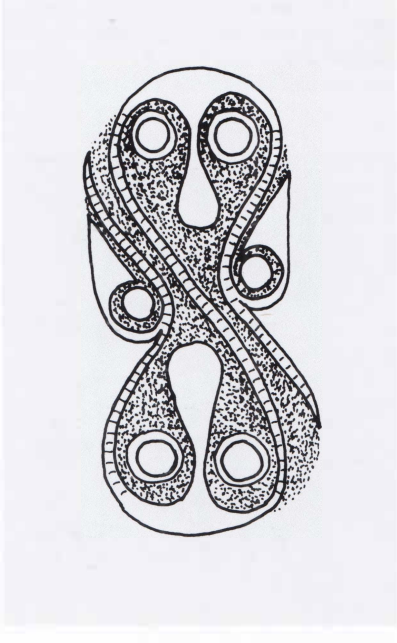
About 300–280 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 14.8 × 17.4 cm
Châlons-en-Champagne,
Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie

This torque is ornamented in deeply cut relief on the buffer ends and the adjacent part of the ring. The buffers bear chains of S-motifs where the final scroll surrounds a hemispherical protuberance. The way in which these are arranged suggests a mask with globular eyes when the object is seen head on.

On both sides of the band is a composition derived from the transformation of a pair of palmettes, connected by a large S-motif and flanked by the springing-off points of foliate scrolls. The palmettes have been reduced to the central leaf, the scrolls at their base replaced by hemispherical elements, suggesting human faces. Again we see the theme of the twin heads. They are differentiated by the reverse formation of the side shoot of one of the foliate scrolls. Thus the face further from the buffer is framed by two triangular elements. The three-fold aspect underlying the composition – three S-motifs, faces with three elements, triangles – is underlined by the third triangle crowning this head, at the end of the decorated part of the object.





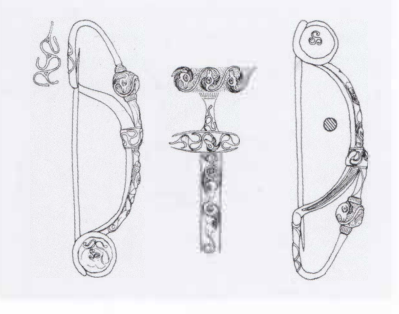




Fibula with beaded foot fixed to the bow, decorated with monsters, grave in Conflans, Marne, France

About 280–250 BC
Wrought iron,
decorated probably using a stamp
Length: 11.7 cm
Troyes, Musée des Beaux-Arts
et d'Archéologie

The decoration on this exceptional example of a fibula is based on patterns of foliate scrolls, alone or combined with animal shapes. Foliate scrolls appear on the discs either side of the spring; a single foliate scroll adorns the underneath of the clasp and also the part of the foot connecting it to the fixing ring on the bow. This ring carries a foliate scroll where the tendril on the upper surface is replaced by an animal head wearing some kind of crest. Three of these same heads, connected by S-motifs, on a dotted background form a decoration covering the entire bead. Finally, the bow carries a foliate scroll, modified so that the first two branches merge into an animal head with a pointed muzzle that ends in a coiled plant motif. These heads replace the palmettes from which the leaves spring in the original Mediterranean versions. This is the same type of grotesque animal as appears on some scabbards, including the example from Cernon-sur-Coole (p. 127) and the openwork lid of Roissy (p. 129). It appears to belong to the dragon family, associated with the world tree and supporters of the deity.



Belt clasp, grave no. 12 in Dormans 'Les Varennes', Marne, France

About 290–270 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 4.7 cm
Épernay, Musée Municipal

The composition shown in deeply cut relief on the body of the clasp is a simplified version of the one found on the Jogasses torque (p. 136), for example. The difference between the two heads linked by their S-motif is that one is continued on the bow of the buckle; when the belt was in place this would have been half-hidden, so it would have resembled a pair of horns, as in the example from Loisy-sur-Marne (p. 119).





Anklet made of hollow egg-shapes, from a woman's grave in Křepice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 280–240 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 16 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

This belongs to a characteristic series of this type of ring jewellery from central Europe, where angular and rounded shapes are assembled in 'cubist' forms. Here, a large S-shape carries at the ends and centre three circular motifs, consisting of two intertwined leaves – a version in high relief of the S-motif within a circle. They turn in the opposite direction from the rotation of the principal S-motif, built up from angular forms.



Tetradrachm of the Danubian Celts, inspired by a coin of Alexander the Great, from Modruš, Croatia

About 280–250 BC
Stamped silver
Diameter: 2.6 cm
Zagreb, Arheološki Muzej

On the obverse, the profile of Alexander the Great, represented as Hercules crowned with the skin of the lion of Nemea, has been transformed into an assemblage of shapes that held meaning for the Celts, particularly in their characteristic leaves. On the reverse, the simplified figure of Zeus enthroned combined with new motifs: the palmette flowering on his knee, the S-motif adorning his head, a yoke and the cheek-piece of a bit evoking a horse, the animal embodiment of the sun god, a recurrent theme on the reverse of Celtic coins.

This transformation is considered to be an example of the attitude of Celtic artists towards their models: this is never a purely formal process, attributable to misunderstanding, lack of skill or a taste for abstraction. It is the transformation of the original meaning into a system of religious iconography with a specifically Celtic content.

One-third stater no. 219 from the settlement of Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 260–240 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 1.2 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

This was probably inspired by a Macedonian model, which bears on the obverse the helmeted head of Pallas Athena and on the reverse the image of a winged Victory. However, the obverse of this coin represents a profile, probably masculine, with hair modified to suit Celtic taste: curls in the form of leaves and a comparable S-motif. The whole is surmounted by a three-leaved palmette. On the reverse, a warrior with a shield and a double leaf over his elbow is accompanied by a set of letters, perhaps borrowed from the Greek alphabet.



Stater with 'dragon, mare and foal' (LT 6901), known as the unique example, believed to be from the land of the Aulerci Cenomani in the region of Le Mans, Sarthe, France

About 280–250 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 2.1 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles

The obverse bears the profile of Apollo, crowned with laurels taken from a Macedonian stater of Philip II. Only the hair, with its leaf-like curls, and the ear show any substantial modifications. The image on the reverse is original: a mare suckling a foal facing in the opposite direction. A monster with a crest that appears to be inspired by the Hellenistic sea-dragon, the *ketos*, but with a head borrowed from a griffon, shown by the presence of a hawk's beak and ears, is pictured above. In front of the mare, a long leaf-shaped palmette, probably the aerial part of a stylized (yew?) tree, is carried on a stem, which curls into an S-motif, before ending in a double scroll. This is probably an evocation of the world tree.

This appears to be the representation of a scene, which is a rare example in Celtic art, so the subject must have held particular importance. Perhaps it is an episode of the history of the Great Goddess, *Rhiannon*, the 'High Queen', and her heavenly son in the *Mabinogion* tales.





Stater no. 336 from the settlement in Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 260–240 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 1.46 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

The image on the obverse appears to represent the head of a horned animal (or of a monstruous man) seen from the front; and the image on the reverse seems to represent a buffer torque, inside which is some sort of shield surrounded by a wavy line suggesting a snake.

These images are unique, because they appear not to relate to any type of Mediterranean coin in circulation during the third century BC. They are probably drawn from the symbolic repertoire of the Celts.



Half stater with 'head shown in front of the body of a horse' (LT 10379 and 10303A), from the land of the Ambiani in the region of Amiens, Somme, France

About 280–240 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 1.6 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles

The image on the obverse represents a head in profile, with a hairstyle of S-motifs standing up above a bandeau and the ear also formed by an S-motif. The neckline is a beaded arc of a circle, perhaps a collar or a torque.

The hindquarters of a horse replace the back of the neck; and its lower forelegs and head appear in front of the nose and mouth of the figure. This is obviously a variant on the representation of the sun god combined with his animal embodiment. However, the head of the animal might equally well belong to a griffon as to a horse.

On the reverse side, a horseman (or woman) brandishes a torque, a sun wheel (or a shield) and a long branch. In the background appears a second horse. Behind the horses, a wavy pattern might represent a snake.

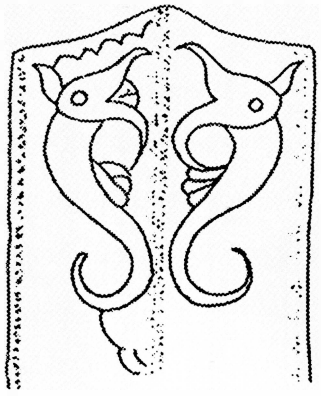
The metamorphoses of a pair of dragons on sword scabbards

The emblem of the pair of dragons – monsters whose cyclical rotation at the location of the world tree ensured, in the minds of the Celts, the balance of the world – has been found beneath the throat on the front panel of several hundreds of sword scabbards from the fourth to the second centuries BC.

The motif appeared in the sixth century BC (p. 43), but it became especially frequent in the following century, on various elements of military equipment: scabbards (pp. 76–77), spearheads, belt buckles (pp. 63, 65), linch-pins and other items from chariots (pp. 52, 63, 66). There are two major variants of it: serpentine monsters whose bodies form an S-motif (p. 89), and griffons or sphinxes (pp. 50, 69).

Initially, the world tree was represented between the monsters in the form of a palmette, a double leaf, the silhouette or the face of the deity, which was probably Lug, the god-hero worshipped above all others. But by the time of the fourth to third centuries, the world tree flanked by monsters was more often simply understood or alluded to indirectly.

The homogeneity of its content, and its astonishing and disturbing variety of forms, make this category of decorations a remarkable illustration of the mechanisms used by the Celts to transform their fundamental themes.



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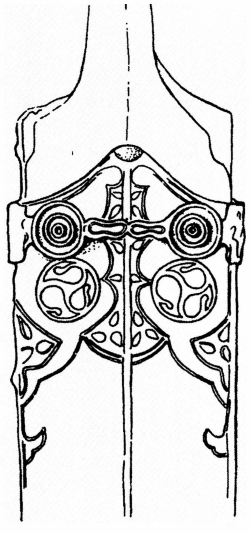

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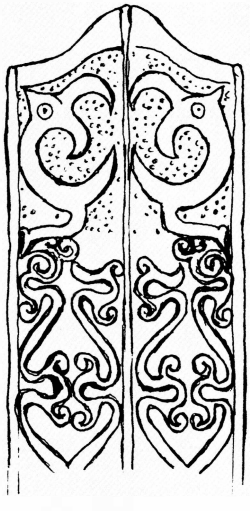


3

1 Sword scabbard with a 'zoomorphic lyre', grave no. 1-3-1791 in Pećine, Serbia

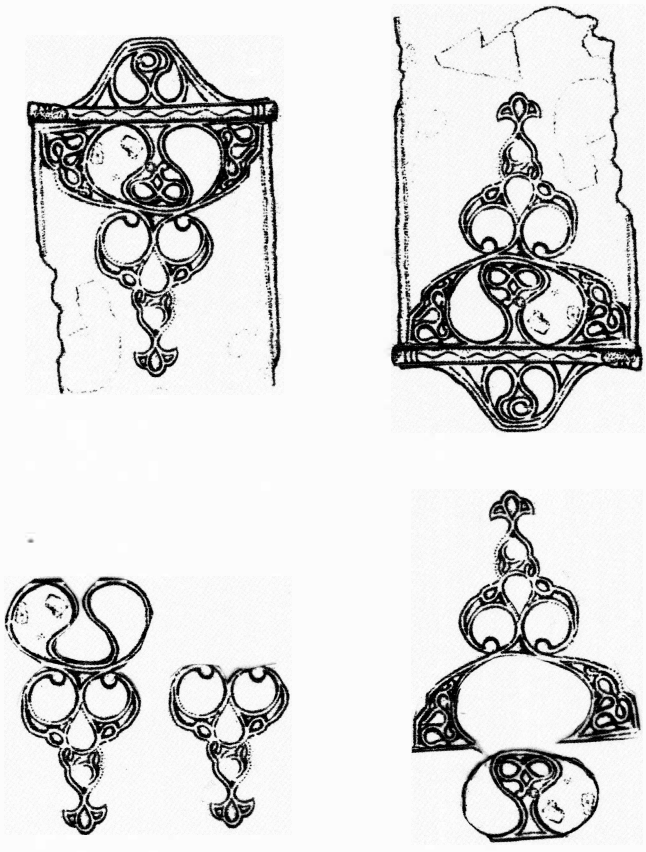
About 280–260 BC
Iron sheet engraved free-hand
Width: approx 6 cm
Požarevac, Narodni Muzej

Elements of a deconstructed palmette are attached to the bodies of the monsters. The plant motif is repeated in the three-lobed garland, which completes the lower part of the emblem.

2 Sword scabbard from grave no. 6 in Dobova, Slovenia

About 260–240 BC
Iron sheet engraved free-hand
Width: approx 7 cm
Brežice, Posavski Muzej

The palmette, which would have originally formed the central motif, has been divided down the middle and the halves have been moved to the sides. The eyes of the monsters (griffons) are covered by the profiled discs of the applied crossbar with a central part that seems to have been made in the shape of duckbills. The principle of dismantling the palmette and moving it sideways was also adopted on the scabbard from Cernon-sur-Coole (p. 127). Of particular note here are the three-fold motifs, often associated with the emblem of the dragon.



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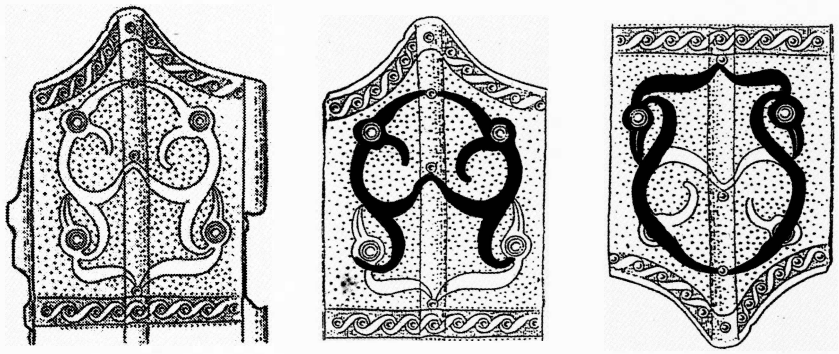


5

3 Sword scabbard from grave no. 53 in Casalecchio di Reno, Bologna, Italy

About 350 BC
Iron sheet engraved free-hand (griffons) and stamped in relief using a punch (plant friezes)
Width: approx 5 cm
Bologna, Soprintendenza archeologica dell'Emilia Romagna

Beneath the pair of dragons, engraved on a mottled ground, either side of the central rib throughout the whole length of the scabbard, there extends a double frieze not unlike the one that appears on the Filottrano scabbard (p. 94). This combination of symbolic monsters and the sequence of cyclically alternating plants is the basis of compositions like the one adorning the scabbard of Cernon-sur-Coole (p. 127).

4 Fragment of sword scabbard without context from Bölcske-Madocsahegy, Hungary

About 260–240 BC
Iron sheet engraved free-hand
Width: 5.7 cm
Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum

At first sight, this elaborate, dense composition appears simply decorative. But closer analysis reveals significant elements: two suggestions of superimposed faces, the larger crowned with the double mistletoe leaf, the other with a pair of horns. In both cases, a three-lobed palmette appears beneath the chin, as is generally the case for this type of representation of the deity (p. 81). This is therefore an unusual variant on the theme of the 'twin heads' (p. 136). When it is inverted, the decoration reveals a face encircled by the double mistletoe leaf framed by a pair of monsters with griffons' heads, their beaks turned outwards. This time the three-lobed palmette, symbolizing the world tree, dominates the composition. This is an excellent example of the hidden pictures in Celtic art at its height.

5 Sword scabbard with a network of dragons, lake site of La Tène, Marin-Épagnier, Canton of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

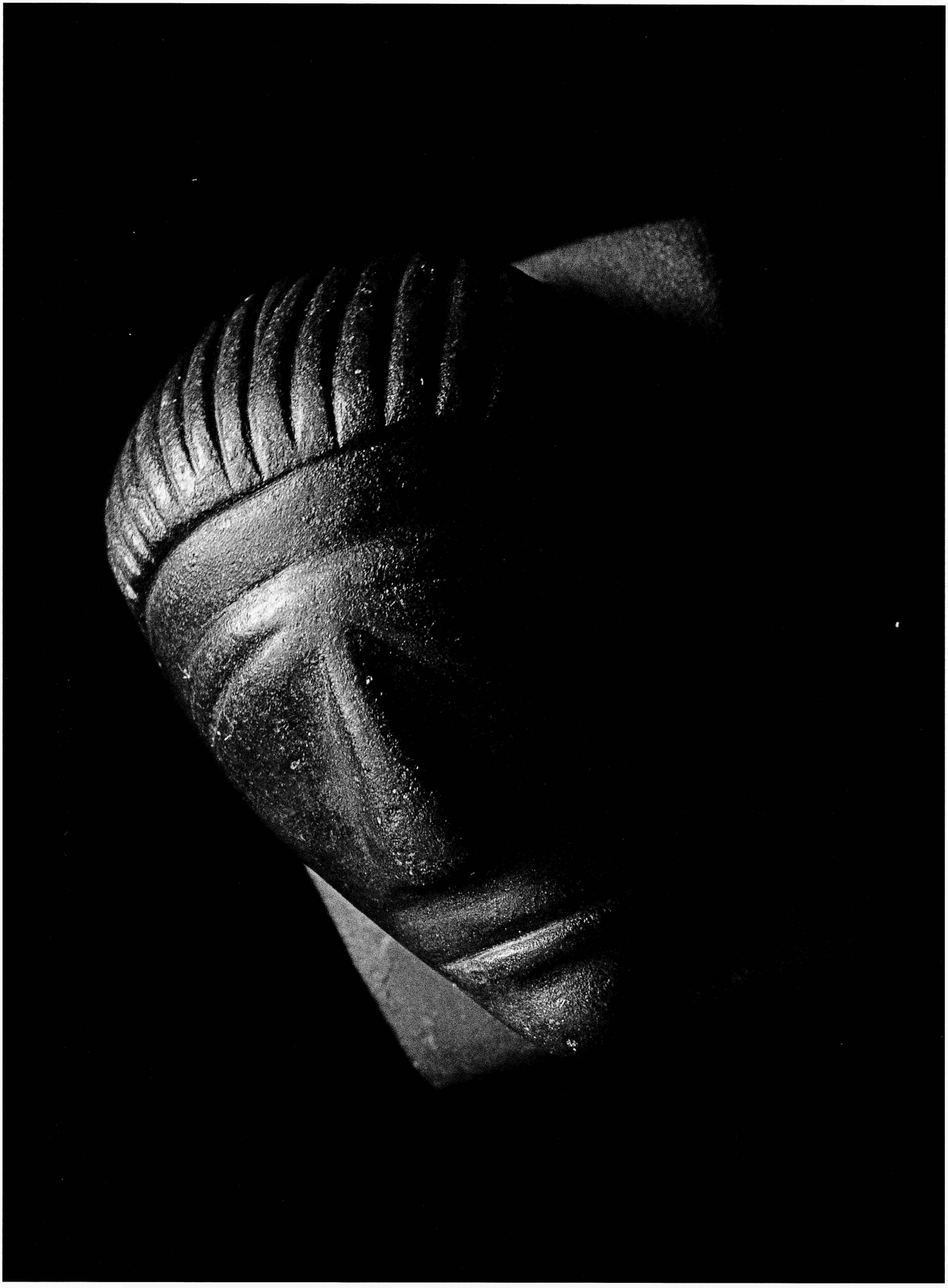
About 360–300 BC
Iron sheet engraved free-hand and with compasses
Width: approximately 5 cm
Neuchâtel, Laténium, Musée d'Archéologie

A sort of grotesque network of four heads stands out against a mottled background. This is a fusion of a pair of griffons – the upper heads with their beaks wide open – and a pair of serpentine monsters in the shape of an S-motif, with the lower heads inverted and crowned with a plume. The body of these two grotesque pairs comes from their super-imposition: the S-shaped part is common to both, unlike the wings of the griffons, which meet on the central moulding, along with the upper part of their beaks.

V

THE ART OF THE *OPPIDA*

Second and first centuries BC



Head moulded perpendicularly on a flat iron stem (component of a chariot?) from Křivoklát, Bohemia, Czech Republic, about 150–50 BC See p. 159

The third century BC, the age when the Celts' military adventures reached its greatest extent, and its culture expanded to many neighbouring peoples, closed at the end of the second Punic War, with the final reversal of the Celts' power in Italy and Rome's decisive affirmation of its supremacy in the Mediterranean. The defeat of the Boii in Cispadane Gaul, followed by their return to their country of origin in central Europe, opened a new chapter in the history of mainland Europe. Indeed, the halt in the Celts' expansion and their subsequent stabilization and settlement resulted in rapid economic expansion and the development of markets. These new conditions encouraged the birth of urban centres, where some activities were concentrated, and where key commercial exchanges took place, especially those involving long-distance trade. These towns, located in strategic sites on main communication routes, were places where the resources of an area converged. In some cases, they were also places that focused the religious and administrative unity of the tribal elements of a federal community, which Latin authors called the *civitas*, 'a city'.

The origin of these Celtic towns, known under the Latin name of *oppidum*, is not unique. The first settlements north of the Alps, which were no longer exclusively rural, and covered areas ranging from several dozen to hundreds of hectares, brought together homes, workshops and probably also buildings for community use, dating back to the third century BC. They do not appear to have been fortified at that date, but we do not know enough about them to be categorical in our description.

One of these is the recently discovered settlement at Němčice in Moravia, in a strategic position on the route that had already been used for several thousand years for north–south trade, known as the 'Amber Road'. Simply picking up items from the surface over about thirty-five hectares has produced an impressive quantity of archaeological remains: abundant residues from bronze forges that made rich belts and other jewellery for high-status women, and also 500 fragments of bracelets in coloured glass and scrap from a workshop making glass beads. Among the most numerous and the most interesting archaeological remains found on the site are hundreds of coins: gold and silver coins minted here or in the neighbouring regions, as well as examples, mainly in bronze, from very distant sources. Coins have been identified from Gaul, Marseille, Macedonia, Illyria, Etruria, Campania, Apulia, Rome, Sicily and Carthage, from the mints of the Ptolemies

in Alexandria and Cyrene, most of them struck in the last third of the third century BC. Such evidence of the existence of contact between distant countries, which cannot be plausibly explained by commercial dealing, given the low value of the items, probably indicates the central role played by the town in the recruitment of mercenaries.

The decline of this settlement appears to coincide, around the end of the first few decades of the second century BC, with the return of the Boii from Italy, their resettlement in part of nearby Bohemia, and the building of a network of fortified sites, which must have controlled the main trade passing through the heart of Europe. So the development of the urban civilization of the Celtic *oppida* is not uniform, but varies according to the region. It might equally well be a development from previous unfortified hamlets, or from colonial-type foundations on unoccupied sites, as is the case in Bohemia. However, the rapid expansion of the *oppida* corresponds to widespread social changes, which had repercussions that are perceivable in different fields.

Thus, the changes that came about in funeral practices often led to the almost total disappearance of graves, probably due to the systematic practice of cremation and the burial or scattering of the ashes without identifiable objects accompanying them. This increasing scarcity of grave goods, up until then the main source of our knowledge of artistic production, partly explains the differences at first sight between the art of the *oppida* and that of previous eras. In many regions, the works we have available come mainly from settlements, sanctuaries or votive deposits, and their choice does not reflect the same concerns as the funerary contexts. This fact accentuates the differences between the two periods.

However, the wealth and quantity of images on coinage largely makes up for the poverty of certain categories, which had previously been predominant, and demonstrate the striking continuity between the repertoire of earlier periods and the imagery of the time of the *oppida*. We find not only the same themes, but also the same attitudes towards portraying them. We might almost deduce that the best creators of images were now employed in engraving coins. This is not impossible, because the coin constituted the ostentatious new way to display the power and wealth of communities. This appeared to be less favourable to the aggrandisement of the individual, in a society governed by an aristocratic class that was jealous of their privileges and the collective control that they exercised over the city.

It is therefore the images on coins that best reflected the continuity, or even the resurgence of themes, illustrated during the previous centuries. On the reverse of coins, we see the image

of the horse with a human head reappearing, a theme generally associated with other motifs, including the S-motif and the triskelion, the sun wheel, the wild boar, the bird, the palmette and the foliate scroll or their derivatives. But also we find a few that can be read as star pictures, to mark the passing of a comet or other exceptional astronomical events.

The theme on the obverse of the coin is almost exclusively the head of the deity. His hair and other details are built up of the S-motif, leaves and other symbols, including the schematic version of the ram's head, whose presence underlines the similarities with the repertoire on ceremonial jugs.

These appear to have lost their importance, probably replaced, from the third century BC, by another type of vessel, made of wooden staves with metal hoops, and the handle-attachment in the form of a human or animal head. These vessels are rarely preserved entirely, but a number of their metal fittings can be recognized in material from settlements or deposits.

The small figurative bronzes, of which the more elaborate examples of these fittings form part, are an abundant category of material found in the *oppida*, and in certain deposits of a probably votive nature. This type of work was previously mainly known through a few statuettes of animals, which often have an uncertain date. The series emerging from the large settlements and from some deposits are numerous and varied.

Very few of the figures depicted have unobtrusive features that allow them to be recognized as probable divine effigies, including hair or eyebrows formed of S-motifs or leaves, hair in a characteristic bandeau and rudimentary palmettes as ears. The rest depict wild boars, horses, goats and waterfowl in the repertoire of figurative fibulae from the second half of the fifth century BC, and also four-legged animals, which are less easy to identify, but perhaps include dogs. The function of these statuettes remains uncertain. A small number of them have a suspension ring, showing they were worn as amulets. The others might be seen as votive offerings, or parts of a domestic cult, although there is no conclusive evidence.

Sanctuaries or sites believed to be such, though difficult to identify with certainty, have yielded up a few large sculptures in stone or wood, which were probably cult statues. The remarkable wooden sculptures discovered in the well of the quadrangular enclosure in Fellbach-Schmiden illustrate the quality of this little-known aspect of Celtic art, which was no doubt much more abundant that its equivalent in stone. This gap in our knowledge is obviously even more apparent in architecture, where wood was used almost exclusively.

Particularly interesting works fall into the category of fine ceramics, thrown on a wheel and painted with decoration most often in outline. Although widespread, this type of pottery is only found in large quantities in the few regions where the custom of laying pottery in graves was maintained. The most spectacular collection so far, datable to the second century BC, comes from central France. These vases illustrate already familiar themes, but are here executed with dazzling elegance and virtuosity.

In the last centuries BC, painted ceramics also reveal the most remarkable episode in the art of the Hispanic Celts, which up until then had mainly featured figurative fibulae representing a horse or a horseman, probably referring to the sun god and his equine embodiment worshipped by their cousins north of the Pyrenees.

On the painted pottery from Numantia, inspired by work from the Mediterranean coast of Spain, we find the same themes as among the Celts of central Europe, including the S-motif and the triskelion, the sun wheel, the horse, the man with a horse's or ram's head, the bull, the wild boar, the crane and other birds, and the 'image of the world'. In addition, we find the same process of introducing a plethora of symbols into the figure, which is magnificently illustrated by the 'vase of the bulls'. This particular attitude does not exist in the works of the Iberian potters and therefore reflects the Celts' original concept of the image.

The monumental stone sculptures of pigs, boars or bulls, which even today throng the landscape of the central Iberian plateaux, perhaps marking out the boundaries of ancient territories, are a Celto-Iberian speciality, as are the life-size effigies of warriors, which appear to characterize the Lusitanian area.

It was therefore at the end of the Continental history of Celtic art that those Celts, who for more than a thousand years had been living in the Iberian peninsula, finally expressed through original images, their membership of a spiritual community with deep and ancient roots.



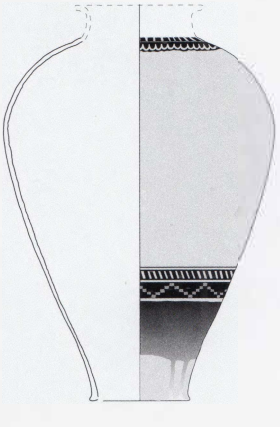
Large painted vase (no. 21), well 34 in Gandaillat, Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, France

About 150–100 BC
Terracotta painted free-hand over slip
Estimated height: 47 cm
Clermont-Ferrand,
Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles

The exuberant decoration on this exceptional work, which is unfortunately very damaged, is outlined in black on the pale slip. The major theme is a set of seven four-footed monsters, probably the final mannered stage of the 'crane-headed horse' of the earlier repertoire (p. 156). The body of the horse has a touch of the plant about it, because its tail is formed of two S-motifs linked together, their meeting-point decorated with the residual leaf of a palmette. The slender, long neck ends in a small head with a long beak, crowned by three scrolls on thin stems and a long tall crest, tipped with a three-leafed palmette, folded back.

The space between the necks, the three stemmed scrolls and the hindquarters of these beasts is filled from top to bottom with pairs of quadrupeds, browsing face to face, whose long tails end in a scroll. They are crowned with two pairs of half-palmettes, which can be construed either as antlers or as an image of the world tree. An S-motif starts at the forehead and unfurls over the elongated muzzles of these animals. They differ in that one has a wavy line representing a sort of mane, whereas the other has parallel lines suggesting its coat. Perhaps they represent a couple, male and female. Beneath the bellies of the larger 'crane-horses' are small quadrupeds facing in the opposite direction. Their bodies on slender hoofed legs are S-shaped, their rumps raised; their necks and leaf-shaped ears are long. This might be an image referring to the childhood of the sun god in the shape of a foal (p. 140). The voids between the figures are entirely filled with S-motifs, rosettes with triangular petals and circles.





Large painted vase, known as the 'vase of the bulls' from Numantia, province of Soria, Spain

About 250–150 BC
Terracotta with painted decoration in black
Height: 53 cm
Diameter: 57 cm
Soria, Museo Numantino

A band runs all the way around the upper part of the body of this large bi-conical vase, which is edged above and below by several lines. It contains two large images of bulls, drawn in an abstract manner. Both have the same form: a long, hourglass-shaped body with the two large extremities containing symbolic motifs. On the better-preserved animal, this consists of large giratory circular patterns, which are undoubtedly solar symbols (a triskelion is depicted nearby). The other animal is patterned with circles containing a cross in outline on a black background, suggesting sun-wheels. The bases of the bulls' long necks have geometric patterns across them; they then shrink down to a head with long pointed horns. This is shown full-face on the animal that is better preserved, and in profile on the other bull. The long tail is bent, in the first case, above the body and ends in a trefoil motif. In the other case, it arches downwards and ends in a square containing the lines of a cross, like nine squares of a chessboard.

The animal that is less well preserved is rather dark, whereas the other one is distinctly paler. Similarly, all the front and rear legs of the dark bull are clearly drawn, whereas they seem absent from the paler creature, where the base of the central part of the body only has a triangular protuberance, ending in a circle, perhaps a stylized penis. These two animals are surrounded by numerous crosses in circles, probably stars, connected by lines that might define constellations: thus, the triangle between the two bulls might correspond to the 'Summer Triangle', the boundary between the dark season and the bright season (p. 122). These are therefore a pair of divine incarnations of the heavenly Bull, perhaps corresponding to the pair *Lug*, 'the Bright One', and *Donn*, 'the Dark One'. In the bulls on this vase, we see the idea of the battle between the two mythical bulls of the Irish epic, the White and the Brown, a retelling of the alternation of the seasons.









Painted jug, 'the human horse', from Numantia, province of Soria, Spain

About 120–40 BC
Terracotta with black painted decoration
Height: 33 cm
Soria, Museo Numantino

On a trapezoid, vertical field, outlined on the four sides by rows of geometrical patterns, is represented a standing figure, its legs in profile, with prominent calves or cnemides (greaves). The bent arms are raised obliquely upwards in a suppliant gesture. The head is that of an animal, probably a horse, because the scroll that remains is more like those that adorn the shoulders and hips than a ram's horn. Therefore this appears to be a 'human horse', a composite representation of the deity who is the reverse of the human-headed horse of Celtic repertoire from the centre-west of Europe, but expresses the same idea. On the back and the other side of the vessel, a geometrical decoration surrounds quadrangular fields containing swastikas, thus confirming the solar nature of the whole.



Painted jug known as 'the bull mask', from Numantia, province of Soria, Spain

About 120–40 BC
Terracotta painted directly onto the reddish surface in black and white
Height: 18 cm
Soria, Museo Numantino

The silhouette of this head of a bull, seen full-face and depicted in a schematic fashion, was first painted in white and then finished with the black lines that define its outline and essential details. The immediate, spontaneous nature of the image gives a remarkable power of expression to this evocation of an animal, which is probably the Heavenly Bull of Celtic mythology, and probably identified with the constellation that still bears its name.

Vase painted with 'long-eared quadrupeds' (no. 9), well F78 of the Puy de la Poix, Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, France

About 200–150 BC
Terracotta painted over slip
Height: 26.5 cm
Clermont-Ferrand,
Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles

The body of the vase presents a set of three quadrupeds with a body in the form of an S-motif, slender legs ending in hooves, a thin elongated muzzle, fan-shaped tail and large leaf-shaped ears. They stand out in white relief against a hatched background. In the spirit of Celtic art, the animal represented subtly blends some realistic elements with other symbolic elements. This might be a representation of the sun-horse, or equally a grotesque animal.



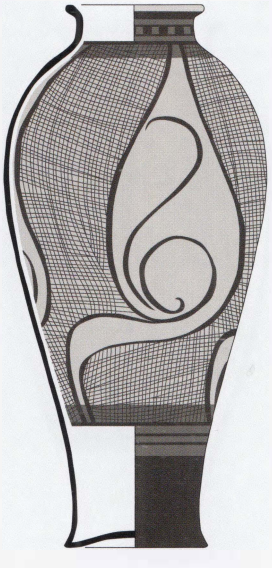




Vase painted with 'three leaves' (no. 10), well F78 of the Puy de la Poix, Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, France

About 200–150 BC
Terracotta painted over slip
Height: 33 cm
Clermont-Ferrand,
Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles

On the body of this slender vase, a set of three vertical designs combining a leaf with the S-motif and just a hint of a triskelion, are drawn in outline against diagonal or vertical cross-hatching. Thus the elegance of the whole carries a great degree of symbolism.



Vase painted with 'crane-headed horses' (no. 11), well F78 of the Puy de la Poix, Clermont-Ferrand, Puy-de-Dôme, France

About 200–150 BC
Terracotta painted over slip
Height: 29.5 cm
Clermont-Ferrand,
Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles

The body of this vase carries a set of three grotesque animals, crowned with a symmetrical composition of leaves and scrolls, topped by a triskelion, to suggest a mask against a background of diagonal or right-angled hatching. The S-shaped body is that of a horse, with a drooping leaf-shaped tail and a mane suggested by a wavy line. Yet the small round head with its long beak is that of a bird, probably a crane, associated with the heavenly bull and the number three in Celtic mythology. In contrast to this grotesque animal, a design recalling not only other painted pottery, but also contemporary coins, the pattern above its head continues the formula from earlier centuries of semi-abstract images with multiple readings, centred here on a triskelion.







'The three-fold crane' painted tazza on a moulded stem, from Numantia, province of Soria, Spain

About 120–40 BC
Terracotta painted in white and black
Diameter: 17 cm
Soria, Museo Numantino

Inside the bowl, in the form of a spherical cap, is a representation of a crane, over the centre of a three-fold motif, consisting of three segments of alternately black and white concentric circles, which could be interpreted as the wings and the tail of the bird, while also suggesting a triskelion. Around them is a circle formed of a chain of S-motifs. The white body of the crane consists of dots and concentric circles, the latter arranged in a line along the neck. So, several elements underline the solar nature of this image. A mythical episode, shown in the Gallo-Roman period on the 'Pillar of the Boatmen' in Paris, links three of these birds with the *Tarvos trigaranus*, the 'Bull with Three Cranes'.



Openwork phalera from Skryje, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting with rivets
Diameter: 13.7 cm
Křivoklát Fortress Collections

This circular phalera, fitted with a suspension system, is decorated with a strictly symmetrical openwork design. The solid parts are plant motifs, with the cut-out parts forming scrolled leaves and fan-shaped triangles, as found on most Celtic works with compass-drawn decoration. The round-headed rivets, decorated with a cross dividing them into alternatively smooth and chequered quarters, are partly functional. Their main role, however, is decorative, and their design might be a schematic allusion to the fundamental concept of the subdivision of space. The moulded cruciform suspension bar has ducks' heads on its arms. The head of its central rivet, larger than those on the disc, presents the same four-part decoration.

Carved head, found in 1944 outside the quadrangular enclosure of Mšecké Žehrovice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 180–150 BC
Carved limestone marl
Height: 22.4 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum



This head was discovered, broken into five pieces, in a secondary position in a ditch. It might have belonged to a statue or a bust, slightly smaller than life-size, from a place of worship inside the quadrangular sanctuary in one of its phases of occupation.

The flat face is almost triangular, with little deep relief. From the root of the nose spring protruding eyes, their outer corners extending and edged with fine moulding. Above them, the eyebrows form S-motifs, extending outwards into an upward curl. Thus the whole recalls the old motif of the leaf and scroll. And the same design has been used to represent the moustache. The ear is formed by a simplified version of the palmette, a single leaf amid a pair of scrolls. The hair is the characteristic bandeau type, with deeply incised curls crossing from one ear to the other, leaving the back of the head smooth, perhaps shaven. The neck wears a smooth tubular torque with large buffers.

Here we find, partly integrated into the face, most of the attributes of the principal masculine deity worshipped by the Celts.

Statuette of man carrying an instrument, *oppidum* of Stradonice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 4.8 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum



This figurine of a standing naked man is generally known as 'the *carnyx* player'. The curved object that he is holding in his right hand, resting on his shoulder, does indeed vaguely resemble a Celtic war trumpet. However, other interpretations have been suggested, for example an axe or a club, which might have been used for a sacrifice or as a symbolic attribute. If so, the nudity might suggest that this is the image of a hero, a sort of Celtic Hercules.





Head moulded perpendicularly on a flat iron stem (component of a chariot?) from around Křivoklát, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
on a flat iron stem with a hole in the end
Height: 2.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

An expressive head stands out in high relief from a rectangular base, complete with a triangular face, closed eyes and the characteristic hairstyle in a band from one ear to the other. The closed eyes might indicate the subterranean appearance of the deity represented. Surprisingly, the force of expression that emerges from this face, when reduced to its essential features, resembles that of some sculptures of the early Middle Ages.

Head originally forming the pommel of a pseudo-anthropomorphic sword handle, *oppidum* of Stradonice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 2.5 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The slanting almond eyes have eyebrows that extend to the temples, where they meet the ears, which are shaped from double scrolls encircling a residual palmette. The hair is formed of S-motifs in relief at the front, then flat triangular strands, which meet at the back to form a sort of plait or pigtail. Such characteristics, particularly the hairstyle, are found in other images belonging to the Celtic repertoire, as seen on the figure on the reverse of the Modruš coin (p. 139). This unusual hairstyle must have been a particular feature of the sun god. It finds an echo in the braids of the Irish *Fianna*, one of their distinctive features.





Small statuette of a horse or a dog from the settlement of Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 200–100 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 2.7 cm
Otrokovice, private collection

The horse, an embodiment of the sun god, is the most frequent animal subject in the Celtic repertoire, particularly on coins. Its statuettes are known to have existed since the early Iron Age (which spanned from the seventh to sixth centuries BC). If no suspension device is provided, they must have been used in domestic worship or as individual offerings. In this particular case, however, this object could also be a rendering of a dog.



Statuette of lying dog from the settlement of Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 200–100 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 2.1 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

The position of the animal in this figurine and the power of his alert expression recall those that adorn the edge of older ceremonial jugs, in particular the two examples from Basse-Yutz (p. 62). Evidence of the important role of the dog in Celtic mythology is provided by the story of the great Irish hero Cúchulainn, who killed a dog and from then on had to bear its name.

Small ring surrounding the silhouette of a figure; votive deposit from Ptení, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Diameter: 3.7 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum



This ring, a votive object or amulet, is one of a pair from the same source. It differs from the other example, mainly in the stem linking the elbows of the raised arms of the figure to the ring below. This might be the theme that is also found on the reverse-side image of certain coins from the region (p. 140). Another difference is the protuberances, which extend beyond the ring beneath the feet. These two, slightly different, rings might refer to the theme of the twin figures, widely illustrated in the Celtic repertoire.

Small head in high-relief from the settlement of Němčice, Moravia, Czech Republic

About 200–100 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Height: 1.8 cm
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum



Remarkably effective in its simplicity, this small oval head with its round eyes and its crescent-shaped mouth and moustache with turned-down corners was probably framed and fitted to a wooden support (a bucket or other vessel). The fan shape on the forehead suggests the Celtic variant of the palmette, known as a pelta, associated with the sun god. It is, however, the type of image, very frequent in art from the *oppida*, which holds a meaning that will probably remain impossible to decipher.



Statuette of a long-necked horse from the *oppidum* of Stradonice, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 3.3 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The suspension ring shows that the object would have been worn as a pendant. The long neck emphasizes the supernatural nature of the animal, an embodiment of the sun god. This curious distortion was already apparent, although less accentuated, in much older works and also on certain painted vases from the second century.



Statuette of a wild boar discovered by accident in Prague 6, Šárka, Bohemia, Czech Republic

About 150–50 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Length: 11.3 cm
Prague, Národní Muzeum

The tenons beneath the feet indicate that this statuette was originally set on a support: perhaps a military ensign, or a crest on a helmet, as in the case of one of the horsemen and one of the foot-soldiers on the plaque of the military procession of the Gundestrup cauldron (p. 169). The Celts' veneration of this animal and its important role in their mythological stories explain the frequency with which it appears.

Statue of a stag, from a well in the quadrangular enclosure in Fellbach-Schmiden, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

About 120–100 BC
Carved oak, with traces of paint
Height: 80 cm
Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg

This excellently carved statue in the round is one of the very rare testimonies to the quality of Celtic wood sculpture. Like the two ibexes from the same source, it belonged to a liturgical group in the sanctuary, probably a pair of stags standing either side of the tree of life, whose presence is shown by the two remaining leaves above the animal's muzzle. The distortion of the real proportions of the animal represented is in accordance with the non-descriptive spirit of Celtic art.



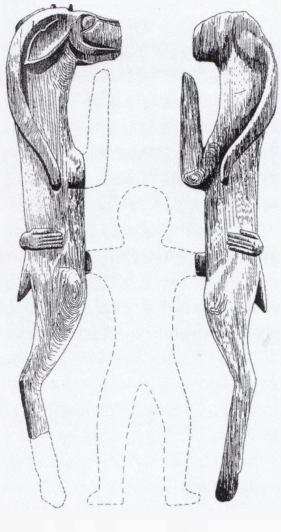


Pair of statues of ibexes facing each other from the well in the quadrangular enclosure in Fellbach-Schmiden, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

About 120–100 BC
Carved oak, with traces of paint
Height: 90 cm
Stuttgart, Landesmuseum Württemberg

This exceptional example of wood sculpture provides evidence of the existence of large cult effigies, along with groups that are comparable to those that appear on smaller objects. The sculpture is interesting because of its subject, a theme of remote eastern origin, which the Celts included in their repertoire from the second half of the fifth century BC onwards. This is the deity associated with the tree of life, represented between a pair of animals, which are either his accompanying monsters or stags, ibexes or other goat-like creatures (p. 63).

The figure, which once stood in the centre of the composition, was not of the same scale as the animals, at least if we can rely on the size and positioning of the forearms around the hindquarters of the ibexes. He was probably standing, crowned or surmounted with a symbolic image of the world tree, a palmette or a pair of leaves.



Military ensign or tip of a sceptre 'rider on a two-headed horse', burial site in Numantia, province of Soria, Spain

About 200–140 BC
Bronze lost-wax casting
Size: 11 × 8 × 2.5 cm
Soria, Museo Numantino

A horseman, probably helmeted, sits astride the junction of the forequarters of two horses facing in opposite directions, decorated with concentric circles. They stand not on legs, but on two human heads, represented by a face on each side. From the front of the horse busts emerge rectangular shapes, similar to the raised leg of the animal, which bear little human heads on their upper corners. These heads thus look out into the other two directions. Rather than being an image of trophies of severed heads, this is a way of representing the 'image of the world', where the protective gaze of the god is supposed to cover all the surrounding space.



'Horseman' fibula, provenance uncertain from the region of Palencia, Castile-Leon, Spain

About 180–140 BC
Cast bronze
Width: 9.4 cm
Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional

This example, which is exceptional both in its size and quality of workmanship, is an excellent illustration of a series of fibulae from the Hispanic Celts, amounting to some hundred and fifty items. This high number suggests that these jewels were perhaps symbols of the elite cavalrymen, the *equites*, who fought under the aegis of the sun god and his incarnation, the horse. The head represented under this horse's muzzle is therefore probably not a severed head trophy; it is more likely to be a symbol of the divine nature of the animal, as are the concentric circles, very ancient solar or astral symbols, visible on its neck and haunch. But they might also be an allegorical representation of the victory of the forces of light and life over those of darkness and death, close in meaning to that of the Gallo-Roman columns known as 'anguipeds'.





Small phalera from the deposit in Manerbio sul Mella, province of Brescia, Italy

About 100–50 BC
Repoussé silver worked, hammered and stamped
Diameter: 10 cm
Brescia, Museo della città, Santa Giulia

This little phalera comes from one of the two saddle-horse harnesses; each of them has six of this size, along with another phalera, which is much larger. The arrangement of the rivets around these phalerae distinguishes them from those with three rivets, which form the pinnacle of an irregular triangle and cover the junction of the straps on the horse's haunch (p. 169).

Eleven identical heads, made with the same stamp used for the main phalera, are arranged radially on the circumference, around a central boss surrounded by a moulding. The weights of the phalerae vary significantly; they are in multiples of the average weight of a silver coin of the eastern Celts, equivalent to a tetradrachm. Originally worth four drachmae, about 16 grams, at the time in question, coins of this weight had a value of six drachmae. The weights of the phalerae, therefore, suggest that coins of this type were used as the raw material for their manufacture and, perhaps, derive from an origin in the regions where they circulated, the south-east of the Alps or the neighbouring areas.



Large phalera from the deposit in Manerbio sul Mella, province of Brescia, Italy

About 100–50 BC
Repoussé silver worked, hammered and stamped
Diameter: 19 cm
Brescia, Museo della città, Santa Giulia

The main item from one of the two sets of saddle-horse harnesses, similar to those of the horsemen on the Gundestrup basin (p. 169). Around the circumference of this large phalera, in a radial arrangement between two mouldings, are eighteen heads seen full-face. Their almond-shaped eyes are surrounded by a line of beads, the nose is straight, the mouth perhaps sports a moustache, the hair has a central parting either side of a small three-leaved palmette. The central motif is a triskelion formed by assembling three S-motifs, in angular relief with a hollow surround. This is probably a repetitive representation of the deity related to this symbol rather than a trophy of severed heads.

As a solar symbol, the triskelion often accompanies the horse, especially in the images on the reverse of coins; it is not therefore surprising to find it associated with the deity on parts of a horse's ceremonial harness. Horses with decorated sets of phalerae are among the diplomatic gifts mentioned in the texts dealing with relations between Rome and the Celts to the south-east of the Alps in the second quarter of the second century BC.

Narrative plates from a ritual basin, discovered by accident in 1891, dismantled and placed in a peat-bog in Gundestrup, Denmark

About 120–80 BC
Repoussé silver, chased and stamped on the front, enhanced with gilt (some backgrounds and details of the outside plates)
Reconstituted diameter: 69 cm
Outer plates: 24.5 × 26 cm
Inner plates: 40–43 × 20 cm
Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet



Originally this large basin, probably wooden, was clad on the outside with eight plates – four busts of masculine deities with their arms raised in a supplicant gesture and four others of goddesses (one of them is missing), with their arms crossed or placed on their breasts. These figures were probably arranged in pairs, symbolically corresponding to the four points of the compass, the centre being the disc-shaped relief of the bull in the bottom of the cauldron. The whole formed an' image of the world'. Each of these figures is distinctive in its hair, beard and the shape of its torque (or the absence of a torque), and also through its secondary motifs: people, animals, supporters, accessories or allusions to a myth. Thus we find a number of features present in Celtic works from different periods: the characteristic head band, the palmette under the chin and other significant details.

Three of the five plaques of the inner panels (a number perhaps referring to the sacred subdivision of space) have a deity as their central subject: the bust of the 'god with the wheel', generally identified as *Taranis*; probably one of the appearances of the sun god, that of a goddess as 'mistress of the animals', probably the Great Goddess, known under different names or epithets. The third plate represents *Cernunnos*, 'the Horned One' with a stag's antlers, seated cross-legged, brandishing a torque in his right hand and a snake with a ram's head in his left. He is surrounded by animals: stag, wild boar, ibexes, lions and even a large fish being ridden by a little figure.

On the two other inner plates are scenes. On one other inner plate, we see three large bulls, each with a figure standing in front of it, pointing a sword at its throat. Above and below are three running quadrupeds, which might be dogs or wolves. It is generally considered that this image shows preparations for a sacrificial slaughter, linked perhaps with the central medallion.

On the last plate, there is a sort of military procession: above, four horsemen with different crests on their helmets, preceded by a ram-headed snake, are marching to the right; below, shown horizontally, a schematic tree with bare roots, probably the world tree; below that, six foot-soldiers, followed by a man with a crest in the shape of a wild boar (perhaps an officer) and three *carnyx* blowers marching towards the left. This procession of foot-soldiers is marching towards a large figure, who forms a link between the two bands and is dangling a small figure head first over a vessel, perhaps a wooden vat. Rather than a sacrifice by drowning, this might show the transition into the Other World, after immersion in the water of immortality.







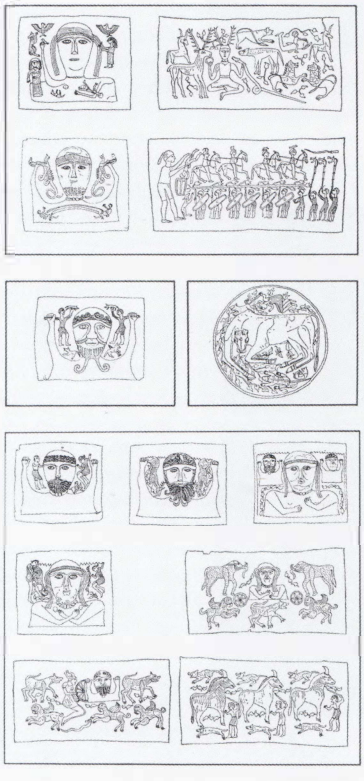


It is interesting to note the many resemblances between the subject of this plate and the Hallstatt scabbard (pp. 76–77): the four differentiated horsemen, the three-fold number of foot-soldiers and other details common to these two exceptional works narrating a story, which are separated by some three centuries.

The Gundestrup basin was obviously an important ceremonial vessel, designed to be used in a shared ritual. Its manufacture is foreign to Celtic art. The silversmiths who made it – at least four, judging by the sets of stamps used – were trained in that area of south-eastern Europe that is known as the Thraco-Getian region of present-day Bulgaria and Romania. It therefore seems to be a work made to order in a workshop outside the Celtic world, perhaps even as a diplomatic gift, or created by craftsmen who had moved for unknown reasons from the area where they worked. The design and contents of the images are, however, truly Celtic, as is clearly shown by the many references to the repertoire and themes illustrated from the second half of the fifth century BC onwards. Their equivalent is not found in the Thraco-Getian works of the Istro-Pontic regions. The apparent legibility of the subjects has given rise to many different interpretations. However, none of these appears to be sufficiently well argued as to go beyond the realms of mere speculation.











Two pairs of oblong items from the deposit in Manerbio sul Mella, province of Brescia, Italy

About 100–50 BC
Repoussé silver
Width: 3–3.5 cm
Brescia, Museo della città, Santa Giulia

The function of the two pairs of oblong items, curved and with a channel-shaped profile, remains difficult to determine, and could perhaps be a side trim off a head harness or a saddle.

Their decoration is well-known from the Celtic iconography of the fifth century BC onwards: the moustached head of the deity, perhaps wearing a helmet, a buffer torque around his neck, framed between his symbolic attribute, a pair of S-motifs. This head is placed above a schematic ram's mask. The meaning of the curved chevrons between the ram's horns and the torque of the deity is not obvious, but they might hint at the snake's body, sometimes associated with the ram's head in Celtic iconography.



Coin attributed to the Armorican Osismii from the modern Finistère region (LT 6555), France

About 100–50 BC
Struck base alloy of copper and silver
Diameter: 2.3 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles

On the obverse appears a head in profile, with an exuberant hairstyle of leaves, crowned by an effigy of a wild boar on a horizontal support, carrying a dotted semicircle (a symbolic image of the rising or setting sun). Towards the back, a beaded S-motif includes a small head in profile. It extends into the return of another S-motif that ends in a trefoil palmette. In front of the largest head is a larger S-motif, also beaded, which encircles two small profiles facing the rim of the coin.

On the reverse side, a human-headed horse appears to be prancing above a wild boar, which is identical to that on the obverse, and a bird with a hawk's beak, displaying wings open above its back and talons against the front leg of the boar. A lyre of tendrils with a three-leaved palmette in its centre frames the top of the human-headed horse. Palmettes also flourish at the extremities, both of which loop back around a little head in profile. S-motifs grow out of their hair, probably indicating their divine nature. This is therefore a variant of the twin heads theme.





Stater of the Parisii (LT 7782), France

About 120–80 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 2 cm
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles

On the obverse of this stater, the head and leaf-patterned hair are represented in profile.

On the reverse side, a horse rendered in rounded forms is shown above a rosette of dots. Above the animal's back, the triangular net with dots in its fifteen diamond-shaped openings is a design of uncertain meaning.

This is one of the most effective pairs of images from Gaulish coins, particularly suggestive, even to the unpractised eye.



Obverse of a stater (LT 7790) and reverse of a quarter stater (LT D19) of the Parisii

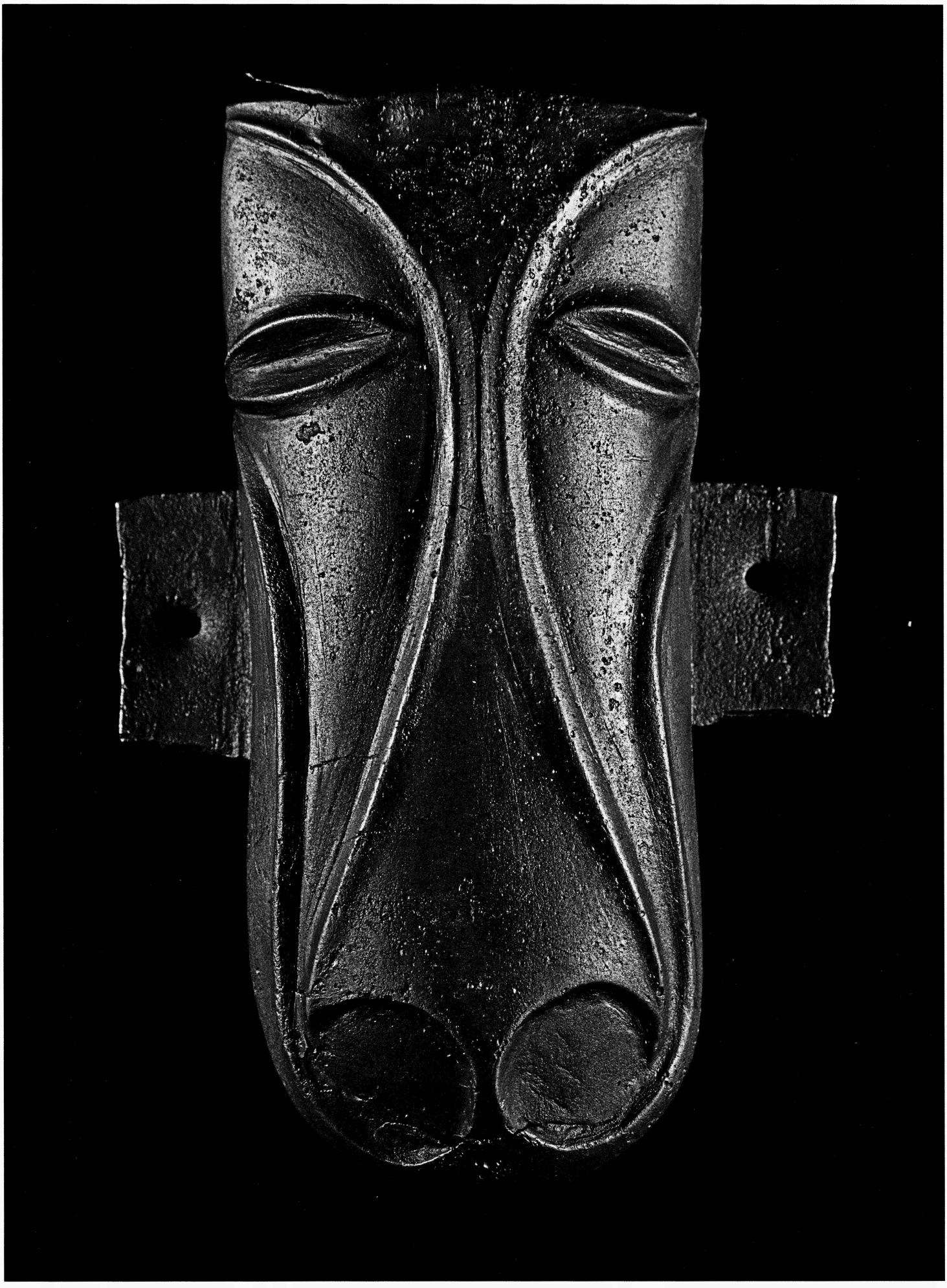
About 120–80 BC
Struck gold
Diameter: 2.19 cm (stater);
1.32 cm (quarter stater)
Brno, Moravské Zemské Muzeum

The obverse of the stater shows a combination of a human profile and a front view of the head, framed by S-motifs in a lyre arrangement, with hair in S-motifs and leaves, two themes that are found on the fitments of ceremonial jugs (p. 59). This suggests a cubist approach before the movement of cubism even existed. Its purpose was probably to make it easier to identify the figure from visible attributes.

On the reverse of the quarter stater there is a horse with globular articulations placed above a rosette of dots. Above that element appears the 'net', characteristic of coins minted by the Parisii in its reticulated triangular design with curved sides, and each diamond-shaped subdivision, which has a dot in it. However, uncertainty surrounds its origin and meaning.

VI

THE ART OF THE BRITISH ISLES



Applied metal decoration, from a wooden bucket, discovered before 1845 near Stanwick Camp, Yorkshire, Great Britain, about 10 BC–40 AD See p. 193

The roots of Celtic settlement in Great Britain probably go back to the arrival of groups of the Bell Beaker culture in the second half of the third millennium BC, as do those in the rest of central and western Europe. However, there were certainly later arrivals who grafted onto a population that was without question already largely Celtic or Celticized.

The oldest record of the two great islands on the western side of Europe, Hibernia and Albion – modern Ireland and Great Britain, called *Eriu* and *Albu* in old Irish – is said to be in the tale by a Carthaginian sailor called Himilcon. Around the end of the sixth century or early in the next century, he sailed up the Atlantic coast of the Iberian peninsula, confronted the dangers of the sea fogs, haunted by sea monsters, and after four months, arrived at the islands he called the Oestrymnides, probably off the south coast of Armorica, whose inhabitants traded with the British Isles.

About two centuries later, when Alexander the Great had invaded as far as the Indus, Pytheas, a Greek from Marseille, undertook a voyage, which is said to have taken him far beyond the Columns of Hercules (Gibraltar), as far as the legendary countries of the North, which were good sources of amber and tin. He recounted the tale of his voyage as far as the shores of the Baltic and perhaps even Iceland (Thule), in a lost work entitled *On the Ocean*. Greek and Latin writers cite the story, often with incredulity. Pytheas identified the peninsula of Ostimioi, probably the Osismii, which in the time of Caesar covered the area that is now the Finistère region. Its name meant 'the furthest away' in Celtic, in other words the 'people at the end of the world'. After sailing past the western shore of this large peninsula, Kabaïon cape (pointe du Raz or de Penmarc'h) and the island of Ouxisama (Ouessant), he sailed towards the great islands that he was the first to name as *prettanikai* (British), and sailed along the coasts of Great Britain. He travelled along the south coast, westwards, from Belerion cape (the Lizard?) and then turned north, between Great Britain and Ireland, as far as the Orkas islands (Orkney Islands). On the return, he sailed down the east coast, along a promontory he called Kantion (Kent), almost opposite the mouth of a Continental river (the Rhine), where the coast abruptly changed direction and turned westwards in the direction of the tin deposits of Cornwall near the cape Belerion, which he had already identified. The names of places and of peoples mentioned in these two accounts confirm beyond any possible doubt the ancient roots of the Celtic origin of settlement in the British Isles.

However, it was not until Caesar's expeditions, in 55 and 54 BC, that the islands were finally recorded. He describes the local people as follows: 'The interior of Britain is peopled with inhabitants who, according to oral tradition, call themselves natives of the soil; on the coast live the peoples who came from Belgium to pillage and make war (almost all of them bear the names of the cities from where they came): these men, after the war, stayed in the region and became colonists' (*Gallic Wars*, V, 12).

Clearly, the natives are descendants from the Celtic or Celticized people, encountered by Himilcon and Pytheas, while the bellicose immigrants from Belgium came from incursions into the British Isles by warrior groups, who criss-crossed Europe in the first decades of the third century BC. After they returned from the great expedition in 280 BC, these warrior groups settled in various regions, including the north of what is now France and its surrounding areas.

Celtic art does not appear to have been emulated in the British Isles in the fifth century, except perhaps in the stamped pottery from Armorica, an ornamental technique diffused from northern Italy. This was despite early contact between the islands and the Continent, based mainly on the tin trade, but also encouraged by the proximity of the Thames estuary. A few influences from the Continent, most likely from the Champagne region, reached the Thames estuary, and even upstream of London, in the middle of the fifth century, but do not appear to have brought any significant elements of Celtic art.

The Celto-Italic fashion of the following century has only a few, probably late echoes. Unfortunately, as is often the case in the British Isles, the objects in question are difficult to date, because it is rare to find them in contexts that can be firmly dated.

The currently known works from the British Isles show the significant role played by the arrival of groups led by the military elite in the formation of local art, which brought Celtic art to its high level of advancement.

Indeed, the works that are most representative of early British art, for example the shield from the river Witham or some Irish scabbards, are close to the high-status weapons that warriors took on their travels during the first half of the third century BC, mainly from the area around the Danube, and then spreading throughout Europe. Other characteristic objects – particularly sorts of fibula, torque and bracelet – confirm that the islands rapidly assimilated this wave of novelties.

The themes seen on the objects brought by the newcomers were already familiar in the British Isles. The fact that they were celebrated in pictures fully corresponded with the fondness of the local elite for showing off their esoteric knowledge.

In this way, the language of images created on the Continent was a great success in the islands and had after-effects, which extended the principles and even developed some aspects. This was particularly true for designs created with compasses, which achieved an unparalleled complexity and richness on British mirrors. We can see the people's fascination for the interlinking of flowing lines, for curves and reverse curves derived from the adaptation of the foliate scroll and other plant motifs.

There is here a set of subtle allusions, where abstract and representational art meet: a few alterations convert a palmette into a sketch of a face or a mask, which wavers between being a man and an animal. Part of a foliate scroll converts into a silhouette of an imaginary bird. The image is a symbol of an enchanted forest, haunted by friendly or malevolent monsters, by fleeting indefinable shadows, by strange beings, owing as much to the observer's whims and sense of humour as to their creator's imagination. The horse's head mask from Stanwick (p. 193) illustrates the complete mastery of this virtuoso language of multi-purpose images, whose only Continental equivalents after the third century are on coins.

The Roman conquest of Great Britain, which began under the Emperor Claudius in the year 43, was never completed, and Ireland retained its independence. Even in regions subjected to Roman rule, traditional art forms were not abandoned. This can be seen in works such as the Paillart harness-plate, found in a Gallo-Roman site in the north of France, indicating its late date. The plate combines a skilful and rigorous design with compasses, with the use of coloured *champlevé* enamel, in red and yellow in this case, but blue also appeared on other objects.

The special meaning of red has already been suggested in relation to coral. It is possible that other colours also held a meaning that went beyond the purely decorative. The mastery of enamelling by Celtic craftsmen was so renowned that Philostratus of Lemnos, a Greek sophist in the imperial period, describes it when discussing white, yellow, black and red: 'It is said that the barbarians who live next to the Ocean know how to pour these colours onto red-hot copper where they fuse together, take on the consistency of stone and preserve the designs that have been drawn there' (*Images*, I, 28).

Although it was influenced by ornamental Roman art, the later work of the islands retained the originality of Celtic art long after it had died out on the Continent. So in later years, the work inspired the imagery of Christian art at the dawn of the Middle Ages that the missionaries from Ireland and Scotland would take to the Continent.

Ceremonial shield, found in 1826 on the bed of the river Witham, below Lincoln, Lincolnshire, Great Britain

About 280–240 BC
Beaten bronze, perhaps lost-wax casting, repoussé work, chased and engraved, central boss decorated with three biconvex and two hemispherical coral cabochons
Height: 125 cm
London, British Museum



The outside covering of this shield retains the imprint of an earlier version, where the applied decoration took the form of a wild boar with elongated legs. Its fixing holes and silhouette are still visible. A spine running lengthways down the middle with a small hemispherical central boss and discs at both ends replaced the first decoration.

The discs have a rosette with seven petals in the middle and an undulating moulding around the outside, forming a loop encircling leaves at the ends. The whole suggests a grotesque mask with the leaves creating the appearance of the eyes and eyebrows.

The flat internal ring inside this moulding is decorated with line drawings: pairs of S-motifs joined by palmettes, and scrolls embellished with semi-palmettes. One scroll is shaped like a bird's head with a crest and the curved beak of a hawk. Where the disc-like ornaments meet the moulding, double palmettes facing each other are arranged in a relief form of an animal's head: a pair of cabochons, the metal equivalent of the three-fold coral pattern in the central boss, suggest its eyes, and palmettes suggest its ears. In light relief, the S-motif marking the beginning of a foliate scroll extends the muzzle of this animal with plant-like features.

On the central boss, pairs of large peltas, joined by their stalks and linked horizontally to the main axis, suggest masks with large eyes and end in pairs of leaves. These are joined to one of the pairs of peltas by a hint of a triskelion, separated from the other by a palmette.

This work is of exceptional quality and is made even more unusual by designs borrowed from the Continent, but it already shows some features specific to the art of the British Isles.



Metal covering from a ceremonial shield made of organic material, found in 1857 on the bed of the Thames in Battersea, London, Great Britain

About 180–120 BC
Beaten bronze,
repoussé work inlaid with red enamel
Height: 84.5 cm
London, British Museum

This well-preserved small shield for ceremonial or votive use has a smooth surface with metal adornments fixed by three circular rivets decorated in relief. Medallions inlaid with red enamel are arranged in the middle, along and at right angles to the main axis, and around the edge of the three metal adornments. They are held in place by rivets fixed in their centres. They are decorated by angular swastikas, which all turn in the same direction, breaking the rigorous symmetry of the whole. The central medallion is bigger than the others. There are four medallions in the upper and lower decorations, and four pairs within the central medallion.

A relief suggesting a caricature of a face creates a visual link between the central and the other medallions. In this relief design, four small enamel medallions are set in the scrolls of a pelta and in a pair of S-motifs on both sides. The central residual leaf of a palmette is placed on the top of the pelta, flanked by the heads of the rivets fixed in the medallions. This part also suggests another mask, where a leaf forms the nose and the heads of the rivets form the eyes. This is perhaps the most explicit of the many designs suggesting faces that appear on the object.

Such images are also apparent on the central decoration, where the four pairs of coloured medallions appear to be eyes belonging to the faces. The four-fold design is based on two horizontal peltas, which form the starting point for S-motifs tracing a loop, touching the vertical axis, and returning to form a hint of a triskelion. This four-part design, with a major axis and a centre, is most likely inspired by the Celtic concept of space: the world image. The design on the two secondary metal decorations is different: there are two pairs of S-motifs, interlinked to form a lyre. Coloured medallions mark the place at which they join. The sophisticated design and workmanship of this elegant work belong to a fully developed British style, which prevailed between the original appearances of Celtic art in the third century BC and the period preceding the Roman conquest.

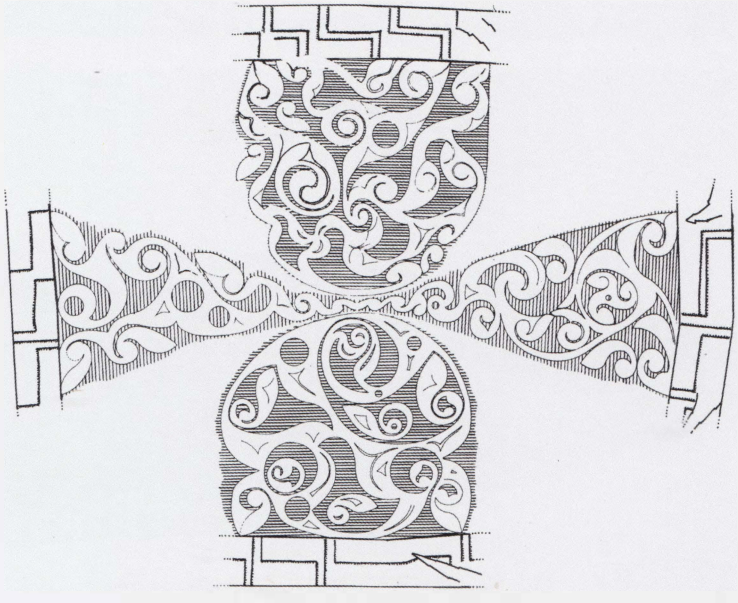
Sword scabbard, found in a peat-bog in Lisnacrogher, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

About 250–150 BC
Beaten bronze, engraved and embossed
Overall length: 55 cm
London, British Museum

The construction method and the type of ornamentation on this scabbard suggest that it is the result of a local reworking of Continental designs. Some features are rather archaic, particularly the choice of bronze for the plaque on the front and the decoration along its length, on both sides of a central moulding. These features are found on examples of the Celto-Italic mainstream in the second half of the fourth century BC and the chape's form would appear to belong to the scabbards of the next century. The decoration, derived from the same prototype as the Filottrano scabbard (p. 94) – a chain of palmettes joined by large S-motifs – displays characteristics connecting it to the birth of a British style, and to works such as the ceremonial shield from the river Witham (p. 182). The later development of this style can be traced to the Broighter torque (p. 187) and other characteristic Irish art objects.







Carved stele from Turoe (current location), formerly near the fort of Feewore, County Galway, Ireland

About 120–20 BC
Solid block of granite carved in bas-relief
Height above the current
level of the ground: 120 cm
Overall height: 168 cm

The base of the rounded top of this oval section pillar is bordered with an engraved design like brickwork with vertical joints. Appearing at first glance like an intertwined decoration covering the upper part of the object, the adornment is in fact divided into four panels, suggesting the function of an *omphalos* in this instance (pp. 81 and 104).

Two narrow triangular panels, connected by a wavy line, appear to emulate the sun's daily trajectory, from sunrise to sunset; and two wider semicircles on the upper part represent north and south. The decorations on the panels are clearly differentiated and show interlinked or juxtaposed triskelions, S-motifs, leaves and peltas, in the characteristic British style. This collection of juxtaposed symbols might be a schematic representation of the vault of heaven.

Bone slips, part of several thousand similar objects found from 1863 to 1943 on the megalithic site at Lough Crew, mainly from Cairn H, County Meath, Ireland

About 50 BC–50 AD
Animal ribs engraved with compasses
Length: 13 cm
Dublin, National Museum of Ireland

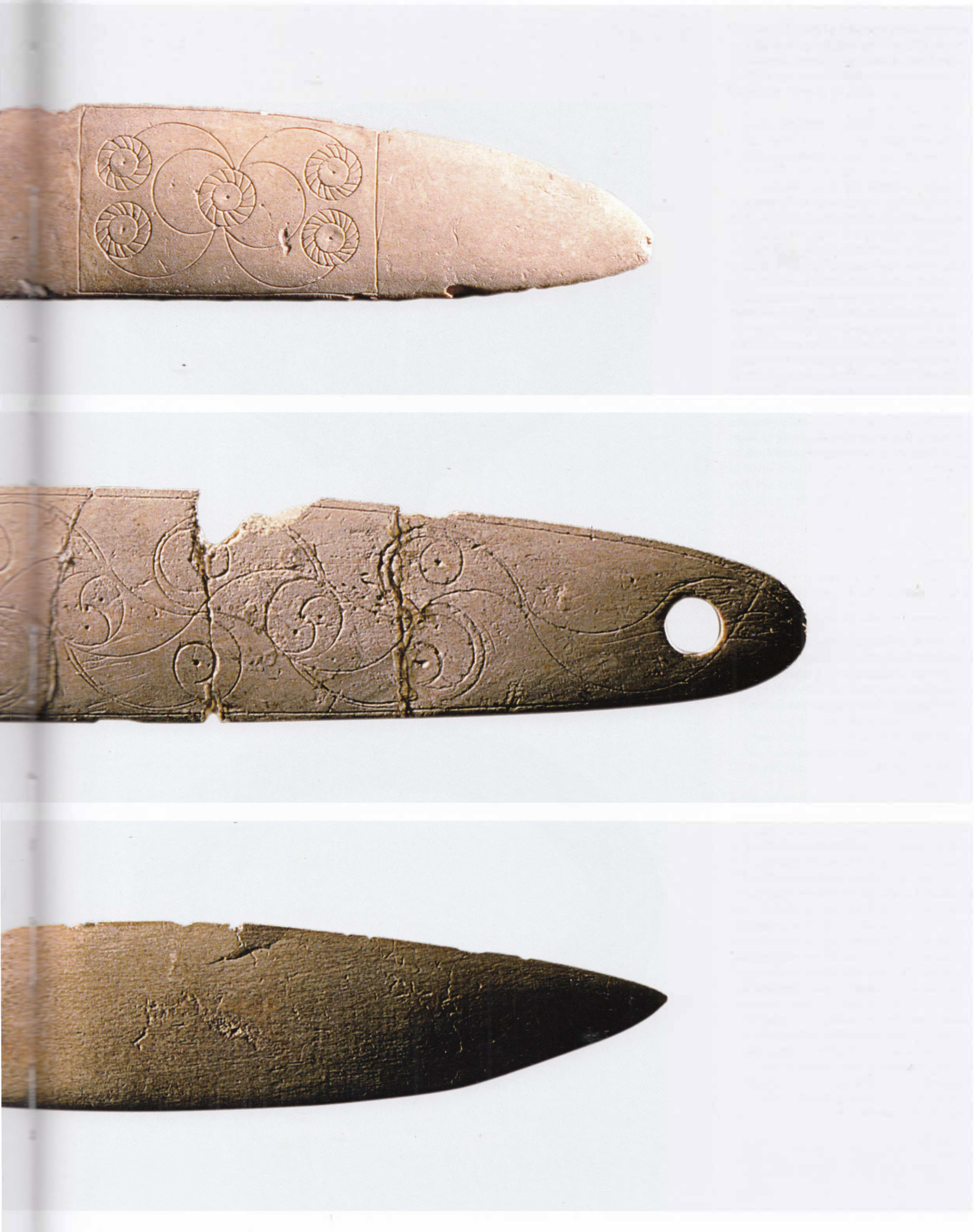
The engraved bone slips from Lough Crew are a remarkable example of the variety of decorations with compasses from British art at its height. These three examples, selected from more than a hundred decorated items, show different types of design: circles arranged symmetrically around an axis; three circles and two semicircles on a dotted ground rotating in symmetry around a central point; intertwined curves and circles that recall the interlacing of foliate scrolls. A spiralling motif of two intertwined leaves on the middle axis is noteworthy.

The Lough Crew bone slips have been interpreted as rough sketches, used in the ornamentation of metal objects. The context of their discovery – a megalithic site and holy place – along with their finish and shape, similar to that of a divination tool in an Austrian warrior grave, suggest that they were supernatural offerings. In this case, the designs with compasses reflect the belief in the sacred nature of numbers and their relationships, expressed in geometric formulas. Indeed, some classical writers compared the Druids' science in this field to that of Pythagoras.









Torque with fused buffers from Knock (formerly erroneously said to be from Clonmacnoise), County Roscommon, Ireland

About 320–260 BC
Repoussé work covered in gold leaf
Diameter: 13 cm
Dublin, National Museum of Ireland

This object, probably imported from the Continent, reflects the impact of Celto-Italic fashion on transalpine culture. Indeed, on the back a lover's knot can be seen, a symbol of magical virtues and the equivalent of the sailors' reef knot still used today. It was borrowed in the second half of the fourth century BC from the Italiot goldsmiths, and widely used on necklaces and bracelets, and then became fashionable among the Transalpine Celts, perhaps because it expressed the inseparable union of two opposing principles. An imitation of the undulating decoration in repoussé work, which on the originals was worked in filigree, provides evidence of this Celto-Italic pedigree, as does the early date of the object. This torque is currently the oldest object from the La Tène culture that has been identified on Irish soil.



Torque with large rings at the ends, discovered by chance in 1950 with a bracelet and a fragment of another torque, at Ken Hill in Snettisham, Norfolk, Great Britain

About 100–10 BC
Lost-wax casting and twisted gold
Diameter: 20 cm
London, British Museum

The type of torque with twisted band and ring ends is known to have been in use on the Continent mainly in the first half of the third century BC. It is, up until now, the best-represented form among the British Celts, particularly the powerful Iceni from the east midlands. This example has a solid band made from eight intertwined twisted strands, soldered into the hollow rings at the ends.

The relief decoration on the ends, and on the sleeve that covers the join to the band, is based on a collection of three-fold elements, in particular triangles with convex or concave curved sides. The insides are covered with groups of parallel triple lines, arranged in a pattern known as 'basketry'. From some angles, concentric circles suggest faces. Small hemispherical bosses include groups of three dots, emphasizing the three-fold principle of the whole.





Twisted torque with rings at the ends, from the deposit of sixty-three gold torques discovered in 1990 at Ken Hill in Snettisham, Norfolk, Great Britain

About 150–50 BC
Lost-wax casting and engraved gold
Diameter: 21 cm
London, British Museum

This torque illustrates the original adaptation on this type of jewellery of forms derived from the Continent into versions of the palmette in the first decades of the third century BC. This is probably locally produced work: four caricature faces, with warts on their noses formed by the residual central leaf of the palmette, and eyes formed by the scrolls that surround the palmette, are arranged in facing pairs on the ring at the end of the connecting piece. This is an original version of the twin heads theme, designed and produced with remarkable mastery. The influence exercised by the Continental culture in the first half of the third century BC is clearly perceptible, especially in the detail of the sort of wart on the mask's nose, a characteristic feature of works directly linked to the mobile military elite that crossed Europe around 280 BC (pp. 112, 113, 116, 119, 131).



Tubular torque from the votive deposit of gold objects in Broighter, County Derry, Northern Ireland

About 40 BC–10 AD
Repoussé work covered in gold leaf, chased and engraved with compasses
Diameter: 13 cm
Dublin, National Museum of Ireland

Although this torque can be compared with British or Continental works, it is an original creation and one of the oldest examples of a specifically Irish style, which would become fully established in the following centuries. The decoration on the two halves is identical: the adaptation of a set of two S-motifs with ends that have been embellished with scrolls and triangular forms. The contours of the lines, swelling out into biconvex bosses, are characteristic of the art of the British Isles. The decoration in this well-defined relief stands out from a finely hatched ground. All of the decoration is based on an outline drawn with compasses, brilliantly transferred to the curved, rounded surface of the jewellery.

Bell from a trumpet from Loughnashade, Navan Fort, County Armagh, Northern Ireland

About 240–160 BC
Sheet bronze repoussé work
Diameter: 19 cm
Dublin, National Museum of Ireland



The outer ring of the bell from this musical instrument was found towards the end of the eighteenth century with three others, now lost, in a peat-bog in what had been a lake, at the foot of the royal site of Emain Macha. Its decoration clearly derives from Continental re-readings of friezes of palmettes, framed by foliate scrolls from the Celto-Italic mainstream. This, however, was produced in the British Isles, with a design close to those on engraved Irish scabbards. The overall design is rigorously symmetrical, arranging along two perpendicular axes. One of them crosses the centre of motifs derived from peltas, connected to scrolls by interlinking triangular shapes coming from foliate scrolls. The other axis crosses simpler peltas, framed by facing S-motifs forming a lyre. The hemispherical bosses at the end of the scrolls and the stalks, which follow the two axes, suggest fleeting glimpses of faces.

Mirror discovered in 1909 in Desborough, Northamptonshire, Great Britain

About 50 BC–40 AD
Lost-wax bronze casting (handle), beaten and engraved with compasses and free-hand
Diameter: 26 cm
Height: 35 cm
London, British Museum



The richly engraved back of this mirror is an excellent example of one of the major success stories of British Celtic art at its height. The decoration is based on the contrast between shiny and matt surfaces, covered with short parallel lines arranged in a 'basketry' pattern. This contrast makes the light shimmer in the same way as a valuable fabric. Strictly adhering to the principle of symmetry around a central axis, the design is derived from sets of palmettes, which open up into circles, S-motifs and triangles with curved sides across the surface.

The tension between the ground and the decoration perpetuates the random movement of the eye, preventing the rigorous organization from being appreciated as a whole. This almost magical effect suggests that the object did not have an exclusively decorative function. Indeed, mirrors played an important role during the divinations of various ancient societies. Among the Continental Celts, they appeared in princely female graves, for example the Reinheim burial (p. 60), where a mirror is combined with a ceremonial drinking set.





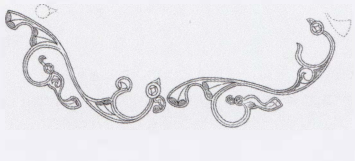
Applied metal decoration for the centre of a shield, found before 1858 on the bed of the Thames near Wandsworth, London, Great Britain

About 180–120 BC
Beaten bronze, repoussé and engraved work
Diameter: 36.5 cm
London, British Museum

This disc-shaped, metal adornment with a central boss belongs to a shield of the type that includes the Battersea example (p. 181). The organization of the relief and engraved decoration is, however, different, because its design is based on a rotation around a central point. This type of symmetry was widely used on the Continent from the fourth century BC onwards and introduced a dynamic element into the designs.

The relief pattern is based on a large S-motif, which ends in a bird's head with a hawk's beak. A sort of crest, formed by two large leaves, starts behind this head. This is extended by a large scroll, which divides into leaves inside it and at the end. The same type of scroll appears at the end of the S-motif opposite the head. The design is completed by two secondary motifs, also derived from plants: one of them, a sort of double leaf, runs forwards above the bird's head; and the other, joined to the end-scroll of the S-motif, suggests a beak.

Other engraved designs, similar to those on the Continent that derive from adaptations of plant motifs from the Celto-Italic mainstream, decorate the inside of most of the leaf-like motifs. The engraved frieze around the central boss is a variant of the design in relief: a suggestion of two monsters whose bodies trace an S-motif, with, at one end, a head with a hawk's beak crowned by a crest and, at the other, a suggestion of a simpler bird's head with a triangular beak. The whole is therefore nothing but a cleverly designed, coded version of the symbolic pair of monsters, frequently found in warrior imagery on the Continent.



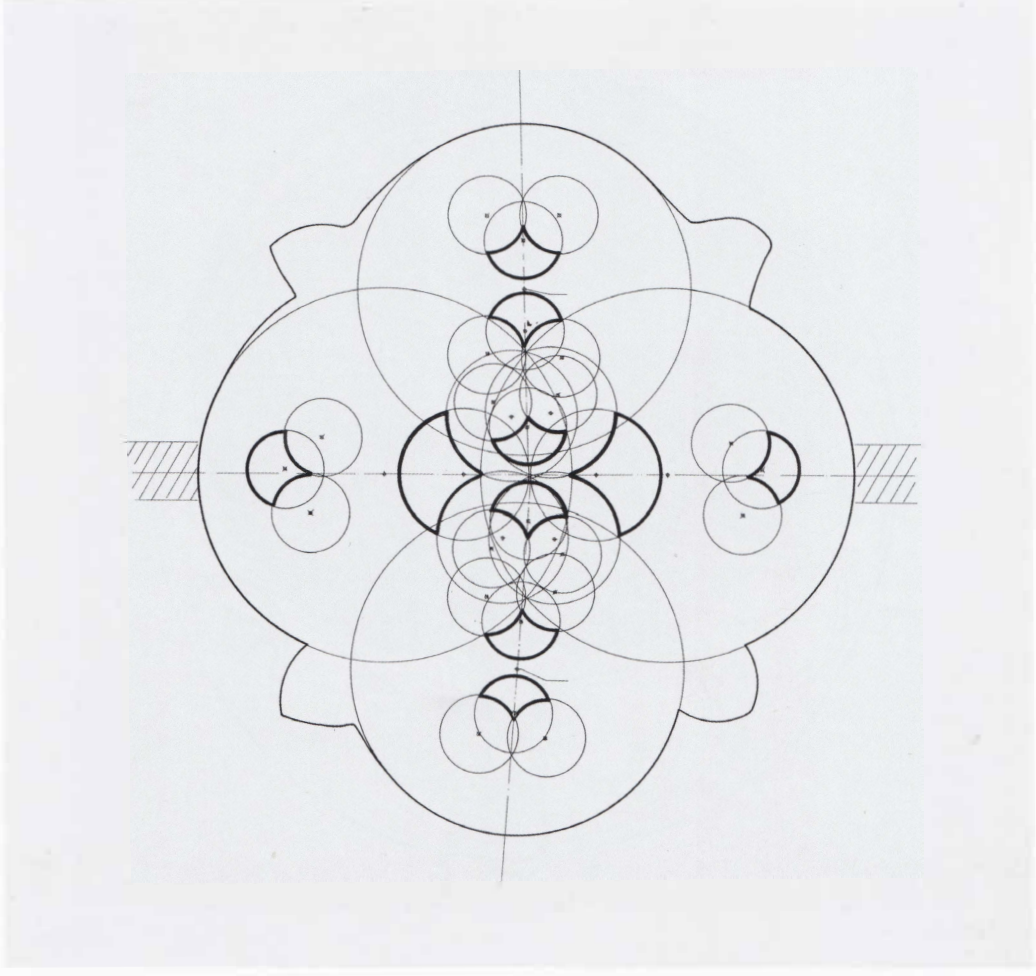
Openworked, enamelled harness plate, isolated find in Paillart, Oise, France

About 10–60 AD
Bronze lost-wax casting,
hot enamelled in red and yellow,
engraved with compasses and free-hand
Dimensions: 9.8 × 10.5 cm
Breteuil, Musée Archéologique
de la Région de Breteuil

The shape of the object and its adornment have been designed with compasses, from circles of three different diameters: a large circle, a medium-sized circle with a radius measuring a third of the large one and a small circle with a radius that is a quarter of the large circle.

In addition, circles in variable sizes have been used for details of the engraved decoration. The central points and the preparatory lines, which would have been incised using the compasses and reworked a few times free-hand, are clearly identifiable. The object displays the clear use of adjustable compasses. This shows excellent workmanship, the result of a painstaking and skilful preparation.









Wooden bucket with metal decorations from cremation grave Y, explored before 1890 in Aylesford, Kent, Great Britain

About 60–10 BC
Lost-wax bronze casting (fixing points) and sheet-metal repoussé work; wooden staves probably of yew
Diameter: 26.5 cm
London, British Museum

This bucket is a type of ceremonial vessel adopted on the Continent during the third century BC that replaced the flagon. It could be an import from Gaul, but is more likely to be a local product. The elaborate, high-quality bronze decoration is concentrated on the top hoop and on the three feet, and the intermediate hoops are smooth. On the sheet-metal plaques covering the feet, a large rosette with petals appears to rotate, in an evocation of the sun. This is framed by four S-motifs, linked in pairs, along with a single scroll shaped like a bird's head with a curved beak surrounding a dotted circle. The other ends of these S-motifs are simply joined together to form lyre-shapes.

The same motif appears on the upper hoop encircling the vessel on one side of the handle-attachment, modelled as human heads crowned with a pelta, the Celtic version of a palmette, with bulbous ends. This is an image of the deity that the Celts traditionally associated with a plant theme. The other attachment is framed by a design similar to the one described: the centre of a circular boss is crossed by two intertwined S-motifs, which connect it on each side to two smaller bosses, forming the corners of a quadrilateral. A final S-motif extends each pair with a well-defined scroll. The two designs are derived from the concept of the 'world image', treated here in two different ways, perhaps to suggest aspects of the dual nature of the divine being that they surround. The whole sums up the various themes associated with the great sun god in its rich symbolic content.

In the centre of the space between the fixing points, bordered on each side by these two alternating designs, are two rearing horses. They are joined together, but distinguished by the shape of their tails. They could be twin deities represented as their animal embodiments. We can also see that their hind legs appear to be more human than equine.

Spearhead found on the bed of the Thames in London, Great Britain

About 100–10 BC
Forged iron with applied flat engraved bronze decorations
Length: 30 cm
London, British Museum

In this spearhead, the use of two metals – iron and bronze – emphasizes the contrasting shape of the applied bronze decorations. They might suggest silhouettes of pairs of monsters with a beak and a crest, one of the recurrent themes in Continental Celtic warrior imagery. Also found in the riverbed, scabbards decorated with a pair of dragons are evidence of the appearance of such weapons in the Thames estuary from the second half of the third century BC. Inside the engraved decoration is a version of the relief designs, which derives from the local adaptation of Continental originals, similar to the ornamentation on mirrors. The smooth areas on the spear echo the relief on these other objects and its hatched areas echo the hollow or void areas. Pairs of circles are joined by different triangles, with curved sides, usually arranged inside a circular medallion. Endowed with a special kind of magic, this spear must have been an exceptionally prestigious weapon or a military badge.





Applied metal decoration, probably from a wooden bucket, discovered before 1845 near Stanwick Camp, Yorkshire, Great Britain

About 10 BC–40 AD
Bronze repoussé work
or lost-wax casting
Height: 11 cm
London, British Museum

This apparently simple work, from a collection of metal objects (which is perhaps a deposit), is one of the finest examples of Celtic animal art. It is remarkable for its starting point, formed of two leaves, which suggest a pair of facing S-motifs with terminal scrolls that create nostrils.

This exceptionally effective work draws together the S-motif, the plant theme of the double mistletoe leaf, and the animal associated with the sun god (the horse) in the same image.

EPILOGUE

THE CHRISTIAN ART OF IRELAND

Seventh–tenth centuries



Illuminated 'Chi-Rho' page of the 'Book of Kells', about 700–900

See p. 202

On the Continent, the Roman conquest and the advances of the Germanic people brought the era of Celtic art to a close. The old and new elites chose the type of imagery imposed by the conquerors. They displayed an attitude towards imagery, which gradually evolved into a form of art proper to the Germanic world.
The intellectual background of Celtic imagery rapidly weakened, because the elites of Gaul and the other ancient Celtic countries, once subject to Rome, abandoned the oral traditional teaching of the Druidic schools, in favour of learning about Graeco-Roman culture, which became essential to any career and social mobility.

Although tolerated, the ancient Celtic beliefs were increasingly distorted by an outward presentation that showed greater similarities to the principles of classical art from the Mediterranean. Thus, the multiple appearances of the deity were split into apparently distinct personalities. But they had names that conjured up different manifestations of the same divine being. The same was true of the images: a single figure would borrow the characteristic features of different gods of the Roman pantheon. Yet behind an abundance of names and effigies, there were ultimately only a limited number of ancient deities.

Thus the native religion of Gaul and the other Celtic countries was gradually marginalized and confined to rural areas. In the towns, it was supplanted by the official cults of the Roman Empire and the esoteric religions of eastern origin. The academic mythology, until then guarded and handed down to new generations by the Druidic schools, gradually faded into the realm of folk tales and also provided the inspiration for a Christian hagiography that was specifically intended to supplant the old faith.

Things were different in Great Britain where Britons steeped in Roman culture, but attached to the traditions of the Celts, led a resurgence of the Celtic world after the decline of the Roman Empire.

A warlord named Artorius, who was the historic model for the legendary king Arthur is believed to have been the protagonist of the struggle of the now Christian and partially Romanized Celts against the barbarian and pagan invaders of Germanic origin.
At first he inflicted a crushing defeat on his enemies, but in about the year 539, he was killed at the battle of Camlann, the location of which is uncertain. However, the echoes of these historic struggles have been veiled by myths, and the Arthurian cycle is imbued with a heritage that has transformed the protagonists into

the heirs of a warrior tradition more than a thousand years old. Thus, the sword Excalibur continues to be engraved with the pair of 'fire dragons', which adorned the weapons of participants in wars from the fourth and third centuries BC, and Arthur's father bears the nickname Pendragon, 'chief of the dragons', which might just as easily have been given to the commander of one of the military brotherhoods of the Celts in the heyday of their expansion.

Ireland retained not only its language, but also the tradition of the literary education of the intellectual elite, which helped preserve its Celtic works from decline. Thus, after the adoption of Christianity, which resulted in the lifting of the ban on recording oral literature from mythological sources, the Irish monks, direct heirs of the Druids, still had access to coherent and untainted versions. They altered them to play down their pagan appearance and used the tradition for their own ends. Thus transformed into a logical sequence of a mythical history harking back to the dawn of time, Christianity was an apotheosis.

The same attitude can be observed in the field of graphic art, where Christian imagery takes over some fundamental themes from the earlier repertoire. So, the S-motifs, the leaves, the triskelions and other three-fold or four-fold rotating motifs flourished in profusion on the illuminated manuscripts consecrated to the glory of the Lord. There are even clear traces of the union of the three forms of life, with the skilful interlacing of human figures, animals and branches.

As for the Irish type of cross, its shape echoes the concept of space subdivided into four parts, that meet in the circle with a common centre, and which is still the place where the world of humans and the vault of heaven unite. The world tree, pillar of the universe and embodiment of the sun god, is here replaced by Christ. However, the central medallion can sometimes contain a sun emblem. In one instance, it is even circled by a pair of monstrous 'dragons'. The significant impact of Irish missions to Continental Europe suggests that Irish art played a decisive role in the formation of Romanesque art and its inheritance, although it is impossible to define precisely its extent. And yet the convergence that can be observed between some of the imagery of the Middle Ages and the art of the ancient Celts could equally be the result of a resurgence. This can be seen in the rediscovery of ways of building a sacred space through imagery that embodies the unity of the different forms of life and the forces that inspire them. This resurrection of principles characteristic of Celtic art would find its apotheosis in the Gothic cathedrals, which were forests of stone peopled with figures, animals, monsters and signs. The visitor is drawn into the turmoil of a fabulous and

transcendent world that blurs the boundaries between images borrowed from daily life and the wonders of the sacred, which can only be fleetingly glimpsed. Here too, variations in lighting, understanding and individual sensitivity can open the way to multiple perceptions that, for a moment, offer glimpses into the changing outline of the ineffable.

Monumental cross of Ahenny, County Tipperary, Ireland

About 850
Carved stone
Height: 370 cm

The concept of a four-part space around a central point is transposed vertically into the distinctive shape of Irish crosses, a circle superimposed on two axes at right angles. Here, we find the same idea clearly defined by the arrangement of the hemispherical bosses that, on a background of interlacing, adorn the centre and the arm, and also the panels that cover the lower part: a swastika turning around a central medallion, nine – three-by-three – concentric quadrilaterals crossed by perpendicular axes. The base panel is the only panel where we see a man, a palm tree, which suggests a memory of the tree of life, and animals, possibly including a matching pair of felines and horses.
In the choice of these images, we recognize the association of the three forms of life, which was so important in the imagery of the pagan Celts.





Monumental cross of Muiredach, Monasterboice, County Louth, Ireland

About 920
Carved stone
Height: 550 cm

The support is again the Celtic design of a cross, but now at its centre is Christ, who thus takes the place of the deity of the world tree as the source of life and universal order. Biblical scenes replacing the symbolic patterns of traditional imagery enliven the panels. However, the presence of a symmetrical pair of felines might be a distant echo of the tree of life and of the role of the world tree as a link between heaven, our world and the underworld; and also a point of balance in the dynamic chain that might symbolize the endless struggle of a pair of animal champions.

Illuminated 'Chi-Rho' page of the 'Book of Kells'

About 700–900
Richly illuminated manuscript on parchment
Dimensions: 33 × 25 cm
Dublin, Trinity College Library

One inevitable result of the adoption of Christianity was the exaltation of writing as a means of conveying and preserving religious thought. The traditional imagery did not, however, disappear in Ireland; it was maintained with remarkable vigour for a long time in the service of the new faith. In this astonishing illuminated capital, the ancient symbols invade the monogram of Christ: triskelions and other motifs, and three-fold constructions; S-motifs dividing a circle into two nesting leaves; and human figures emerging from interlacing plants and animals. There is even a hint of the mask (above the 'Chi' and inside the 'Rho') and the theme of the subdivision of space into four parts around a common centre (above the 'Chi' and between the 'Chi' and the 'Rho').





Illuminated carpet page of the gospel known as the 'Book of Durrow'

About 680–700
Richly illuminated manuscript on parchment
Dimensions: 24.5 × 14.5 cm
Dublin, Trinity College Library

The six medallions on the central space of this page, one of the four that introduced the Gospels, display a chain of rotating motifs clearly derived from experience of pre-Christian British art. Here we see not only triskelions with centres of three whirling leaves, but also peltas, leaves with tips curling into a spiral, fan-shaped triangles, concave triangles inscribed in a circle, leaving the perimeter as three leaves traced with compasses – an arrangement identical to the one seen on coral cabochons on fibulae from the fourth century BC or from the beginning of the following century, including the British Isles (p. 180).

There are even echoes of the Continental compositions worked out with compasses in the latter half of the fifth century BC, for example the openwork phalera from Somme-Bionne (p. 53). It is also possible to find, in the motif of three slender leaves of unequal lengths on a curved stem, positioned at the joint of the elements connecting the medallions, a trace of the masks invented in the fourth century BC from a metamorphosis of the palmette. The similarities are too numerous and too relevant; the whole is too consistent to be simply explained as a mere convergence of forms. The author must have had a good knowledge of the symbolic value of the signs he was using, this time to celebrate the glory of another religion.

GLOSSARY

A–B

Acheloos
Acheloos was an ancient god of the river of the same name, also known as Aspropotamos, which is located in north-western Greece. His image was a bearded man with a bull's horns, and he could also take the appearance of a bull. This association of the human and the animal fitted perfectly into Celtic iconography.

Aedui (Eduens or Haedui)
A powerful people who came from central-eastern Gaul, between the Saône and the Loire, whose main *oppidum* was Bibracte (Mont Beuvray, near Autun). They were, along with the Remi, the traditional allies of Rome in Gaul.

Amber
Amber is a fossil resin from the tertiary era, yellow or reddish in colour, transparent or opaque. This resin is abundant on the shores of the Baltic, where it has the technical name of *succinite*. It has been used since the fifth millennium BC, and has been traded along the 'Amber Road', from the Baltic coast to the Adriatic. Because of its brilliant colour, which is suggestive of a ray of sunlight, ancient peoples associated it with the sun and invested it with magic properties.

Ambiani
A Gaulish group of people from Picardy, who gave their name to the city of Amiens (*Samarobriva*). The name means 'those on both sides' and refers to their territory, which extended both sides of the Somme (*Samara*).

Anguiped
A kind of divine being, found on statuary and amulets from the Graeco-Roman period. It takes the form of a human body with snakes for legs.

Aniconic
This describes the absence of a graphic representation in a belief system. It does not depend on an image, but presents an abstract, non-figurative character.

Aulerci
This name is common to four Gaulish peoples. The Aulerci Brannovices, a client people of the Aedui, settled in the south of the area that is the modern Yonne region or in the valley of the Saône. The Aulerci Cenomani (a name which indicated their foreign origin) occupied the modern Sarthe department and gave their name to the city of Le Mans. The Aulerci Diablintes lived in the north of the modern Mayenne region. They lent their name to the town of Jublains. The Aulerci Eburovices lived in the modern Eure department. Their name is perpetuated in the Évreux area.

Baluster vase
A generally hollow vase with a curved profile and a short neck that bulges out at the top and narrows proportionally at the base. Its shape recalls the architectural feature of the same name.

Basketry pattern
A term used for a chequerboard pattern, where the squares are filled with alternating horizontal and vertical lines, used in Continental and British Celtic art for secondary infills or for grounds contrasting smooth with shiny parts.

Bas-relief
A sculptural relief in which the projection from the generally plain surface is slight and no part of the modelled form is undercut.

Battle Axe culture
A name given to the peoples originating in the steppes of eastern Europe, who around the end of the fourth millennium BC penetrated into vast areas of northern Europe, from southern Scandinavia and the Baltic coast down to the Rhine, the north-western edge of the Alps and the north of Bohemia and Moravia. This ethnic culture, whose principal subdivision is known as the 'Corded Ware culture', owes its name to the frequent presence in men's graves of an axe, made from polished stone or less often made in copper.

Bell Beaker culture
This important culture, sometimes known as the 'Beaker people', owes its name to the characteristic bell-shaped beaker placed in their graves. Formed around the middle

of the third millennium BC in central Europe, in the regions to the west of the Carpathian Mountains, from local groups and peoples from the Corded Ware culture, it spread widely and rapidly westwards, and reached as far as the British Isles and to the shores of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. This was most likely a new stage in the Indo-Europeanization of Europe by groups already differentiated from the battle culture of the early third millennium BC. The Bell Beaker culture probably was originally made up of various Celtic groups and also peoples with close languages related to the Indo-European root, such as the Ligurians and the Lusitanians, who were descended from its merger with local groups.

Boii
A powerful and ancient Celtic people from central Europe, whose name belongs probably to the same root as 'bovine' and 'beef'. The name means 'cattle owner' and therefore 'man of property'. They lived in central Europe, but in about 400 BC, the Boii took part in the invasion of Italy and settled in Cispadania, between the Po and the Apennines. They returned north after the Roman victory of 191 BC to their lands of origin, and gave their name to Bohemia (*Boiohaemum* means 'the countries of the Boii').

Boss
A convex, elongated or circular metal piece, covering the central cut-out on a shield, where the hand-grip is placed.

Britons
A name given by the ancients to the Celtic peoples of Great Britain. The variant 'Bretons' is used today for the people of British origin who settled in Armorica in the fifth century AD.

Bronze Age
An archaeological period, traditionally defined as the era when tools and weapons were mainly made of bronze, an alloy of copper and tin. In 1836, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen laid down this subdivision of the prehistoric past into three ages (stone, bronze and iron). The general limits of the Bronze Age are today set approximately as 2200–750 BC, depending on the region.

Buffer
A flat-ended terminal of a circular piece of jewellery, such as a torque, bracelet or ankle ring. The end is widened into a torus or a conical disc.

Cabochon
An appliqué in relief, fixed to an object, either by rivets, or by a material such as pitch. The cabochon is often circular in shape and made of a material, which might be different to that of the support (amber, coral, glass paste) or identical.

Caesar
Gaius Julius Caesar (100–44 BC). A Roman general, politician and writer, who invaded England in 55 BC and 54 BC. In his book, *Notebooks on the Gallic Wars*, he described many aspects of Celtic civilization.

Carnyx
A Celtic war trumpet with a long vertical tube and a bell at right angles, which generally took the shape of a boar's head.

Carpet page
A page of an illuminated manuscript, covered entirely in decorative motifs, usually in a symmetrical pattern, resembling some forms of oriental carpet.

Cenomani
Celtic people and a fraction from the Aulerci in Gaul in Italy settled from the first half of the fourth century BC onwards, in an area approximately bounded by the river Po, the river Oglio, Lake Garda and the course of the river Tartaro or the river Adige, between the lands of the Insubres and the Veneti. Its main settlement was located at *Brixia* (Brescia). The name Cenomani means 'those who come from afar' and indicates its alien origin without necessarily implying Gaulish people.

Cenotaph
A funerary monument or 'empty tomb', which is erected in honour of a person or group of people, whose remains are elsewhere.

Cernunnos
A Celtic god characterized by his stag's antlers.

B–C

C – D

His name, combined with his image on the Gallo-Roman *Pilier des Nautes* in Paris, means 'the Horned One' and is, in fact, an invocation, an epithet, rather than an actual name. This might, therefore, be the incarnation of a deity also known under another name. He is sometimes identified with the *Dis Pater*, monarch of the underworld, which Caesar mentions among the principal Gaulish gods.

***Champlevé* (Enamel)**
An enamelling technique in the decorative arts, or an object made with that process, which consists of melting glass paste directly into cavities made in the metal support.

Chape
A metal tip or mounting on a scabbard or sheath. On the swords of the La Tène culture, it was a separate component. It sometimes carries a decoration, or was shaped in the form of grotesque animals, particularly the 'pair of dragons'.

Cisalpine
From this side of the Alps from the Roman point of view, that is south of the Alps.

Cispadane
From this side of the river Po from the Roman point of view, that is south of the Po.

Coil
The wound spring of a fibula, such as the bilateral spring, with a pair of triple coils.

Coral
Red coral (*corallium rubrum*) was collected from Mediterranean coasts, and used by the Celts from the sixth century BC onwards. Its popularity is explained not only by its decorative qualities, but also by the magical virtues attributed to it. For the Celts, it would have given the appearance of the fire that filled the motionless water of the underworld with life.

Corded Ware culture
A major component of what is known as 'the Battle Axe complex'. During the first half of the third millennium BC, it related to the northern part of that culture, from modern-day Poland to the mouth of the Rhine, Switzerland and the northern part of Bohemia. Its name comes from the decoration of the pottery, particularly characteristic goblets, made by imprinting a cord or imitating one.

Coriosolites
An Armorican people settled mainly in the modern Côtes-d'Armor department. Their name is preserved in that of the town of Corseul.

Cremation
A funeral rite that involves burning the body of the deceased on a pyre, with or without personal belongings and offerings. The ashes are then either scattered, deposited in an urn or buried in a grave, with or without grave goods, like a body.

Deiotarvos
This means 'the heavenly bull', a name attributed by the Celts to a deity or animal incarnation, probably identified with the constellation of the same name. In the first century BC, rulers and nobles among the Galatians in Asia adopted this name.

Didrachma
A coin weighing two drachmae, more often known by the name of stater.

Dis Pater
Roman god of the underworld who was identified by Caesar with a Gaulish deity of origins and shadows.

Donn
A deity of the Irish pantheon, who reigns over the kingdom of the dead, known as the 'Dark One', who was as much to be feared as a benevolent presence. He is probably the equivalent of the Gaulish *Dis Pater* referred to by Caesar (see also Cernunnos).

Double mistletoe leaf
A plant motif from the Celtic repertoire, found from the second half of the fifth century BC onwards. It is the result of the transformation of a frieze of lotus flowers in which the ends of the petals meet, allowing it to be seen as a palmette reduced to two leaves drooping towards the base. A pair of nested leaves can be obtained by drawing an S-motif

inside a circle. This rotating design, frequent in the third century BC, is the Celtic equivalent of the Chinese *yin-yang*. It expresses the continuous chain of opposed and complementary principles.

Double spiral
A symbolic motif composed of two spirals rotating in opposite directions, which are linked by a loop. It was widespread from the third millennium BC, when it was often made of gold wire or copper. Together with the S-motif, it symbolizes the imaginary journey of the sun between one winter solstice and the next, above and below the horizon, first waxing, then waning from the summer solstice onwards. In Celtic iconography, its principle is found in the faces derived from the transformation of a palmette.

Drachma
A unit of weight and a monetary value in ancient Greece, originally determined by the number of iron pins (six *obeliskoi* correspond to the same number of obols), which could be held in the hand, hence its name, which means 'handful'. The weight of the drachma varied, according to the standard and the date, from about 6.2 to 2.8 grammes of precious metal.

Druid
A member of the intellectual elite of the Celts, trained on a long oral apprenticeship, because no sacred text was committed to writing. Ancient authors mention several categories of Druids: the bards (poets), the vates, responsible for sacrifices and divination, and the Druids proper, described as philosophers and theologians.
As the repositories of wisdom, they studied the interpretation of nature and moral philosophy.

Earth Mother/Great Goddess
Originally the fertility goddess for the gods and the various forms of life, the Earth Mother or Great Goddess was widely worshipped in ancient Europe. She is the principal, if not unique great female deity of the Celts where, as mother of the great sun god, she is known under the name of *Dana* ('Earth'), *Ana* ('the Ancient one'), *Mórríoghan* or *Rhiannon* ('the Great Queen'), *Modron* or *Matrona* ('the Divine Mother'), *Brighíd* or *Brigantia* ('the Eminent'), *Belisama* ('the Most Bright') and many other epithets. In the Roman period, she was generally identified with Minerva.

Enamel
A material, generally coloured, opaque or translucent, obtained by melting powdered glass directly onto the object (the *champlevé* technique) or into a mould (cabochon). The predominant colour of Celtic enamel is red, associated with life. Later, particularly in the British Isles, yellow and blue were added.

Etruscans
These are people of ancient Italy, living mainly in the area that is now known as Tuscany (derived from their other name *Tusci*). The Tyrrhenian Sea that washes the coasts of this part of the peninsula also derives its name from them), as far as the neighbourhood of Rome and into the plain of the Po, between the river and the Apennines (Etruria Padana). They were organized in cities, often in conflict, and fought the Greeks and the Romans. Their origin remains disputed. It probably derived from the fusion of local peoples with foreigners coming in from the east, beginning in the first quarter of the last millennium BC. The Etruscans played an essential role in passing on Mediterranean models to the Celts, notably in the fifth century BC.

Fibula
A type of brooch that both men and women wore on their clothes. Fibulae reflect the social standing of the person wearing them and might therefore often be the work of artists. This is true in the case of the figurative fibulae in the fifth century BC, particularly the examples known as 'mask fibulae', and in the next century, in the rich examples decorated with cabochons of coral and mainly inspired by Italiot models. The La Tène culture fibula consists of a spring (more rarely a hinge), a pin, a bow and a foot, sometimes disc-shaped to hold a coral or enamel cabochon, or an imitation of one in bronze. These fibulae are called 'Münsingen type'.

D–F

F – H

Filigree
A technique used by goldsmiths and silversmiths, consisting of soldering a length of precious metal wire into patterns, either openwork or in relief, on the surface of the object. The Celts imitated this in bronze and sometimes in precious metals (for instance, the Filottrano, Waldalgesheim and Knock torques) by lost-wax casting or repoussé work. This is known as faux filigree.

Fused-buffer
A shape of a torque, which resembles two separate buffers, but is actually a single piece. Sometimes called a 'muff'.

Galatians (*Galatai*)
The Greek form of the name of the Gauls, now used to refer to the Celts who settled in Asia Minor after 278 BC and set up the 'Community of the Galatians' (*Koinon Galaton*), which was composed of three peoples: the Tectosagians, the Trocmi and the Tolistobogians.

Germanic people
People of Indo-European origin descended from population movements in the third millennium BC. They were the northern neighbours of the Celts, divided by a line, which, at the beginning of the first millennium BC, ran approximately along the southern edge of the great plains of northern Europe. There were many contacts between these two linguistically and culturally distinct ethnic groups from the second millennium BC onwards, some peaceful, some hostile.

Golasecca
A site of settlements and burial sites on the left bank of the river Ticino, where it leaves Lake Maggiore. Archaeologists gave the name of the site to a culture from the first Iron Age in modern-day Piedmont and Lombardy, now attributed to peoples of Celtic origin. They are the first of this family known so far to have left written documents in their language, using an alphabet borrowed from the Etruscans (from the end of the seventh century BC).

Granulation
A technique used by goldsmiths and silversmiths, which consists of soldering minuscule beads of precious metal onto a support of the same metal. In this way patterns can be obtained, or a finely granulated surface, which leaves subjects standing out in smooth, shining relief. The Etruscans excelled in this technique and made exquisitely detailed items. The Celts imitated this technique, either by the process of working sheet metal in repoussé, or by lost-wax casting of bronze (a technique known as 'pastillage').

Graphiting
Treating the surface of pottery by coating it or rubbing it with mineral graphite or carbon, obtained by burning organic matter (tallow or other animal fat).

Griffon
A fabulous monster of oriental invention, with a feline body, eagle's wings and a hawk's head and small ears, often crowned with a sort of plume. The Celts adopted this in the second half of the fifth century BC. Pairs of griffons and snake-bodied dragons are often shown flanking the symbolic image of the world tree, following the oriental model of the tree of life. As an emblem of the military elite, the pair of griffons appears on many sword scabbards.

Hallstatt
A site in Upper Austria, above Lake Hallstat, situated at the mouth of the Salzberg valley, where rich deposits of salt have been worked since the Bronze Age. The rich burial site, of about 2,000 graves, explored since 1846, has produced materials belonging mainly to the early Iron Age, from the last third of the eighth century BC to the first half of the fifth century BC, and also a few La Tène culture graves from the second half. In 1874, Hans Hildebrand proposed that the name of the site should refer to the first Iron Age period (the Hallstattian period).

Heliacal rising
This occurs when a celestial body or constellation first becomes visible again above the eastern horizon, just before sunrise, after a period of time when it had not been visible.

High relief
A sculpture that projects distinctly from its

background, but is not totally detached. A high relief forms an intermediate stage between low relief (or bas-relief) and sculpture in the round.

Hypogeum
An underground monument, generally used for burial purposes.

Icenians (*Iceni*)
A powerful people of Great Britain, settled in modern-day Norfolk and Suffolk, and also part of Cambridgeshire. They initiated the uprising of 61 AD, led by queen Boudicca against the demands of the Roman power.

Illyrians
Ancient peoples of Indo-European descent, who came from the east coast of the Adriatic, and inland areas from present-day Albania to Istria. Formerly they were attributed with an excessively large area, which some alleged to have gone beyond the Carpathian basin in the second millennium BC. Now it is thought that peoples grouped together as Pannonians occupied the plains between the Danube, the Alps and Lake Balaton.

Inhumation
A funeral ritual that consists of depositing a body, with or without offerings and personal possessions, in a grave or tomb, generally surmounted by a mound (tumulus) or other marker on the surface.

Insubres (*Insubri*)
A powerful people who occupied the approximate area of present-day Lombardy, between the river Ticino, the Alps, the course of the river Oglio and the river Po. The Insubres are now thought to be descendants of people of the Golasecca culture, so much older than their first mention in written records, where they were considered as the first wave of transalpine invaders, dated about 600 BC. The first inscriptions in the Celtic language, in an alphabet borrowed and adapted from the Etruscans, go back to this period, indicating the Celtic identity of people whose presence can be traced locally to the last centuries of the second millennium BC.

In the round (sculpture)
A free-standing sculpture in relief where the subject is not attached to the ground, as opposed to a bas-relief or high relief.

Iron Age (first, second)
The archaeological period that followed the Bronze Age. It is traditionally defined as the period when tools and weapons were principally made of iron, a metal found across Europe since the second half of the second millennium BC. In 1874, Hans Hildebrand subdivided the Iron Age into two periods: he gave the first the name of the Austrian site of Hallstatt (about 750–450 BC) and named the second after the lake site of La Tène in Switzerland (about 450–10 BC).

Istro-Pontic
A term used to refer to a form of art from the fifth to first centuries BC, characteristic of the regions bordering the Black Sea and the lower Danube (mainly modern Bulgaria and the neighbouring part of Romania). When talking of the ethnic group, the terms Thraco-Getian and Daco-Getian are also used, depending on the periods and regions.

Italics
Indigenous peoples of ancient Italy, including the Daunians, Latins, Umbrians, Picentes, Samnites, Veneti and others, but excluding the Greek colonists (Italiots) and Phoenicians, and the Celtic invaders of the beginning of the fourth century BC. The Celts of the Golasecca culture, ethnically Celtic judged by their language, belonged culturally to the Italic world. The Etruscans are generally considered as an entity apart, in spite of their close links with their neighbours, expressed by the term of Etrusco-Italic culture.

Italiots
A name that was given from the fifth century BC to the Greeks, who colonized the south of Italy (Magna Graecia).

Ithyphallic
A figure displaying an erect penis.

La Tène
A site on Lake Neuchâtel, in Switzerland, where its distributary channel called the

H – L

Thielle (in German, Zihl) emerges. It was flooded and then discovered in 1857, when the water level fell. It has since furnished a large number of metal objects. Excavations from 1906 to 1917 revealed the archaeological remains of two bridges, one of them recently dated by dendrochronology (the analysis of growth rings in trees) to the early Iron Age (about 662 BC). However, the objects – including many weapons – belong almost exclusively to the second Iron Age, particularly the third century BC. Hans Hildebrand, in 1874, gave the name to the second period of his subdivision (La Tène period, or La Tène culture).

Latins
People of ancient Latium, and neighbours of Rome, who came from the Italic group of Indo-Europeans. Their confederation, often opposed to Rome, finally became part of Rome in the second half of the fourth century BC.

Lenticular
This refers to a form of vase with a low, broad base, in the shape of a lentil.

Ligures
Ancient people of the coasts of Italy and France, who came from La Spezia and perhaps as far as away as the Rhône delta, and its hinterland. Their language was apparently related to Celtic, but heavily influenced by a pre-Indo-European base, retained mainly in place-names. On the periphery of the area inhabited by the Ligures in historic times are mentioned various peoples known as Celto-Ligures, whose linguistic, and therefore ethnic, identity remains ill-defined. They are often culturally closer to the Celts than the Ligures proper, particularly in the south of the France.

Lug
This was the principal deity of the Celts, identified in Gaul with the Roman Mercury by Caesar. The name means 'the Bright One' and confirms his relationship with the sun, daylight and summer. His remote origin might have been a twin hero. His festival, *Lugnasad*, was located midway through the bright season and was determined by the heliacal rising of Sirius, the brightest star in the sky. This festival of sovereignty was the date of a meeting of the great assemblies. Under the Empire, it was merged with the feast of Augustus, the date when the council of the Gauls was held in Lyon (*Lugdunum*, 'Lug's City'). In Italian, it coincides with *Ferragosto*, the feast of the Assumption, our 15 August.

Lusitanians
People of the Iberian peninsula who occupied the north of modern Portugal, the adjacent valleys of the Douro and the Tagus with the neighbouring territories in Spain, particularly upper Extremadura. Their language was of Indo-European origin, apparently different from the Celtic group, but very close in nature.

Neolithic
Formerly known as 'the new (or late) Stone Age', this period corresponds to the development of settled agriculture in Europe, from the seventh millennium BC onwards. The end of the Neolithic age is determined by the changes related to the introduction of metalworking and the beginning of the eneolithic or chalcolithic (The Copper Age), which were variable according to region, from the fifth millennium BC in the south-east of Europe to the third millennium BC in the centre-west.

Obol
A unit of weight and monetary unit of ancient Greece, corresponding to one-sixth of a drachma. It was the smallest coin struck in silver.

Omphalos
This word, which means 'navel' in Greek, referred to the presumed centre of the world in Delphi, the point where two eagles sent from the extremities of the world by Zeus, met; in particular it is the sacred stone, which marked this place. Among the Celts, it refers to four-sided monuments, supposedly indicating the symbolic centre of the territory, the presumed place where the world tree grows and holds up the vault of heaven.

Oppidum
Name of Latin origin used to refer to Celtic settlements of urban type. The main *oppida*

took on the role of the economic, religious and administrative centres of the confederations of tribes, which were known as 'cities'.

Orientalizing (style and period)
An influence of eastern, mainly Syrophoenician origin, which in the eighth century BC affected Greece and various regions of the western Mediterranean. Its effects are particularly evident in the field of figurative art, where previously unknown subjects begin to appear: fabulous animals like the sphinx and griffon, the tree of life between pairs of ibexes. This imagery persisted in Italy during the following centuries in Situla art, and was appropriated by the Celts in the course of the fifth century BC.

Osismii
An Armorican peoplè who occupied the area of what is now the modern Finistère region. Their name meant 'the Most Distant', that is 'the people from land's end'.

Outline (painting)
A painting technique where a line is drawn around the subject rather being painted directly. A good example in the field of classical ceramic decoration is known as 'red-figure pottery'.

Palmette
An image that is symbolic of the tree of life, which was of oriental origin, inspired by the date palm. The Greeks and Etruscans adopted the motif, particularly as a component in decorative friezes, where the palmette often alternates with the lotus flower. The Celts borrowed the motif in the fifth century BC and identified it with the world tree, the plant embodiment of the great sun god, Lug. Their palmette generally has three leaves, in accordance with the symbolic value that the Celts gave to this number.

Pannonians
Ancient peoples from the river Danube plains, which stretched from its right bank to the Alps, situated south of Lake Balaton. In the past, they were confused with the Illyrians, but can be distinguished by their language, mainly found in the names of people, and by their Iron Age culture, prior to the Celtic invasion at the start of the third century BC.

Parisii
A small Gaulish people on the banks of the Seine, established from the confluence with the Marne to the mouth of the Oise. Their name perhaps meant 'the Spearmen'. According to Caesar, the Parisii were originally an offshoot of the Senones. Modern archaeology has set their formation in the first half of the third century BC, with a strong element derived from the area of the Danube. They gave their name to their principal settlement, Lutecia, later Paris.

Pastillage
A bronze technique practised mainly by the Celts of central Europe in the third century BC, which roughly imitates the granulation of goldsmithery and silversmithery. The models were made in wax and then cast using the lost-wax technique.

Pelta
Originally, in ancient Greece, this was the name of a small, light shield with a rounded shape, with a semicircular part cut out of the edge. The word is commonly used for a decorative pattern of a similar shape. In Celtic art, the term is applied to a shape derived from the simplification of the palmette by merging the leaves and the scrolls at the base. This motif is also sometimes called a 'Celtic palmette'.

Pendant
An object intended to be hung around the neck or elsewhere, sometimes considered as a magic protection (amulet) for its wearer. It is generally identified by a suspension ring or loop and might represent a figurine, a symbol or even elements that retain their natural form, such as coral and shells.

Phalera
A metal disc worn by the Continental Celts for religious and ornamental purposes, especially those used on harnesses.

Phoenicians
An ancient people from the Syrio-Lebanese coast. In the second millennium BC,

O–P

P–S

they developed an intense maritime trade and from the late second millennium BC, they went as far as the western Mediterranean, where they founded colonies in North Africa, the islands (Sardinia, Sicily) and even on the Atlantic coast of the Iberian peninsula (Cádiz). From the fifth century BC, Carthage, the most powerful of these cities, probably employed Celtic mercenaries, recruited in southern Gaul. There was a particularly high number of them in the third century BC. In the eighth century BC, the Phoenicians were largely responsible for spreading the orientalizing fashion, which three centuries later was incorporated into Celtic art.

Picentes
Italic people with Indo-European roots who occupied the land bordering the Adriatic coast between the rivers Esino and Salino. Their name is said to be derived from the word for woodpecker, the bird associated with the god Mars, whom they believed had guided them into the region. In the fourth century BC and the early fifth century BC, they were the neighbours to the south of the Senones, from whom they borrowed the La Tène culture sword.

Quatrefoil
A kind of rosette with four lobes generally suggesting petals.

Red figure and black figure
The technique known as 'red figure' was invented by Greek pottery painters about the end of the sixth century BC. It reverses the process of the previous technique, known as 'black figure', where the figures and the motifs were painted directly onto the surface of the vase, using fine slip, which when fired became black. The red-figure technique consists of painting in the background, thus leaving the subject paler (the colour of the surface of the vase), in silhouette on a black background. Adopted by Etruscan and Italic potteries, it was occasionally imported into Champagne in the second half of the fourth century BC.

Remi
A powerful people from what is now the Champagne region, whose name probably meant 'the first' or 'the oldest'. They gave their name to city of Reims.

Repoussé (technique)
Cold working of a thin sheet of metal by hammering on the back to create shapes or lines, which will appear in relief on the front of the item.

Rocked chisel
A technique of engraving on metal, which consists of directing the cutting edge of the chisel in a swivelling movement, turning it on its two corners in sequence. The result is a zigzag line with accentuated corners, which correspond to the points of rotation. The result is sometimes referred to as 'tremolo'.

Senones
A people probably originally from the Seine basin, upstream of Paris. Their name means 'the old ones' and therefore means the same as the Remi ('the First'). They played a significant role in the migration of people from the Champagne region towards Italy in the early fourth century BC. They settled under this name in what is now Ancona and surrounding areas. These Adriatic Senones were the main players in the struggle against Rome, until their defeat in 283 BC. The Transalpine Senones were distinguished in the fourth century BC from other people from the Champagne region, particularly from the Remi, by a characteristic form of closed 'three-fold' torque. At the time of Caesar, they mainly occupied the Yonne basin and gave their name to the town of Sens.

Silenus
In Greek mythology, the tutor of Dionysus, son of a nymph and the god Pan. His fellows, along with the satyrs, nymphs and bacchantes, form part of the Dionysian procession. He is represented as a bearded bald man, with the ears, tail and hooves of a horse. In the fifth century BC, his image frequently appeared on Greek and Etruscan utensils for serving wine. Because of the combination of human and animal features, the Celts borrowed his head as a model to represent their principal deity.

Situla
A ceremonial or utilitarian bucket, shaped as a truncated cone or cylinder, which was particularly widespread in the north-east of Italy and in what is now Slovenia. Here it gave its name to an artistic movement influenced by orientalizing fashion, known as 'Situla art', which flourished from the second half of the seventh century to the fifth century BC. Greek and Etruscan situlas were imported by the Celts and played an important role in the transmission of models, particularly in the fourth century BC.

Slip
A fine, liquid dilute clay, used for making painted or relief decorations on pottery. This thin layer of clay is applied to the surface of a pot, before decoration. Its colour is generally different to that of the support.

S-motif
A symbolic evocation, together with the double spiral, of the imaginary journey of the sun between one winter solstice and the next, above and below the horizon, first waxing, then waning from the summer solstice onwards, embodied in the mid-point. This is the commonest symbolic motif in the Celtic repertoire. It is related to the double mistletoe leaf because, when the S-motif is drawn within a circle, it forms a rotating pair of nesting leaves.

Sphinx
A fabulous monster, with a lion's body, sometimes winged, and a human head. The sphinx was spread into the western Mediterranean by the trend of orientalizing fashion in the eighth century BC. In the fifth century BC, it was borrowed by the Celts, who used it as one of the forms of supporters of the sun god and the world tree, in the same way as griffons or monsters with a snake's body.

Stater
For the Greeks, this was originally a double unit of weight of a valuable metal, particularly the drachma. The name remained for the gold didrachma. The stater was used in paying for the services of Celtic mercenaries, particularly under Philip II of Macedon, when it was also known as a 'Philip'. It was adopted by the Celts around the beginning of the third century BC. Originally, it weighed about eight grams of pure gold and was successively subdivided into fractional values, including halves, thirds, quarters, eighths, twenty-fourths and even thirty-secondths. Today, it is sometimes described as the 'dollar of ancient times'.

Sun wheel
Wheel with four spokes, or sometimes a multiple, symbolically associated since the third millennium BC with the sun and its god. It suggests both the sun's movement and the four-fold subdivisions of space that determine its journey.

Swastika
An ancient symbol of the sun formed by a cross with arms of equal length, folded in a right angle, clockwise-pointing in the classical form, and facing left, that is pointing anti-clockwise, for the variant called a 'sauvastika'. There are also forms with curved arms, created with two crossed S-motifs. Its symbolic significance for the Celts was probably equivalent to the sun wheel, because it represents the division into four of space combined with a suggestion of movement.

Taranis
Gaulish deity whose name is derived from the Celtic word for 'thunder' and is generally associated with the wheel and considered to be the equivalent of the Roman Jupiter. He could be one of the aspects of the great sky god.

Tarvos trigaranos
'Bull with three cranes', shown on the Gallo-Roman 'Pillar of the Boatmen' found in Paris. It has an inscription with this name and shows the three birds perched on its back. This variant of its epithet *tricaranos*, 'with three horns', explains the Gallo-Roman depictions of three-horned bulls.

Terret ring
A metal ring fitted to a yoke or a chariot, to guide the reins from the horse to the driver.

Tetradrachma
This Greek silver coin weighed four drachmas,

S–T

originally about 16 grams. It was adopted by the Celts from the Danube, who derived their models mainly from Macedon.
The heavy silver coins struck in the first half of the first century BC by the Boii from the Carpathian basin, traditionally known as tetradrachmas because of their weight, were actually hexadrachmas (six drachmas).

Tetraskele
A rotational motif with four curved branches that derives its name from the Greek *tetraskeles*, which means 'four-legged'. This is a variant of the triskelion and a curved version of the swastika.

Thracians
In ancient times, Thracians were people who came from what is now Bulgaria and surrounding areas. The Greek poet Homer mentions their name. Their language, known from the names of people and places, appears to belong to the Indo-European family. Celts and Thracians were in direct contact after the great expedition of 280 BC and the setting up, on Thracian territory, of the short-lived Celtic kingdom of Tylis.

T – V

Thraco-Getian
An adjective particularly applied to artistic production from Thracian territory, from the fifth century BC. The Getae were the peoples, most likely of Thracian stock, who mainly occupied the lower Danube and Carpathian Mountain regions of modern Romania.

Torque
A rigid metal neck-ring worn by Celtic men and women, but only women of rank were buried wearing them. The torque might be open, usually with the open ends forming buffers, or closed, such as the three-segment torques, which opened by removing a segment. These are characteristic of the Senones from Gaul.

Torus/toroidal
A semi-cylindrical moulding at the base of a column. The expression 'toroidal buffers on a torque' is sometimes used when the moulding is, in fact, a solid disc with a rounded, usually decorated edge.

Transalpine
From the other side of the Alps from the Roman point of view, that is north of the Alps.

Triskelion
(also called triskele, triscele, triskell)
A rotational motif with three curved branches, which has a name that comes from the Greek *triskeles*, meaning 'three-legged'. It is found among the Celtic peoples from the Hallstattian period. After the S-motif, it is the most frequently used symbol in the La Tène cultural repertoire. As one of the sun symbols, it is often associated with a horse, particularly in designs on coins. It perhaps suggests the three important moments of its daily journey: dawn, noon and dusk, and also the dynamic relationship between the three superimposed worlds of heaven, earth and the underworld.

Tubular
Hollow, ring-shaped jewellery, formed of a metal sheet rolled into a cylinder, or the shape of the spout on ceremonial flagons, for example from Reinheim.

Tumulus
This is a mound generally covering the burial chamber of an important figure, which sometimes contains adventitious graves. It was sometimes bordered by a ditch, a palisade or a ring of stones, and surmounted by a stele or an effigy.

Urnfield
A term traditionally applied to archaeological cultures of the recent and late Bronze Age (the last third of the second millennium BC and the first centuries of the following millennium), where the rite of cremation was prevalent. Formerly considered as evidence of the expansion of Celtic peoples, the Urnfield complex covers a wide range of ethnic groups that shared this funeral ritual and certain widespread forms of objects and symbols.

Veneti
The name of various peoples from ancient Europe. From the second millennium BC, the Italic Veneti occupied the modern Veneto, between the river Po and the Alps, to the east of the Cenomani, who had settled

there in the fourth century BC. The Veneti of Armorica occupied the modern Morbihan region. Their powerful ocean-going fleet and the ports, which they controlled, gave them a leading role in trade with Great Britain. They gave their name to the city of Vannes.

Volcae Tectosages
The name probably means the 'Falcons (rather than 'the Wolves') looking for a home'. A Celtic people probably formed in the fourth century BC on the central plains of Bohemia and Moravia, from groups who had arrived mainly from the Swiss plateau. They took part in the great movements of the first half of the following century and their presence has also been confirmed in the south of Gaul (Volcae Tectosages and Volcae Arecomici), in the Ebro valley, at the confluence of the Drava and the Danube, and as far as Asia Minor. These peoples have been linked to the supposed pillage of the sanctuary at Delphi and to the legend of its cursed gold, the *aurum Tolosanum* or 'from Toulouse'.

World tree
The symbolic centre of the world, thought to support the vault of heaven and unite it with the earth and the underworld. The Celts probably saw this as one of the incarnations of the great sun god and generally classified it as an oak or yew. They identified it with the oriental theme of the tree of life and its guardians.

V – W

CHRONOLOGY

	CELTS & CELTIC ART	A CONTEXT OF EVENTS
c. 9000–8000 BC		• Invention and spread of agriculture in the Near East
c. 7000–6000 BC	• Beginning of the Neolithic: introduction of agriculture; first settled communities in Europe • Symbolic repertoire and mainly female idols (images of the 'Great Goddess'). Megalithic art in the West	• Appearance of metal working (hot hammering and then smelting)
c. 4500 BC	• Introduction of copper and gold working in the south-east of Europe	
c. 3000 BC	• Arrival of Indo-European populations from what was named the Battle Axe culture into central and northern Europe; they introduce the wheel and draught animals • Very marked decline in figurative art: schematic human images and astral symbols	• First fortified city on the site of Troy (Troy I)
c. 2800–2300 BC		• Ancient Egyptian empire (pyramids, hieroglyphics)
c. 2500 BC	• Formation of what is known as the Bell Beaker culture which extended the spread of the Indo-European groups towards the west and south	
c. 2200 BC	• Beginning of the Bronze Age in central Europe	
c. 1500 BC	• Confirmation, in central Europe, of a very well-defined break between a northern culture, probably descended from Germanic peoples, and the groups further south, who were the direct ancestors of the historical Celts • Representations of an Apollonian sun god associated with waterfowl, chariots, wheels and other solar symbols	• Development and golden age of the Mycenaean civilization (documents in Greek written in linear B); Mycenaean sailors reach Sardinia, the Tyrrhenian coast and the north of the Adriatic
c. 1400–1250 BC		• Golden age of Troy (Troy VI), from which the city in the Iliad was derived, destroyed by an earthquake or a war

CELTS & CELTIC ART	A CONTEXT OF EVENTS	
	• Rameses II's victory in the Nile delta over invaders coming by sea	**1290 BC**
	• Troy (VIIa), destroyed by fire – probable source of stories about the 'Trojan war'	***c.* 1180 BC**
	• Foundation of Carthage	***c.* 824–813 BC**
• Beginning of the first Iron Age in central-western Europe (Hallstatt period) • Geometric art with figurative elements and symbols mainly inherited from the solar repertoire of the Bronze Age (waterfowl, horse, either alone or mounted by a rider, chariot, S-motif, triskele, swastika etc.)		***c.* 800–750 BC**
	• Legendary date for the foundation of Rome	**754 BC**
  	• Foundation of Pithekoussai in Ischia, beginning of the Greek colonisation of the western Mediterranean	***c.* 750 BC**
• First inscriptions in the Celtic language in Piedmont and Lombardy (Sesto Calende and Castelletto Ticino)		***c.* 620–580 BC**
	• Foundation of the Phocaean colony of Massalia (Marseille)	***c.* 600 BC**
• First mentions of the Celts by Greek writers (Hecataeus, Herodotus)		***c.* 550–480 BC**
	• Campaign of Darius the Great, King of Persia, into Europe and creation of a short-lived *satrapy* between the Danube and the Bosporus	**514 BC**
	• Athenian victory over the Persians at Marathon	**490 BC**
	• Greek victories over the Persians at Salamis and the Carthaginians at Himera in Sicily	**480 BC**

c. 460–450 BC

- Beginning of the second Iron Age (La Tène period)
- Initial period of Celtic art: images mainly borrowed from the Etruscan repertoire (figurative fibulae with masks, double mistletoe leaves, palmettes etc.), grotesque representations of the deity (horse with a human head etc.), ubiquitous symbols (S-motif, triskele). Sculptures from central Europe (Glauberg etc.) and from southern Gaul (Roquepertuse)

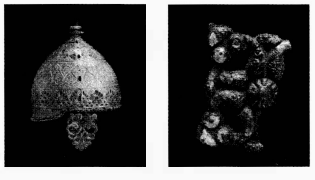


c. 400–390 BC

- Transalpine Celts (Boii, Senones etc.) in Italy

387 BC

- Romans defeated at the battle of Allia; Rome taken by Brennus's forces
- Spread of Celto-Italic artistic innovations: modified designs of foliage scrolls and palmettes, images with multiple meanings (Filottrano sheath and torque, decorations from Čížkovice, Condé-sur-Marne etc.)



336–323 BC

- Reign of Alexander the Great

335 BC

- In the north-west of what is now Bulgaria, Alexander the Great received an embassy from the Celts

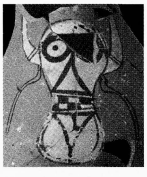
298 BC

- Celtic expedition to Thrace, but the Celts were defeated on the Haemus Mons (Balkan mountains) by Cassander

295 BC

- Roman victory over the Italian Gauls and their allies at Sentinum

CELTS & CELTIC ART	A CONTEXT OF EVENTS	
• Decisive Roman victory over the Senones from Italy • Golden age of continental Celtic art: decorated sheaths (Cernon-sur-Coole etc.), annular jewellery (torques from the Champagne region, bracelets, ankle rings from the Danube etc.), belt clips and other warrior elite insignia of rank • Earliest images on coins • Gradual development of the art of the British Isles 		**283 BC**
• The 'Great expedition' of three Celtic armies against Macedonia		**280 BC**
• Expedition lead by Brennos against Delphi		**279 BC**
• Galatians migrate into Asia Minor		**278 BC**
• Founding of the colony of Ariminum (Rimini), the starting point for the Roman conquest of the Cisalpine region		**268 BC**
	• First Punic War • Sicily becomes a Roman province	**264–241 BC**
	• Carthaginians sail to Cádiz and start their conquest of the Iberian peninsula	**238 BC**
• Roman victory over a coalition of Cisalpine and Transalpine Celts at Telamon		**225 BC**
• Hannibal crosses the south of Gaul and the Alps and enters Italy, supported by local Celts	• Second Punic War • Rome occupies Carthaginian possessions in the Iberian peninsula	**218 BC**
• Boii from Italy defeated and return to their original land in central Europe		**191 BC**

	CELTS & CELTIC ART	A CONTEXT OF EVENTS
190–170 BC	• System of *oppida* set up in Bohemia • Art of the *oppida* and development of the art of images on coins. Painted pottery from Central Gaul and Numantia. Sculptures from southern Gaul (Entremont). Golden age of the art of the British Isles	
154 BC	• Revolt of the Lusitanians and Celtiberians against Rome. Roman expedition into Provence	
149–146 BC		• Third Punic War • Carthage destroyed
133 BC	• Siege and fall of Numantia, capital of the Celtiberian Arevaci	
124 BC	• Second Roman campaign in Provence. • Creation of Gallia Narbonensis (Narbonese Gaul)  	
121 BC	• Roman victories over the Arverni and the Allobroges led by Bituitus	
***c.* 120 BC**	• Probable start of the migration of the Cimbri and Teutons. Victorious defence of central Europe by the Boi	
113–101 BC	• The Cimbri and Teutons move between Noricum, the south of Gaul and the north of Italy	
58–52 BC	• Gallic war • Caesar's expedition to Britain	
44 BC		• Julius Caesar assassinated
42 BC	• Cisalpine Gaul annexed to Italy • Gallo-Roman and Romano-Celtic art • Late examples of British art	

CELTS & CELTIC ART	A CONTEXT OF EVENTS	
	• Octavian's victory over Antony and Cleopatra VII at Actium. Octavian becomes *princeps senatus* and is awarded the title of Caesar Augustus. Start of the Roman Empire	**31 BC**
• Galatia becomes a Roman province		**25 BC**
• Pannonia occupied by Rome		**12 BC**
	• Reign of Tiberius, Augustus's successor	**14–37 AD**
• Claudius sends an expedition to Great Britain. Conquest of the southern part of the island • Romano-British art		**43 AD**
• Revolt against Rome by the Iceni and other British peoples, led by Boudicca		**61 AD**
• Agricola's campaigns in the north of Great Britain		**78–86 AD**
	• End of Severus Alexander's reign • Start of the great barbarian invasions	**238 AD**
	• Reign of Diocletian. The Roman Empire is divided into Eastern and Western Roman Empires	**284–305 AD**
	• Constantine's edict of Milan gives Christians the same rights as pagans	**313 AD**
• Final departure of Roman troops from Great Britain		**407–411 AD**
	• Rome taken by Alaric	**410 AD**
• Patrick is sent to Ireland as bishop		**432 AD**
• Saxons occupy the central eastern part of Great Britain • British migrations into Armorica • Irish Christian art, influenced by elements inherited from the Celtic art of the La Tène culture and influences of Germanic origin		***c.* 450 AD**
• Battle of Camlann, where the legendary Arthur is said to have met his death		***c.* 539 AD**

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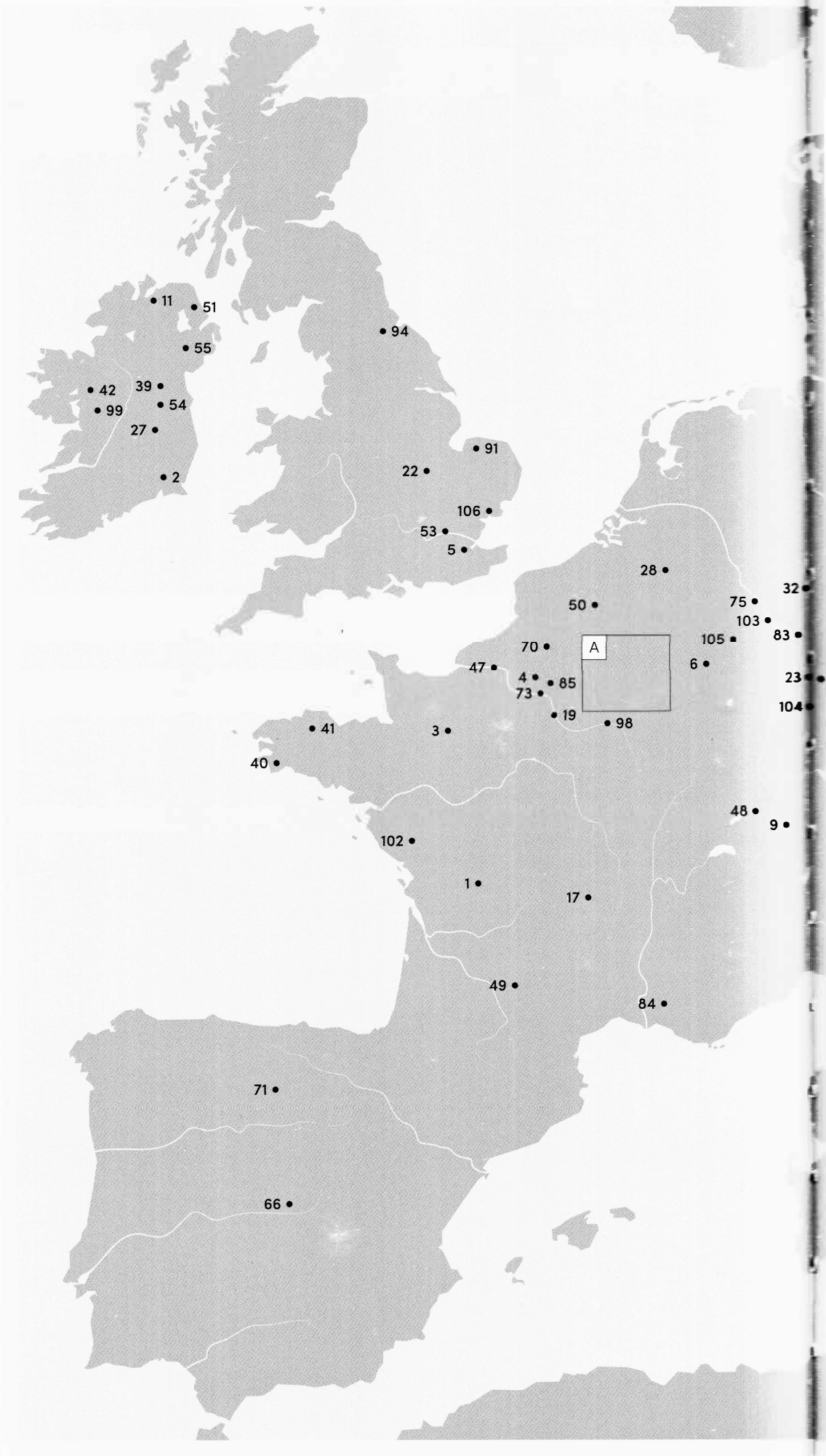

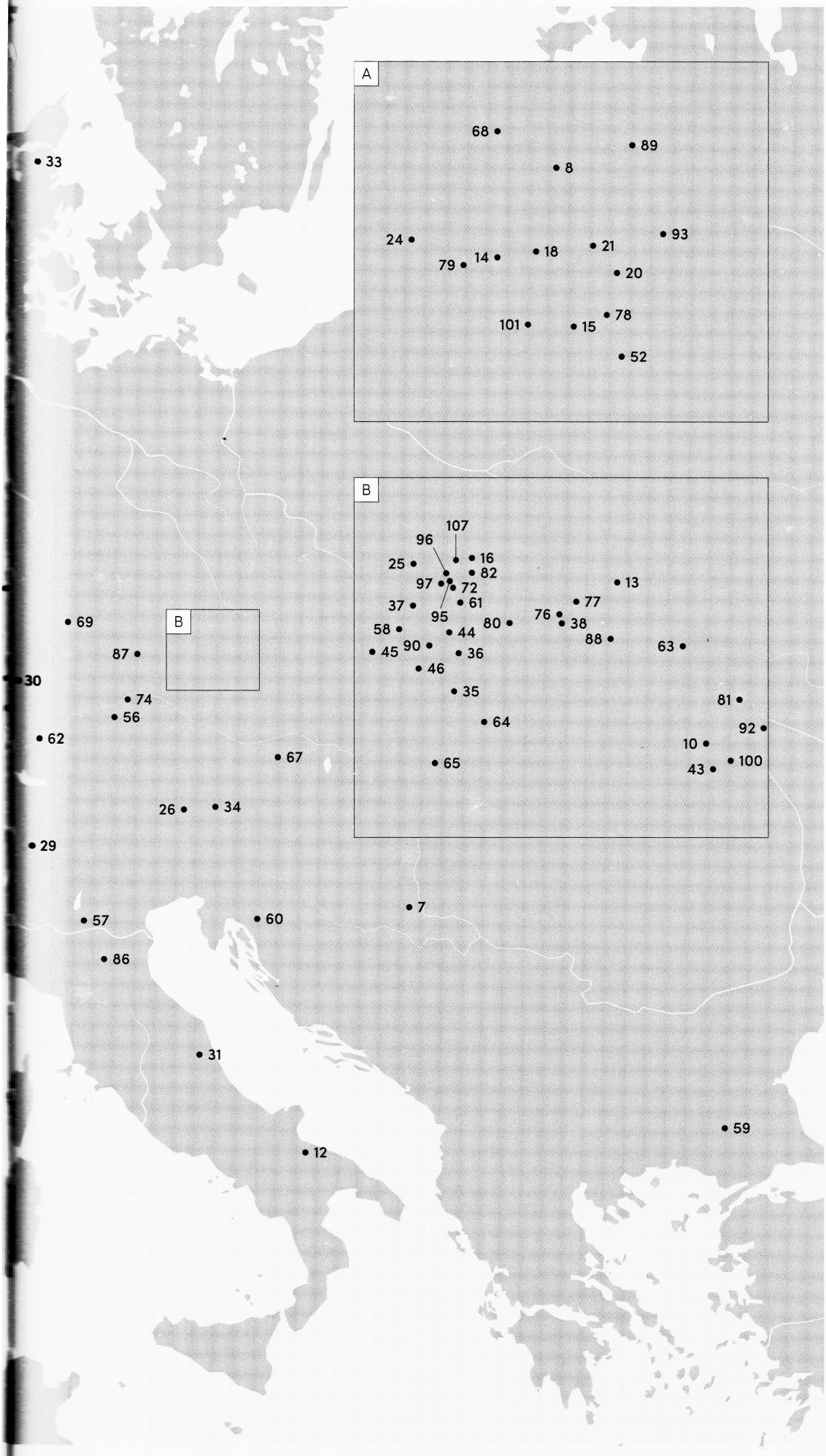

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