

The Bronze Age

In Ireland

Between 2000 and 500 BC

BRONZE is a mixture of COPPER and ZINC



This cauldron dates to the Dowris phase of the Late Bronze Age circa 700 B. C. it was found at Castleberg, County Tyrone, and can be seen in the National Museum of Ireland. It has a diameter of 56 centimetres.



The example of a bronze shield shown here dates to the Dowris phase of the Late Bronze Age circa 700 B. C. It was found in a bog at Lough Gur in County Limerick. It has a diameter of 72 cm. Today it can be viewed in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. It is supposed that it was used for decorative purposes only as the bronze is so thin, and that wooden and leather shields of a similar design would have been used in real combat situations.



**These are some examples of
Bronze arrowheads,
spearheads and axe-heads**

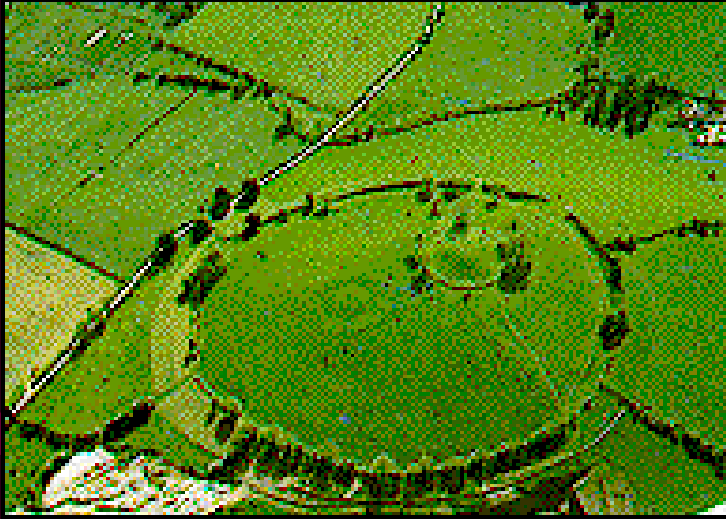
**In order to create these Bronze pieces smelting of metal ores
was necessary – copper and zinc ores had to be heated to
create the Bronze**

Bronze tools and weapons allowed these people to take over more land and cut down more forests.

Farming became more widespread and even more organised than in the Neolithic period.

Disputes and battles over land, cattle and crops became more common.

These disputes lead to the building of safer and more fortified houses such as:



Raths:

circular enclosures surrounded by ditches and fences



Crannogs:

man-made islands on which homes were built for protection

Bronze Age Crafts



The Lunula was a crescent shaped ornament thought to have been used to fasten cloaks around the neck. There have been finds of Lunulae in Co. Mayo and Lissanover, Co. Cavan. They had delicate designs engraved on the surface, usually simple zigzag patterns and diamond and triangular shapes.

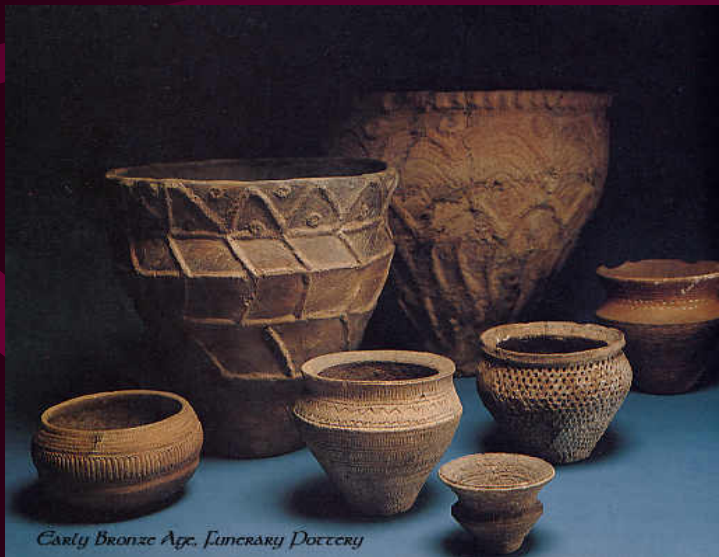


The most impressive example of these armlets were found in Derrinboy, Co. Offaly, and date to between 1200 - 1000 B.C. They are decorated with raised ribs of alternately plain and patterned repoussé work. They come from what is termed as the Bishopsland Phase. The repoussé technique involved hammering a design onto a piece from the back.

The gold dress fastener found in Clones, Co. Monaghan, dates from the 8th century B.C. and is decorated with many small circular shapes engraved into it. It is pure gold and weighs over 1000 grammes it probably was used for ceremonial occasions.

It can be seen in the National Museum of Ireland and belongs to the Dowris phase of the Late Bronze Age at circa 700 B. C. It has a length of 21.5 centimetres.

It functioned as a double button meant to slip through two holes in a garment such as a cloak. The largeness and elaborate decoration on the surface probably meant it was only worn infrequently.



Early Bronze Age Funerary Pottery

Pottery was also important in Bronze Age Ireland

Bronze Age Burial Customs

Most Bronze Age burials were in cists (pronounced 'kists'). These were small rectangular holes in the ground (80cm x 50cm x 50cm) usually lined with slabs of stone. Either the body was cremated before burial or the knees were brought up to the chin and the body was rammed into the grave. A small pot was usually placed in the grave beside the head.

Another type of popular burial was the 'pit and urn' burial. A circular hole was dug and sometimes a slab placed at the bottom. The human remains were put in the hole and an upturned urn was placed over them, after which the hole was filled in.

Many Bronze Age burial sites had a hill of clay built over the cist. This is called a 'barrow'. Barrows differed from megalithic tombs in that there was no doorway or hollow chamber. It was just a hill on top of the grave.



So-called Wedge Tombs consist of a narrowing stone chamber covered by a mound of earth. The single entrance almost invariably faces south-west. The most common megalithic feature in Ireland, they are found in western Ulster, Connaught and Munster although there is a huge concentration of 120 examples in a small area of northern county Clare. The wedge tombs in Kerry and Cork are the first megaliths to be found in those areas and this is possibly due to the presence of copper ore in that area and subsequent surge in population. Alternatively, as the Wedge Tombs are found primarily in upland areas



Thirteen out of the original 17 stones of this impressive circle survive, the most westerly of which is the fine axial, which has 2 egg-shaped cup-marks, one with a surrounding ring. The 2 portal stones' (1.8m high) are as usual on the NE side. Radiocarbon tests on the cremated burial found in the centre of the circle have a date between 150 BC and 130 AD, though the circle itself is almost certainly Bronze Age. I



An example of a Bronze Age monolith

The tallest standing stone in Britain, at just under 8 m in height, with a circumference of 5m. The pointed top is protected with a metal cap. Dragged from Cayton or Cornelian Bay 16 Km to the north, the stone weights an estimated 40 Tons. The stone was erected in approximately 1600 BC, and its depth into the ground may be as much as its height! There is a smaller gritstone in the nearby cemetery, along with a slab cyst grave.

Questions

- 1. When was the Bronze Age in Ireland?**
- 2. What metals are mixed to make Bronze?**
- 3. Name and describe one type of dwelling built by Bronze Age people in Ireland?**
- 4. Name and describe one piece of jewellery or pottery made during Bronze Age Ireland?**
- 5. Name and describe one Bronze Age burial tomb?**