

Celtic Art 3

Insular Art of the Iron Age

Iron Age and Romano-Britain

The term Iron Age is used to describe the period up to the Roman invasion. There was clearly considerable political change in Britain during the middle and second half of the first century AD, but the indigenous visual culture (and of course the use of iron doesn't disappear at this point, although it is substantially augmented by Roman visual culture).

To get started look at the British Museum's illustrated introduction 'Celtic life in Iron Age Britain', available on Google Arts and Culture:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/AWRz1O9u3piJg>

Introductions

General studies on Celtic art provide good coverage of examples of objects from Britain and Ireland. See for example:

- Chapter 6 of Ruth and Vincent Megaw, *Celtic Art from its Beginnings to the Book of Kells* (London: Thames and Hudson, revised and expanded edition 2001).
- Chapter 4 of Lloyd and Jennifer Laing, *Art of the Celts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).
- Chapters 5 and 6 of Julia Farley and Fraser Hunter (eds), *Celts: Art and identity* (London: British Museum, 2015). The preceding chapters also integrate British material into their discussions (and chapter three, Fraser Hunter and Jody Joy, 'A Connected Europe c. 500–150 BC', can be found on [Academia](#)).

In addition, an alternative short introduction can be found in the Shire Archaeology volume by Ruth and Vincent Megaw, *Early Celtic Art in Britain and Ireland* (1986 and 1994). See also I.M. Stead, *Celtic Art in Britain before the Roman Conquest* (London: British Museum Press, second edition, 1996).

The edited volumes *Technologies of Enchantment?* (2012) and *Rethinking Celtic Art* (2008) on the reading list are both available online through the library. The Introduction to *Rethinking Celtic Art* by Chris Gosden and J.D. Hill is an excellent place to start. In the same volume is Jody Joy's chapter on mirror decoration, and the author has made a wealth of material on British Iron Age art available on his Academia pages. He addresses the relationship of the corpus with continental material in his article 'Connections and separation?: Narratives of Iron Age art in Britain and its relationship with the Continent' (2015), which you will also find on the reading list.

Many of the key objects can be found on the British Museum website, see for example:

the Battersea shield

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1857-0715-1

Snettisham great torc

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1951-0402-2

Desborough mirror

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1924-0109-1

There is more to be found on the websites of National Museum Wales, such as finds from Llyn Cerrig Bach

<https://museum.wales/collections/online/object/673f3849-0f1c-3140-81bf-2635987813c4/>

and National Museums Scotland, such as the Torrs pony cap and the Deskford carnyx, articles on which can be found here:

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/torrs-pony-cap/>

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/deskford-carnyx>

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