

## The Early Bronze Age

2400 – 1500 BC

- At the beginning of the **Bronze** Age, new skills in metalworking were introduced at the same time as the spread of the distinctive **Beaker pottery** across Europe.
- People began to make objects using metal; **bronze** (an alloy of copper and tin) and gold.
- Copper was first mined in the counties of Cork and Kerry.
- Tin was available in only small amounts in Ireland and was possibly imported from the Cornwall in the south of England.
- Gold is present in different quantities all over Ireland; most notably in areas such the Sperrin and Mourne mountains in the North and North East and the Wicklow mountains in the South East.
- Over the following centuries, great technical ability and a sophisticated sense of design and decoration was achieved.
- The **Bronze** Age period is considered to be the beginning of Irish craftsmanship.

**Bronze** Age **artefacts** in the National Museum's collection include-

- Pottery—used to hold food and also the cremated remains of the dead.
- Utility Objects—such as weapons, shields, tools, trumpets, axe heads.
- Jewellery – such as discs, **torcs**, **lunulas**, fibulas, lock-rings, **gorgets**, amber beads and jet beads which may have been used as symbols of status or power.

### Gold working

- The gold used during the Early **Bronze** Age was **alluvial** - found in the gravel of mountainous rivers and streams.
- Flakes of gold were collected and were melted together into small bars of gold called **ingots**.
- The **ingots** were then beaten and stretched into thin flat sheets of gold.
- Gold wire was made by cutting narrow strips of beaten gold and twisting them together.

**Examples of alluvial gold flakes, ingots and beaten sheets of gold can be viewed in the National Museum.**

### Early Bronze Age Metalworking Techniques

- **Incision** – the decoration is incised into the front of the metal with a sharp pointed instrument.
- **Repoussé** – the design is hammered into the back of the metal and it appears in **relief** (raised) on the front.

### Decoration

- **Abstract** and **geometric** non-representational shapes were used.

Some common shapes include;

- raised circles and dots
- hatched triangles
- **chevrons**
- **concentric** circles.