

## **Iron Age and Roman Gold and Silver Objects**

Dr. Julia Farley, Curator of European Iron Age Collections, British Museum

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Report by Francis Nicholls

Dr Farley began by outlining some of the early details of the forthcoming Celtic exhibition to be held at the British Museum, probably in September 2015. It would be the first exhibition of Celtic art in the UK for 40 years.

She posed the question 'who were the Celts?' Were they:-

- the ancient peoples referred to by ancient authors?
- the people who spoke ancient Celtic languages?
- medieval people who practised Celtic Christianity?
- or the people who speak modern Celtic languages in the Western fringes of Europe?

Whoever they are or were, the common thread is in Celtic art. The first Celtic art was in a new abstract style, using interwoven designs incorporating birds and wild beasts. Celtic art was often associated with items of personal adornment and showed incredible artistic and technical skill; the style occurred north of the Alps, from Ireland in the west to Romania in the east.

In Roman times, Celtic art was pushed to the fringes of the empire and almost died out. However, in Ireland, Scotland and western Britannia, the tradition continued in a new artistic way as though to deliberately distinguish itself from Roman decorative art.

With Celtic Christianity came the stone crosses and illuminated manuscripts.

After the medieval period, Celtic art fell out of fashion. The style was rediscovered in the C19th. in western Europe. People then were looking at new types of art based on historic designs. The 'Celtic Revival' meant that ancient designs were re-introduced.

Celtic art continues to have an impact in modern times, initially through the Arts and Crafts movement and later on through the designs of art nouveau.