**An Mheánaois Luath** *(Early Medieval Period)* **AD 400- AD 1200**

**Chríostaíocht – An Aois Órga** *‘Golden Age’*

**5ú – 8ú Aois AD**

The National Museum of Ireland houses numerous metalwork artefacts which date to the Early Christian period in Ireland. The coming of Christianity in the 5th century accelerated the slow development of new forms of Irish craftsmanship. Pagan and Christian artistic designs merged seamlessly. By the 7th century, many Irish monasteries were established as centres for learning. The church grew to be the chief patron of the arts and of artistic production, a tradition which continued for hundreds of years. The 7th and 8th centuries, in particular, are often referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of Irish art because of the level of technical accomplishment reached on the island.

* Craftsmen took influence from a variety of foreign sources. Ideas were communicated to Irish craftspeople *(Ceardaithe)* through contact with merchants *(Ceannaí),* churchmen and from undertaking long pilgrimages *(Oilithreachtaí).*
* Native Irish styles of art and craftsmanship were merged with a mixture of Germanic *(Gearmánach)*, Anglo-Saxon *(Angla-Shacsanach),* Roman *(Rómánach)* and Mediterranean *(Meánmhuir)* styles.
* Many of the objects from this period were made using techniques and designs that were Roman in origin, such as **lathe-spun** *(Deil-Chasta)* chalices and **penannular** *(Neasfháinneach)* brooches *(Bróiste).*
* One outstanding style of the era is known as the **Ultimate** *(Deireanach)* **La Téne** style.
* There are strong visual links between the art on manuscripts *(Lámhscríbhinní),* high crosses and metalwork of the period.

**Some Common Decorative Motifs** *(Móitíf Maisithe)*

* **Triskeles** *(Triscéil)* Trumpet patterns Spiral patterns
* Foliage *(Duilliúr)* **motifs Interwoven strapwork** *(Bandáil Idirfíte)*
* **Zoomorphic** decoration*(Maisiú Míolchruthach)*

**New Metalworking Techniques**

* **Cloisonné** – a silver grid is filled with coloured **enamel** *(Cruan)*also used whencreating a decorative stud *(Stoda).*
* **Champlevé-** powdered **enamel** is applied to cells or spaces that have been carved or cast *(Múnlaithe)* into the surface of metal; the **enamel** is then fused *(Comhleáite)* into place by heat.
* **Filigree** *(Fíolagráin)* **–** fine gold wires twisted into a rope and soldered onto a metal base to create **filigree** **interlacing** *(Dualaíochta).*
* **Millefiori –** tiny rods of glass of different colours are fused together in colourful patterns, then and cut in cross sections to display the pattern.
* **Kerbschnitt –** a method of metal casting *(Múnlóireacht)* which imitates a wood carving technique called chip-carving.
* **Engraving –** **incising** *(Gearradh)* into the surface of the metal with a hard object.
* **Gilding** *(Órú)* **–** thin sheets of gold applied onto metal such as silver or **bronze** *(Cré Umha).*
* **Die-Stamping**- *(Stampáil Dísle)* A procedure in which steel, brass, or bronze dies are used to impress an image on a surface by using a relief counterpart or the reverse thereof.