

# Pre-Christian: Burials and monastic sites |

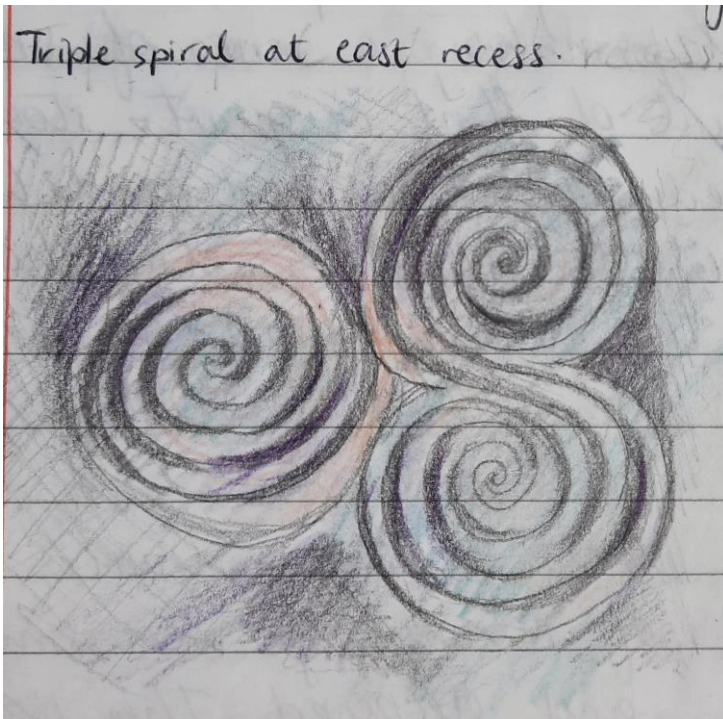
## Sample answer

### 2008 Higher Level Question 1

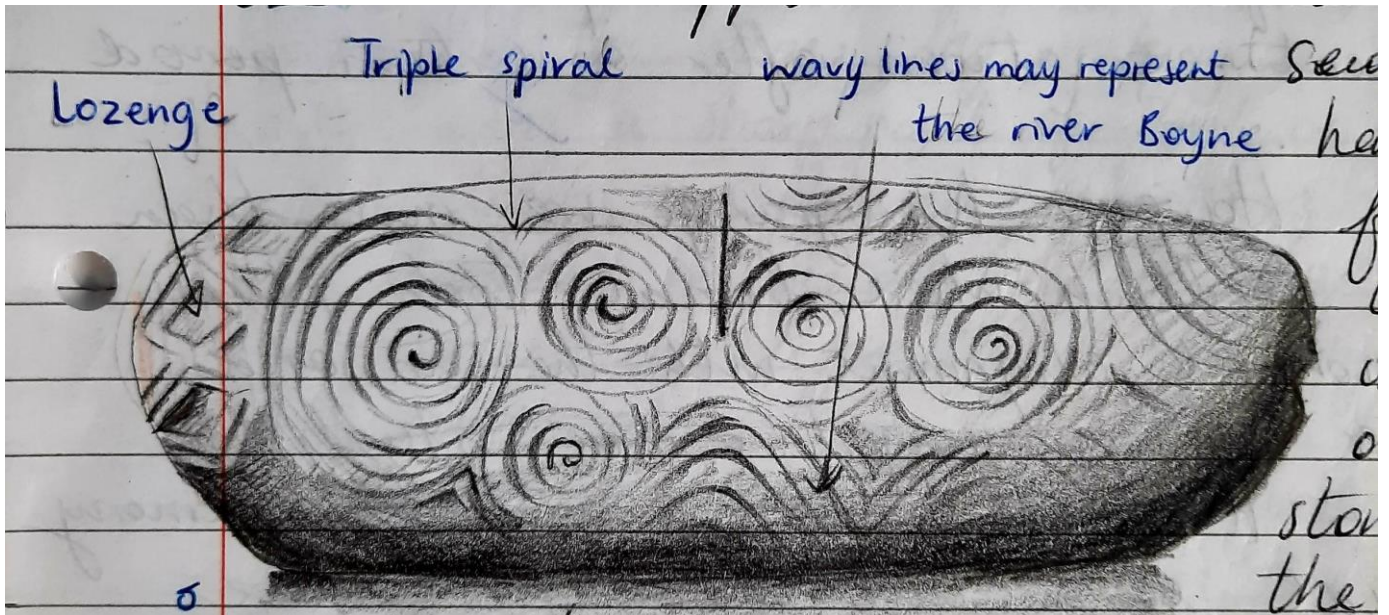
*Describe and discuss the stone carvings at Newgrange, referring to their location, motifs and techniques used. AND Compare the carvings at Newgrange with one other example of stone carving from the pre-Christian period.*

#### **Newgrange**

Newgrange is an international collection of motifs. The site is renowned for the beautiful abstract art that is carved on the stones of the passage mound. Many of the stones that surround the mound are decorated with peculiar motifs. These designs were picked on the surface of the stones by making a series of small pits using a sharp point of flint or quartz stone. The patterns are planned beforehand and guidelines were scratched or incised into the stone with charcoal or a softer stone before the carving began. The artists then rubbed along these lines with a hard stone to create a grooved line. The lines on the entrance stone of Newgrange were smoothed and deepened this way. Alternatively, areas on the surface of the stone were solidly picked. They cut into the stone using sharp flint or obsidian edge, pecking the area with a point driven by a hammer. This technique left areas of low relief which created a motif. This decoration can be seen on the underside of the roof box lintel where the solidly picked areas created a triangular geometric pattern. Combinations of concentrated circles, wavy lines and triangles can be also seen on the stone.

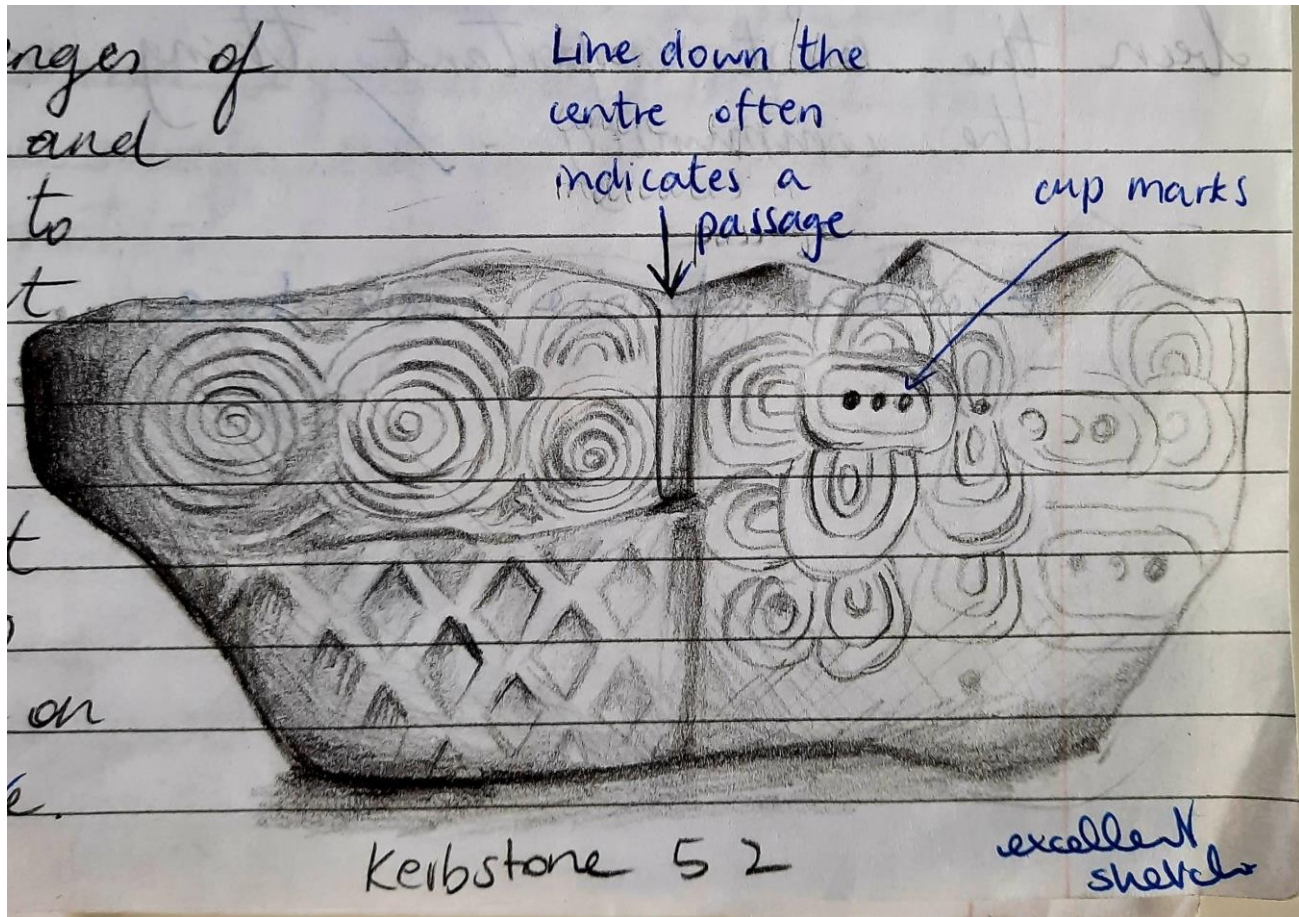


Many of the orthostats lining the passage of the tomb are decorated with concentrated circles and chevrons, some areas have also been blanket picked. Contrary to popular beliefs, spirals are less common but are placed in the most important places for example in the east chamber and on the entrance stone. The entrance stone at Newgrange is covered in a curvilinear which emphasizes the size of the stone. The triple spiral dominates the surface and on its left-hand side is a series of lozenges. A groove is carved at the top which lines up with the entrance and the roof box. Many historians believe that the triple spiral depicts the three mounds Knowth, Dowth and Newgrange. The groove is interpreted as a tunnel or passageway, although a similar line down the middle of the stone is found on Kerbstone 52 (opposite the entrance stone), a second passage has not been found. The consistency and intricate designs on the entrance stone suggest the high level of skill the artist must have possessed and the importance of the stones. In addition, the stone was given a further overall dressing before they were positioned. This meant that the rough edges were removed to take away the thin layer of weathered stone to improve its colour.



Kerbstone 52 is believed to have been decorated by three different people. The spirals on the top left resemble the style seen on the entrance stone, leading us to suspect that it may have been created by the same artist. Below it, are lozenges of lower quality. They are mathematically calculated to fit comfortably into the available space. Beside it, the art style changes completely. The naturally occurring cup marks are surrounded by overlapping arcs and half-formed concentric circles. The design looks a lot more loose and spontaneous compared to the carefully planned lozenges and spirals. This was probably because the artist had to integrate the naturally occurring cup marks into the final design. The slight variations in motifs suggest that many people worked on this one stone.





## The Turoe Stone

As time progressed, so did art. La Tene art was introduced to Ireland by the 3rd-century bc. It combined the influences from classical Greek and Roman art, the Etruscans, the Scythians and Oriental art with the Celtic style. Their art was a curvilinear style based on the plant designs of the Mediterranean, but the Celts transformed this into flowing abstract compositions. The new style combined leafy palmate forms with vines, tendrils, lotus flowers, spirals, S scrolls, lyre and trumpet shapes into a flowing, sinuous, abstract style that the Celts used to decorate ornaments and weapons. This was a development from the abstract and geometric art of the Bronze Age people. The style of art used by the first native craftsmen in Ireland is called Insular La Tene. It is a modified version of the European style and consists of S scrolls, leaf and vine forms, trumpet ends and spirals. The motifs on the Turoe Stone is completed in this style.

The Turoe Stone dates back to around 50bc and is located in Co. Galway. The pink feldspar granite boulder is 1.68m tall and dressed into the shape of a domed cylinder, meaning the weathered outer layer was removed to reveal the brighter undercoat of the stone. The stone was carved with iron chisels with the background cut away to a depth of about 3mm, leaving a flowing abstract pattern standing out in low relief. The same technique of carving was used in the stone

age but the design displayed on the Turoe Stone exhibits a more sophisticated and skilled sense of decoration.

The upper 78 cm is decorated in free-flowing abstract design and takes the form of semi-abstract leaf and vine shapes, trumpet ends and spirals all flowing in casual symmetry. It is split into four segments, with two triangular segments that join across the top and two shield shapes on the broader sides of the stone. A single triskele appears in one of the segments. This is similar to the triple spiral seen on the entrance stone. There are areas of solidly carved disc shapes, specifically placed on the stone and may have represented the movement of the planets and stars. A brick or step pattern forms a band below the decorated dome and separates it from the plain base. The function of these decorated stones remains unknown. Some suspect they may have been boundary markers or ceremonial objects used in rituals connected with fertility and they may have walked around the stone for sacramental purposes.

