SIR JOHN RHŶS MEMORIAL LECTURE

CELTIC ART: EXPRESSIVENESS AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH 2500 YEARS

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SIR JOHN RHŶS saw Celtic as much more than a group of languages; to him it was a way of life. His thinking gave Celtic studies a wide-embracing wholeness, and a continuing urge to reassessment,[2] realizable through the Academy's foundation of this lecture series. Celticists have been here favoured, in that such lectures in recurrent celebration of one honorand are a distinctively British institution;[3] the academies and universities of Europe have no such instituted commemoration for A. Holder, Heinrich Zimmer, or Kuno Meyer. It is with great pleasure that I offer my contribution to the furthering of Sir John Rhŷs's vision.

In this 44th Rhŷs Lecture we shall explore some ways in which the practice and enjoyment of the visual arts have enriched the lives of Celtic peoples through some two and a half thousand years. We shall see fluent expressiveness from the hands and minds of many Celtic artists. They clearly had much to say, and for their art to have lived on so vigorously it must have met with a ready acceptance. The quantity of its survival declares its power in communicating with a wide range of receptive Celtic people, wealthy and not-so-wealthy, pagan and Christian. This survey is intended also to show the extent to which continuous

[1] This lecture was subsequently given at the University College of North Wales in Bangor (where at the Normal College in 1859 John Rhŷs first started his training as a teacher), and then at the University of Aberdeen (29 May 1987). The final result has profited much from the subsequent discussions.

[2] First Sir John Rhŷs Memòrial Lecture, *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, xi (1925), 187–212, and particularly the sensitive study by Sir Idris Foster, *Proc. VIIth Int. Congress Celtic Studies, Oxford, 1983* (ed. D. E. Evans, J. G. Griffith and E. M. Jope, 1986), pp. 10–14.

[3] Gombrich 1969, pp. 49 f. For List of References and abbreviations see pp. 121 ff.

threads can be traced through 2500 years and can thereby justify the overall concept 'Celtic art'.

Celtic art arose in the fith century BC as a reaction, a dissent,[4] from staidness in much of the native (the 'Hallstatt arts'), Greek and Italic ornament traditions[5] as they were seen by the Celtic wealthy in temperate Europe and southern Gaul. This is dramatically shown by some sculptured heads on the fringe of Greek colonial enterprise round Marseilles; the 'profoundly un-Greek mouths' at the sanctuary of Roquepertuse, which nevertheless 'only a Greek training could have enabled a native master to shape' (Pl. III).[6] A stone head not far distant, at Montsalier, has also a dramatic mouth and shows further dissent from orthodoxy; the skewed mouth expression, the slewed chin-cleft, and the cast in the eyes all reveal a restless urge to perturb the frontal symmetry,[7] and an acute awareness of eye-language (Pl. IV).

This individualistic view of the image of man can be traced a little more deeply into the Celtic world; there are hints in the mouth expression on a stone face from Holzgerlingen in Swabia (Pl. III); and its single un-naturally-continuous eyebrow ridge, from under which the eyes are set back to peer in deepest mystery,[8] introduce a further principle of Celtic design composition, the through-composed line, that had a long-lasting value.

But these stone heads are not very closely datable. A more exact time-setting for the upsurge of this dissent from orthodoxy in Celtic work comes from wealthy Celtic graves in south Germany and east Gaul, with their exotic imports of southerly manufacture in the early or middle decades of the fifth century BC.[9] Some of these imported items seem actually to have provided the exemplars that excited this Celtic work (Pl. V*a, b*).[10] It is

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[4] This dissent is strikingly analogous to William Blake's challenge, which makes its display with sinuous shapes similar to those we see below, Pl. V, Fig. 1 (Pevsner 1956, p. 127, pls. 99–100).

[5] ECA, 158–63. Such staidness does not, of course, mar the finest works of Greek or Italic craftsmanship which came into Celtic plutocratic hands in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, as seen in, e.g., the Grachwyll or Vix burials. Jacobsthal in his later thinking felt he had given too small a part to the native—'Hallstatt'—element in the genesis of Early Celtic Art.

[6] ECA, pp. 4, 165, pls. 2, 4.

[7] ECA, pp. 7, 165, no. 7, pl. 6. I thank Prof. D. E. Evans for discussion of the Greek inscription under the head, Pl. II.

[8] ECA, pp. 4, 9, 166, no. 13, pl. 13; AEIA, no. 14; compare Pl. X*c*.

[9] ECA, 135 ff.

[10] E.g., the handle-escutcheon of a stamnos in the Klein Aspergle burial, ECA, pl. 221*a*.

indeed most important that we should be able to isolate the work of this first generation of dissent, for this will reveal the immediate Celtic impulsive reaction to staidness and orthodoxy.

Most instructive is the burial at Klein Aspergle near Stuttgart.[11] Its time-position is well marked by the two Attic cups, one a red-figure cup with a priestess painted inside its base, attributed to the 'Amphitrite' painter, working in Athens around 450 BC.[12] Both cups have added gold sheet embellishments, luscious lobe-shapes but rather unorganized. Items in this burial show us further features of dissent from orthodoxy. First, let us consider the gold finials and sheathings of the pair of drinking-horns (Pl. VI*b*); their rams' heads are Celtic versions of heads on Greek rhyta (one is more thoroughly un-Greek than the other, Pl. VI*b*), showing a bold angled arris up the nasal, running back right over the frontal and the skull, at odds with the natural surface anatomy. This kind of un-natural ridge, pressing through and contradicting biological shaping, we have already seen in simpler form in the Holzgerlingen eyebrow ridge (Pl. III), and we see yet another very fruitful version in the eye tectonics of one Klein Aspergle ram head (Pl. VI). This latter, and the nasal-frontal-skull arris ridge of these horn-finial rams' heads, have ultimate Scythic roots.[13]

This device, the un-natural through-composed[14] line, is exploited to the full in the masterly canine heads on the Basse-Yütz pair of beaked flagons (Pl. VI, Fig. 2*a*; Celtic work of early fourth century BC).[15] Here the long through lines, carried right along the top of the muzzle and back beyond the nasal, then turned back on themselves (with an end-curl) to form the ear, dictate the whole head and ear architecture, and impart a sense of strength and structural unity to the whole composition. This ear-structure again has Scythic analogies, and probably Scythic roots, and has a long life in Celtic art (Pl. XVI*a*).

[11] ECA, pp. 25, 135-7, 141-3; AEIA, pp. 60-1, 64-5.

[12] Beazley 1963, ii, 830-1, no. 25.

[13] Minns 1913, figs. 98, 129, 187; Farkas 1974, pls. V, XV (building from contrasting planes set at an angle (thereby creating through ridges) is a Scythic characteristic, from the seventh century BC); Rostovtzeff 1929, pls. I, III.7, VII.34, IX.45.

[14] 'Through-composed' ('durchkomponiert') is such a good term in our context here, that I am not disposed to worry too much that it is not a literal transfer from the musicologists' usage, to mean, of a song, individually composed for each verse.

[15] ECA, pp. 200-1, pls. 178-83; AEIA, pp. 68-9, pls. 60-1; Megaw and Megaw 1988.

This through-composed un-biological line or ridge proved to be a long-lived compositional device with Celtic artists. Its simple roots (some of them Scythic)[16] seem to be embedded well back, but its effective elaboration seems to be a real Celtic creative activity. The theme is further developed also in Celtic human facial tectonics; a tiny gold ring from the Reinheim burial[17] shows a ridge (with softened edge) carried from the chin right round the jaw, up the back of the cheeks, and continuously over the eyebrows to run down the nose. The same procedure, with stronger arris ridge, appears on some anthropoid sword-hilts of the second/first centuries BC (Pl. IX*c*),[18] and on the escutscheon-heads of the first-century BC bucket from Aylesford in Kent (Pl. XI).[19] And on a most witty brooch of about 400 BC from Parsberg in north Bavaria[20] the line of the great pugnacious mouth is carried right back under the ear and nape, creating the illusion of continuing right up over the back of the head (Pl. V). The idea is much used later by modellers in Britain, especially in animal shaping, as we shall see (Pls. VI, VIII, Fig. 2).

The Klein Aspergle beaked flagon shows off also the liking of early Celtic modellers for the bulging faces which they took over from the Etruscan and orientalizing repertory.[21] In this grave the Etruscan stamnoi handles (Pl. V) could well have provided the actual inspiration for the wild physiognomy on the flagon handle (Pl. V), with its bib of assorted wavy leaf shapes.[22] Early Celtic artists modelled many such bulging faces, on small ornaments as well as larger pieces,[23] and gradually turned to creating real personalities of their own imagining (e.g., Parsberg, Pl. V).

Items in the Klein Aspergle burial and other comparable contexts of the fifth century BC illustrate another most important

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[16] Minns 1913, fig. 197; Rostovtzeff 1929, pls. VII.34, IX.42, 43, 46; Rudenko 1953, pl. LXXX.2, cf. pls. XLV, LXII, LXIII, LXIX, LXXX; Farkas 1974, nos. 100, 103, 112. Jacobsthal (ECA, p. 38) noted, as I do, that the comparanda for this ear-construction were to be found mostly towards the east of the Scythic world, from the Altai region eastwards, and that he did not understand why.

[17] Keller 1965; AEIA, pp. 76–7, 79–80, nos. 73, 79–83. Note also that on the Weisskirchen cat-owl (Pl. X; ECA, pl. 160, no. 317) the nasal line rises to divide into eyebrows, which then sweep right out into ears.

[18] ECABI, pls. 111–13; AEIA, nos. 241, 243.

[19] Stead, 1971, pl. XCI; ECABI, pls. 135–42.

[20] ECA, p. 194, no. 316, pls. 159–60; AEIA, no. 63.

[21] ECA, p. 21; AEIA, pp. 26–7.

[22] ECA, pls. 188, 220*a*; AEIA, pl. 50 (excellent view).

[23] ECA, pls. 157–62, 185–6, 188; AEIA, pls. 50–3, 63–4, 66, 71, 81–3.

and long-living feature fruitful of heightened expressiveness arising at this time of Celtic dissent, the fleshy, luscious swelling or waving shapes of lobes, S-bodies and of foliation (Pl. V*b*, Fig. 1). These swelling or waving outlines were in fact an independent creation of Celtic artists[24] of the fifth century BC, giving birth thereby to an instrument of infinite flexibility, adaptable to fit any shape of space, or sinuous composition (Fig. 1), fruitful and long-lived in Celtic art. Combination at the outset with distinctively swelling low relief (an idea taken from orthodox Greek usage)[25] much enhanced the visual and physical appeal (Pl. V*d*).

The expressive curving triangles, however, which were to be worked up as flexible growth-points for the most versatile ornament-flows, like streams broadening into lakes (Fig. 1), are in early work seen only in embryonic form, though they invite the eye to elaboration (Pl. V*d*).[26] Close-wound ('hair-spring') spirals, later to be so evocatively 'Celtic', are in these early days of Celtic art only used tentatively (Fig. 1).[27]

The openwork girdle hook from Hölzelsau along the Inn valley near Kufstein,[28] shows even more impatient signs of dissent from staidness (Pl. IV). It shows excitable perturbation of frontal symmetry, and energized animation, which were to be persistent elements through Celtic art. Such girdle hooks in early contexts come mainly from the Ticino district, but are found further afield.[29] This is the liveliest of the little manekins (others are rather leaden), his feet dancing up and down upon the musculation of the antithetic beasts with which, as Master of the Beasts, he should be contesting. This liveliness was probably inspired from Etruscan work such as cup-handles.[30] The interplay of muscular forces on this Hölzelsau piece introduces yet another new concept arising in the Celtic artist's mind—movement held in check, powerful forces held in restraint—which later becomes a strong factor in directing Celtic composition.[31]

Here, then, are a number of ways in which Celtic people of the fifth century BC in various parts of temperate and southern Europe were dissenting from some of the staid orthodoxy they

[24] ECA, p. 83.
[25] E.g., ECA, PP388–9, 441–7, 450–64.
[26] ECA, pl. 10, no. 19, pl. 31, no. 34; PP300–2, 304–5.
[27] ECA, pl. 129, nos. 215, 217; cf. ECABI, pl. 49.
[28] ECA, pl. 170, no. 360 (upside down for optimal view); AEIA, no. 95.
[29] ECA, pls. 170–1; AEIA, p. 84, pls. 95–9.
[30] ECA, pp. 118–19.
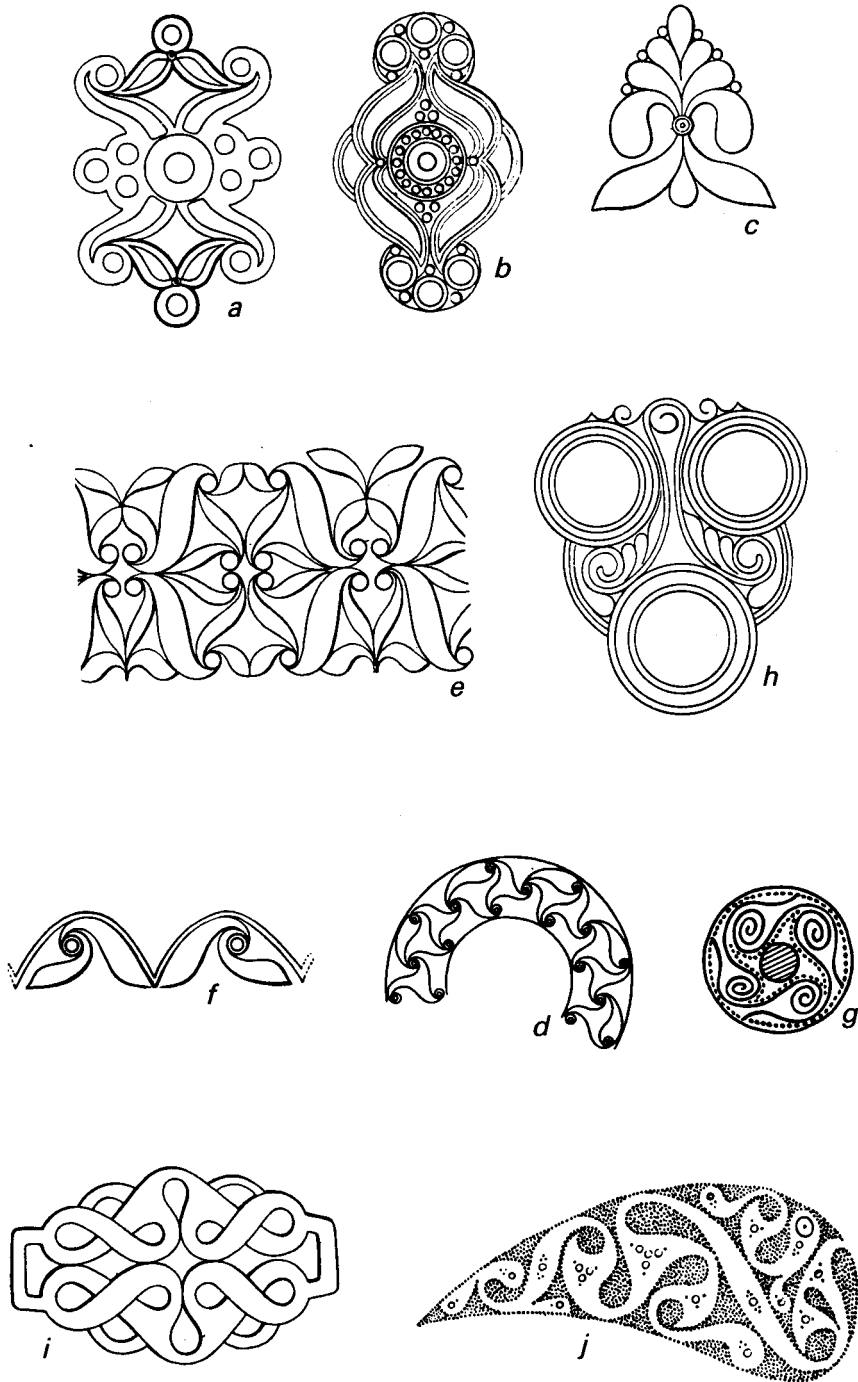[31] Jope 1976, 33; ECABI, 234, 276–8, pls. 270–1.

FIG. 1. Flexible foliate and bladder shapes, apt to fit any space: an early Celtic creation (a–c, e–f, h, j); curved triangles and leaves with growing tips (d–e, h–j), and spun-off leaves (a, e–f, h); close-wound spirals (g). (After *ECA.*)

saw then current in the ancient world, and spontaneously re-fashioning visual images more to their own liking:
(1) Disturbance of Greek sculptural composure, to heighten drama.
(2) Perturbation of frontal symmetry, leading to slantwise or slewed compositions.
(3) Through-composed (but biologically un-natural) arris lines, strengthening and unifying a composition.
(4) Celtic swell and pliant leaf-shapes, in outline and in relief; a real Celtic artists' creation.
(5) Energized animation of ornament; motion and forces held in check; 'pressure-tectonics'.
(6) Ambiguity and wit; power to evoke multiple interpretations from one image.

We have seen also that these Celtic artists' novel approaches to visual art had various extrinsic sources of inspiration, as well as an innate enterprise. This is a field—the genesis of Early Celtic Art—which still requires much research.

This early phase of exuberant dissent in Celtic Europe sobered into competent art production from the later fourth century BC onwards, highlighted with an occasional masterwork (e.g., Malomerice, or Brå, Pl. X).[32] We can follow the continuing life of some of our initial features of dissent. Perturbation of frontal or axial symmetry, and slewed decor, became widespread. Our through-composed arris-ridge lines persisted through many centuries, in facial tectonics, human (Pls. VI, IX, XVII) and animal (Pls. VI, VIII, Fig. 2), as well as in body architecture (Pl. VIII). Celtic swell was exploited with great expressiveness in outline and in relief and in openwork (especially in abstract compositions, Pl. Vd), as in the fourth-century metalwork in the Waldalgesheim grave,[33] or Italo-Celtic helmets of the third century BC.[34] Here was an ever-lasting, powerful Celtic instrument for flexible composition (Fig. 1). Animation, and its fertile developments, we shall discuss further below.

Drama continued to be highlighted, as in the tragic Malomerice faces[35] or the cadaverous linch-pin from Urach[36] near Stuttgart (Pl. VII), exploiting the arresting effect of black holes

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[32] Klindt-Jensen 1953, pls. IV, VI; AEIA, pls. 158–60, 165.
[33] ECA, pls. 37, 44–5, 96, PP. 441–9; Jope 1971, 167–80; Fig. 1i.
[34] ECA, pls. 84–7; AEIA, pls. 106–8.
[35] AEIA, pl. 158.
[36] ECA, pl. 101, no. 160; AEIA, pl. 150, cf. pl. 31.

(which probably were never filled, cf. Pl. VIIIa); note how the eye outlines are drawn right back to the temples (cf. Fig. 2). The fashioning of this linch-pin was initially blacksmiths' work (it is flashed with bronze), and it was they who wrought the Kappel eagle-head[37] to cap parts of a chieftain's chest-frame (Pl. IX), seeming here to exploit the expressive fibrous texture of wrought iron. Note how the eagle has been given bulging heavy eyebrows to intensify the menacing glare, and also how the Brå owl (Pl. X) has been given the reverse: ridged bags under its watchful eyes, to enhance a deceptive sleepiness.[38]

Persuasive expressiveness shows also in line-work (Pl. VIIa–d, Fig. 4a); note the realistic drawing of leg muscles and feet of the little goblin pair at the head of a sword-scabbard.[39]

With the beginnings of a real insular art, in the fourth century BC, a refreshing sparkle of originality can be seen, as in the floppy cheeked faces and swelling S-bodies on the Cerrig-y-Drudion lid flange (Pl. VII),[40] or in the originality of British brooch design,[41] or in the soft watercourse shapes set off against a hatched background on the Standlake scabbard-mounts (Fig. 1).[42] The brooch bodies of smooth swelling bronze, so dear to British taste,[43] were ingrained also in Continental Celtic usage,[44] and the tactile caressable swell was kept very much alive in British work. The Hounslow piglet,[45] of the first century BC, invites you— impels you—to pick it up (Pl. VIII); it was clearly a handle, probably of a trinket-box. The Rhosili pig with its soft muzzle-shaping (Pl. VIII)[46] has, on the other hand, body lines strengthened by long ridges created quite unnaturally under the line of the bristle-spine. This design concept has been pressed further on the Bulbury terriers,[47] where the angled arris sweeping through

[37] Fischer 1959, pp. 26–9, Abb. 4; Piggott 1971, pp. 248, 266.

[38] Klindt-Jensen 1953, pls. I, III.

[39] ECA, pl. 70, nos. 124–5; Navarro 1972, pls. LXXIV–V; Stead 1984, p. 272. Note how this kind of scabbard-ornament shows how widely art-work and style could spread across Europe and into Britain during the pre-Roman Iron Age (Stead 1984, map, p. 275).

[40] ECABI, pl. 29; Stead 1982, pl. XXV top; in this paper Stead reinterprets the Cerrig-y-Drudion pieces as a lid.

[41] Hawkes and Jacobsthal 1945; Hull and Hawkes 1987, passim; ECABI, 56 ff.

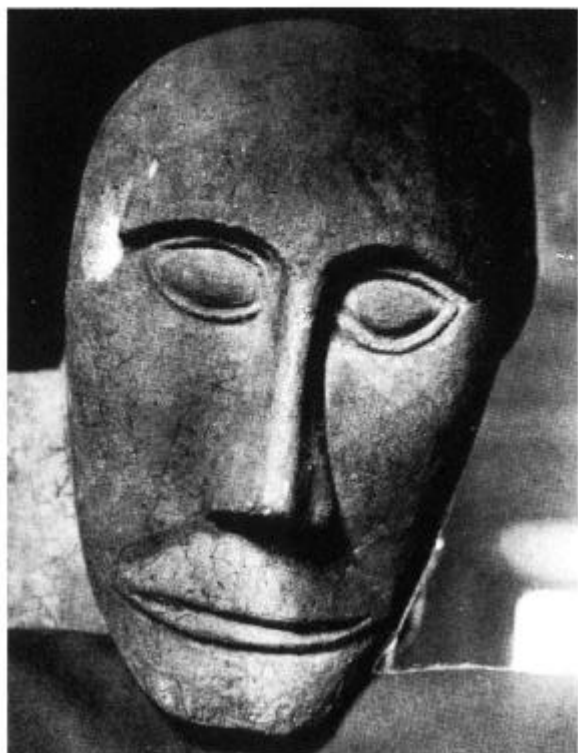[42] ECABI, pls. 48–9.

[43] ECABI, pls. 33–9.

[44] ECA, pls. 153–65.

[45] ECABI, pl. 160.

[46] ECABI, pl. 161.

[47] Cunnington 1884; Cunliffe 1972, pp. 294–6.

PLATE III

Stone heads. *a–c*, Roquepertuse, S. France (1:2). *d*, Holzgerlingen, Württemberg, Germany (1:2).

PLATE IV

a

a, Stone head, Montsalier, S. France
(1:2). b, Bronze openwork girdle hook,
Hölzelsau, Lower Inn valley, Austria
(1:1).

b

a

b

c

d

a, *b*, Klein Aspergle, nr. Stuttgart, Germany: *a*, handle-escutcheon of stamnos, *b*, head on flagon-handle (1:1). *c*, Parsberg, Germany: head on bronze brooch (1:1). *d*, Auvers, Seine-et-Oise, France: disc, thin gold on bronze and iron (1:1).
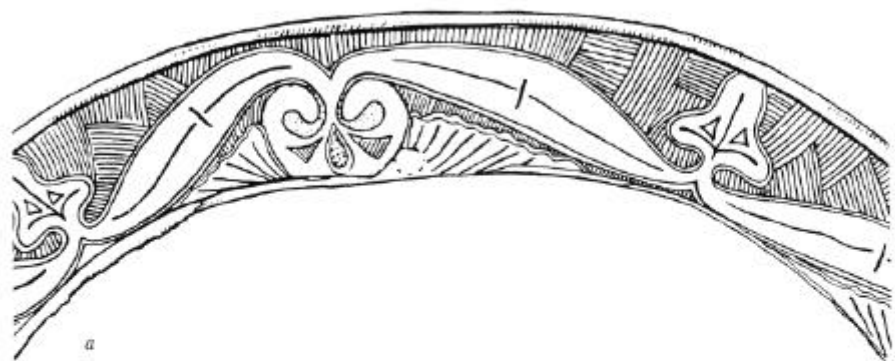
PLATE V

PLATE VI

a

b

c

a, Basse-Yütz, Moselle, Lorraine: top view of flagon (1 : 2). *b*, Klein Aspergle, nr. Stuttgart, Germany: ram's head finial of drinking horn (1 : 1). *c*, Trichtingen, Württemberg, Germany: bovine head with torc, finial on heavy silver collar (1 : 1).

PLATE VII

a, Fourth-century BC line-work in Britain: lid-flange of bronze from Cerrig-y-Drudion, Denbighshire (1 : 2); *b*, *c*, shield-facing of bronze from R. Witham, Lincolnshire: *b*, detail on lower boss flange (2 : 1), *c*, equine head supporter for lower disc (1 : 1); *d*, shield-facing from River Thames at Wandsworth: embossed man's head supporter for outer disc (1:1). *e*, Linch-pin head from Grabenstetten, Urach, Germany (1 : 1).
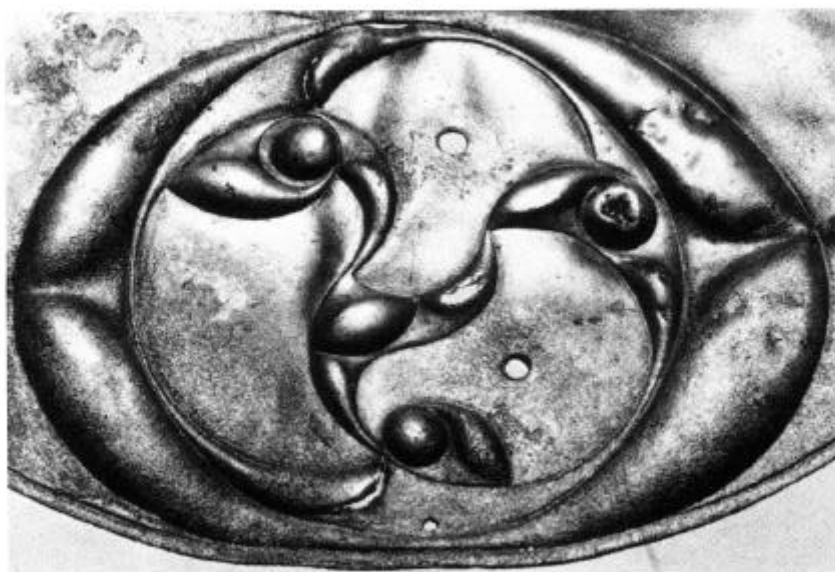
PLATE VIII

a

Animal figurines. *a, b*, Hounslow, Middlesex: piglet (*a*, 2:1, *b*, 1:1). *c*, Rhosili, Gower, S. Wales: pig (1:1). *d*, Felmersham, Bedfordshire: cow (1:1). *e*, Bulbury, Dorset, terrier (1:2).
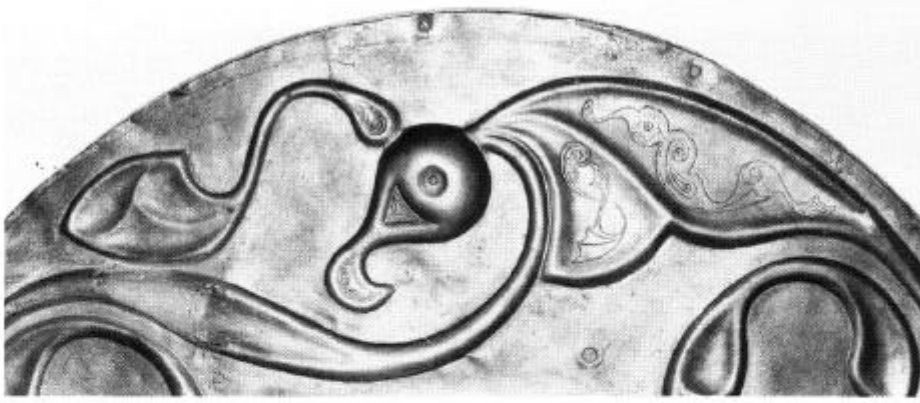
b

c

d

e

PLATE IX

a

b

c

d

a, Llyn Cerrig Bach, Anglesey: group of puffins, embossed bronze (1:1). *b*, Kappel, Germany: eagle head in wrought iron (1:1). *c*, Chatillon-sur-Indre, France: man's head of bronze on sword-hilt (1:1). *d*, Hounslow, Middlesex: small dog, bronze (1:1).
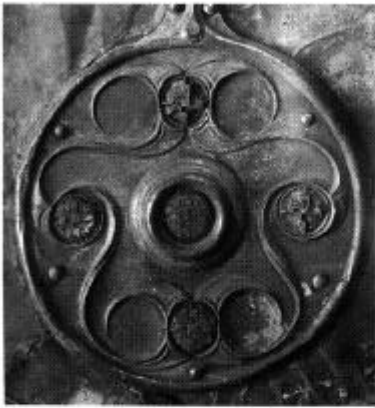
PLATE X

a, R. Thames, Wandsworth, London:
shield-boss roundel, detail showing large
bird rising (1 : 2). b, Brå, Denmark: owl-
head mount for cauldron (1 : 1). c, Weiss-
kirchen, Sarre, Germany: cat-owl on
brooch head (1 : 1). d, R. Thames, Dat-
chet, Buckinghamshire: bronze mount on
iron spearhead, showing tip-touching foli-
ate design (1 : 1). e, Seven Sisters, Neath,
Glamorgan: strap-mount, illustrating
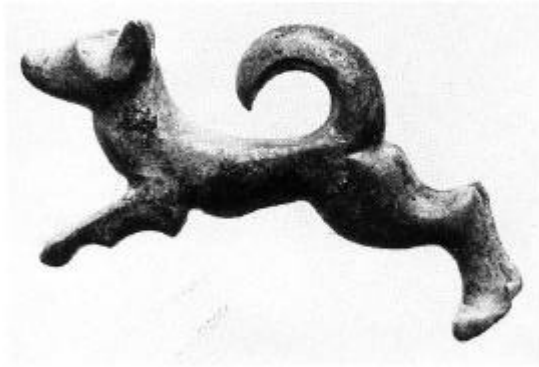'pressure-tectonics' (1 : 1).

PLATE XI

a, Cassington, Oxfordshire: 'elfin' brooch (1 : 1). *b, c*, Horses: *b*, Stanwick, Yorkshire: bucket-mount (1 : 1); *c*, Aylesford, Kent: part of bucket-frieze, showing pantomime horses (1 : 1). *d*, R. Thames, Battersea, London: bronze facing of shield, lower roundel panel (1 : 1).
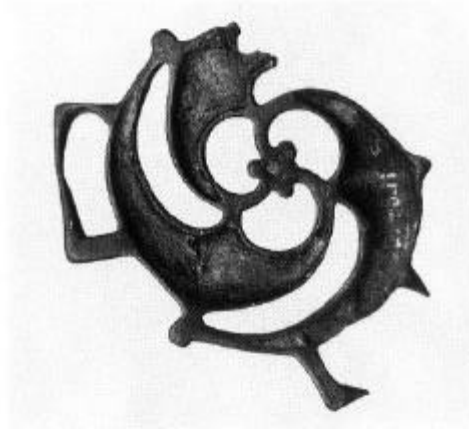
PLATE XII

a, Southbroom, Wiltshire: bronze figure of Mercury (1 : 1). *b*, Great Chesters, Northumberland: tombstone of Pervica (1 : 10). *c*, Aldborough, Yorkshire: dog figure (1 : 1). *d*, Openwork ornament, Hungary. *e*, Great Chesters, Northumberland: openwork bronze roundel (1 : 2).
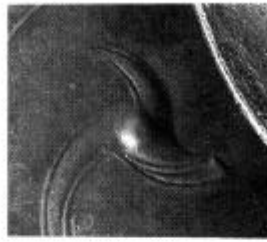
PLATE XIII

a

b

d

c

a, R. Ribble, Lancashire: rodent-head bucket-mount (1:1). *b, c*, the 'Petrie Crown' (Dublin): animated finials (*b*, 1:1, *c*, 3:1). *d*. Baginton, Warwickshire: escutcheon of hanging bowl (1:1).

PLATE XIV
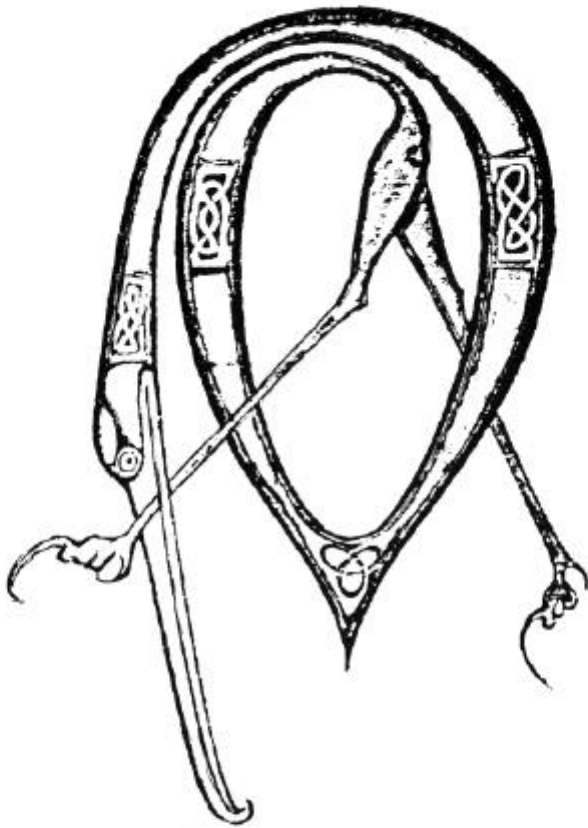
Ornamental initial (Collectio Canonum, Cologne Cathedral Library).

PLATE XV

Book of St Chad (Lichfield Gospels): St Luke folio 218.

PLATE XVI

a
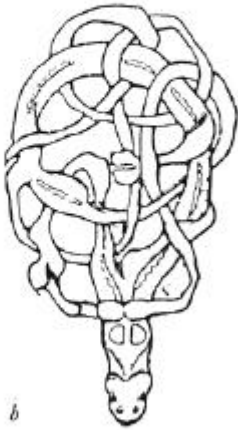
b

a, Book-shrine of the Stowe Missal: detail on side (2 : 1). *b*, Lincoln: ornament on English copy of an Irish-style book-clasp (1 : 1).

PLATE XVII

c

a, Toomevara, Co. Tipperary: detail on O'Hara tomb, late fifteenth century. *b*, Llanaber, Denbighshire: twelfth-century foliate carving in church. *c*, Saint-Thégonnec, Brittany: 'Calvary' (1618) carved on church.

b

PLATE XVIII
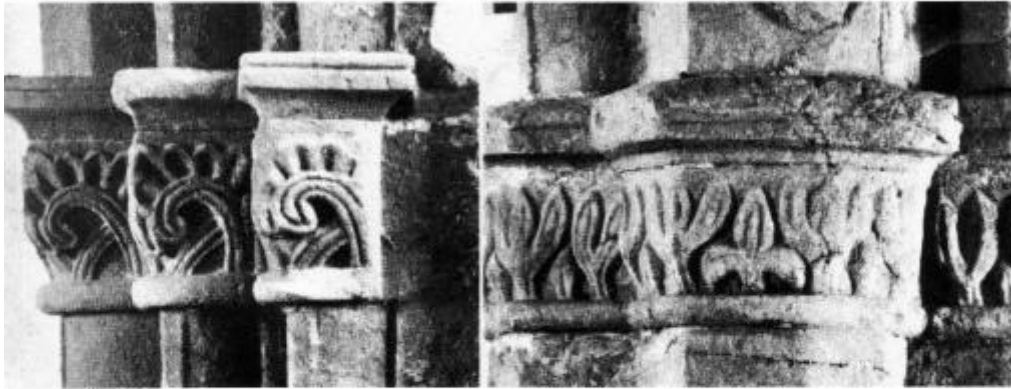
Augustus John (1878–1961): self-portrait in family group, 1915.

from the tail-tip daisy, scooping under the body and up into the neck and head, provides the skeletal strength for the animal's aggressive stance (Pl. VIII, Fig. 2; cf. Pl IV*d*).

Through lines running back from the mouth (cf. Pl. VI), and arris ridges pushing up the neck and right up the erect ears, do much to create the wary alertness of the doe head on a knife-handle from Birdlip (Fig. 2).[48] And the arris ridge is most effectively used in directing facial architecture, as on the bovine heads of the silver collar from Trichtingen (Pl. VI),[49] the Celtic significance of the collar proclaimed by the buffer-torcs they sport.

In Ireland the through-composed line is seen at this time (around the turn of this era) in the Keshcarrigan cup-handle
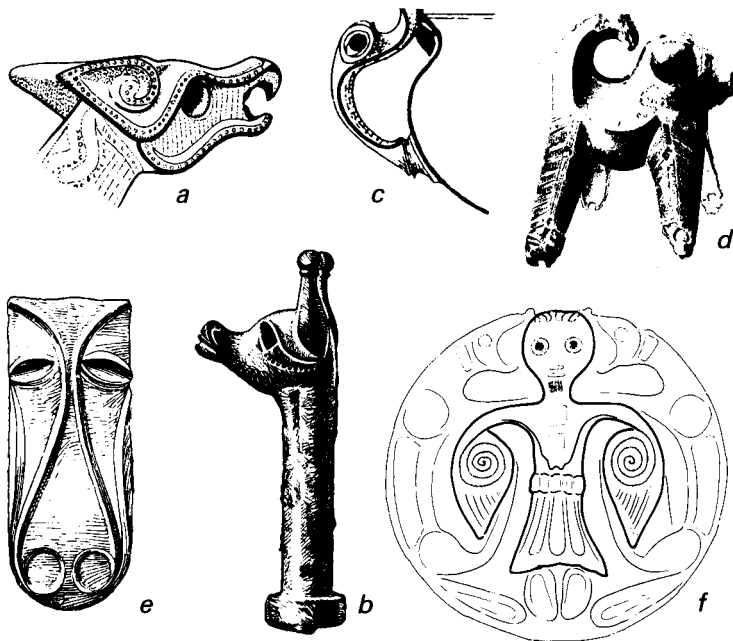
FIG. 2. Through-composed lines in Celtic animated compositions (Fourth century BC to eleventh century AD): a, Bass-Yütz flagons (Pl. VI); b, handle of knife from Birdlip Glos.; c, bird-handle of cup from Keshcarrigan, Co. Leitrim; d, terrier from Bulbury, Dorset (Pl. VIII); e, horse-head bucket-mount from Stanwick, Yorks (Pl. XI); f, shrine of Stowe Missal (Pl. XVI). The heavier lines show how vital the through-composed lines are in forming the figure compositions. (a, c, f, E.M.J. del.; b, e, after Smith 1925, p. 190; d, after Cunnington 1884.)

[48] Smith 1909; ECABI, pl. 163.
[49] P. Goessler 1929; AEIA, pp. 135–6, pl. 216.

(Fig. 2),[50] on which a thin relief rib sweeps from the tail right round the bird body, and (quite un-biologically) under the eye, round and up the beak, to create the up-turned bill of a male Shelduck, the speciation confirmed by the ridge and frontal shield so specific to this bird.[51] This long sweeping line gives the handle its strength; its rounded shaping again invites the viewer to pick it up. These two opposing visual effects, soft fleshiness and the un-natural arrised through-composed line, are here worked together by the Celtic artist in pursuit of dramatic effect.

Celtic artists, especially in Britain, became very fastidious. This is well seen in the delicate tip-touching in the line compositions that decorate mirror backs and other surfaces. On the bronze mounts of an iron spearhead from the Thames at Datchet (Pl. X)[52] the artist has used this light tip-touching (at the base of the stem as well as poising the flower) to evoke water-plants waving in the breeze. On the Colchester mirror (Fig. 3) this device of tip-touching has been used to even more meaningful effect, to poise the circled-tricornes which, with only two of the segments drawn in, can be either opening buds when set upwards, or bursting fruits when hanging downwards.[53] The whole Colchester composition thus raises the dual transcendental concept of the Tree of Life: harvest in autumn, seeding time and renewal in spring. It is here set out with such deliberation that the interpretation can hardly be denied.

Leaves in British foliation can become very searching and inquistive. Some reaction against swelling shapes also can be detected in British line foliation in the later first century BC, so that bodies, instead of bulging, seem narrowed to look like twisted tapes.[54] Plenty of pieces survive, however, to show that fleshiness was never lost to sight or mind (Pl. VIII).

The Colchester mirror back achieves frontal symmetry with consummate grace, and many other mirror-back designs are basically symmetrical, though a little restless in their detail. Mirror decorators could not, however, always resist perturbing the schema,[55] sometimes quite violently and expressively (Fig. 3).

[50] Jope 1954, p. 93; ECABI, pl. 194; cf. Pl. IXa.
[51] C. D. Deane in Jope 1954, pp. 93–4.
[52] ECABI, p. 167, pls. 200, 267.
[53] ECABI, pp. 269–70, pls. 237–9; cf. Leigh 1984.
[54] ECABI, pp. 176–8, pls. 204–5.
[55] ECABI, 286–7, pls. 238–9. This reconstruction of the design on the back of the 'Gibbs' mirror reveals a pair of figures dancing lightly together; this was taken as the emblem of the 1983 International Celtic Congress in Oxford.

One mirror, in a burial at Great Chesterford (30 miles west of Colchester), seems to show a ghoulish figure with horrid tentacles, lurching crazily across the mirror back (Fig. 3).[56] These Celtic mirrors were a British phenomemon (Fig. 3), of the century before Romanization; they are nearly all found in burials and, like the Etruscan mirrors of three centuries earlier, were perhaps intended to glimpse the Other World.[57]

A further fastidious conceit, in symmetrical spatial modelling but related to tip-touching, was the small egg held delicately between the backs of two antithetic claws; it is seen in both the east and west Celtic world, on open-work, girdle-pendants, pin-rings and chape-frames.[58]

Until the last few items we have been very much concerned with physical, visual, tactile response, very inviting with the Hounslow piglet's ears (Pl. VIII). But these soft, caressable ears have another deeper significance, subtler and more abstract; the spatial symmetry is perturbed with reticence, as one ear is tilted and curled slightly forward (Pl. VIII). This modelled dis-symmetry is thus fully realized in three-dimensional space, and draws also an abstract, intellectual as well as a physical response from this very pettable little animal, such as we may perhaps already have felt with some of the through-composed tectonic constructions (Pls. VI, VIII). There are examples in British work of even more intense naturalism: the Felmersham cow with her tongue stretched out to lick one side of her mouth (Pl. VIII),[59] the boar palate of the Deskford carnyx-head,[60] or the Milber nightjar.[61] And where in the Romano-Celtic world do we place the magnificent Lydney dog?[62]

Such free spatial thinking was carried even further in Britain, in the Celtic artist's ability to image space on a surface. This is conceived so cleverly on the first-century BC shield-boss roundel found in the Thames at Wandsworth, with its two great heron-like birds rising so laboriously, but obliquely, into an imagined free space to the front of the shield (Pl. X).[63] This is really a

[56] Fox 1960; ECABI, pls. 238-9.

[57] Beazley 1950, pp. 1-17; Jope 1978, p. 35; ECABI, 194-210, pls. 238-9 notes.

[58] ECABI, pl. 208.

[59] Watson 1949, pl. V*d*.

[60] ECABI, pls. 177, 179.

[61] Fox, Radford *et al.* 1950, 27 ff.; ECABI, pl. 181.

[62] Wheeler and Wheeler 1932, pl. XXV; Toynbee 1964, pl. XXXIV.

[63] Jope 1978, pp. 34-5; ECABI, pls. 82-8.

more imaginative, more recondite conception of space than the spectator is given by Neapolitan wall-paintings of this age.[64] Abstract subtlety is even more apparent when an artist invokes lines of vision as a constructional device in his composition, as from the group of puffins on a plaque from Llyn Cerrig Bach in Anglesey (Pl. IX),[65] thus making the viewer give structure to the whole picture.

Various degrees of ambiguity were devices also used by early Celtic artists in Britain to express their conceits. The duality of mixed animals, or man and animal, is often seen. It was employed with some wit in the pantomime horses on the Aylesford bucket (Pl. XI*c*); the back legs are flexed not as those of a horse but as legs of the back man of a pair under a blanket (and you can see the hem-stitching round the front leg-holes in the blanket).[66] We have already seen a more reticent ambiguity on the Colchester mirror, in the dual intent of opening buds and bursting fruits in the little motif ( ). And a riddle has been posed by the creator of the 'mask' shield from the Thames at Wandsworth (Pl. VII)[67]—when is a mouth not a mouth, a chin not a chin? This conflation of facial features shows a subtle visual punning wit—it needs no words, its meaning taken in a flash.

In insular Celtic vision there grew another concept, a sense of force and of movement held on leash, imparting a great feeling of strength to a whole composition ('pressure-tectonics': Pl. X*e*).[68] Sometimes imagination oversails these limits; once the lyres on the outer roundels of the Battersea shield (Pl. XI) have been seen to move, they seem for evermore to be winding up and down on the swastika-discs, like a yo-yo.

These are all abstruse concepts; but we must accept that the point was taken by sufficient among the élite to make such witty exercises worth proliferating. The Celtic artist is here, through his visual imagination, creating a world of ideas for a largely non-literate clientele.

To pursue the thread of Celtic art into the post-Roman world (and the changes of outlook from pagan to Christian) involves understanding the cultural life of the Romanized provinces, of Gaul, even Germania, and especially of Britain. Even more

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[64] Richter 1966, pp. 50 ff.

[65] Fox 1946, pl. XIII; ECABI, pl. 184.

[66] Jope 1983, p. 156; ECABI, p. 170, pls. 136–7; Stead 1971 for three-legged reconstruction.

[67] Jope 1978, pp. 31–2, pls. V–VI; ECABI, pls. 70–5.
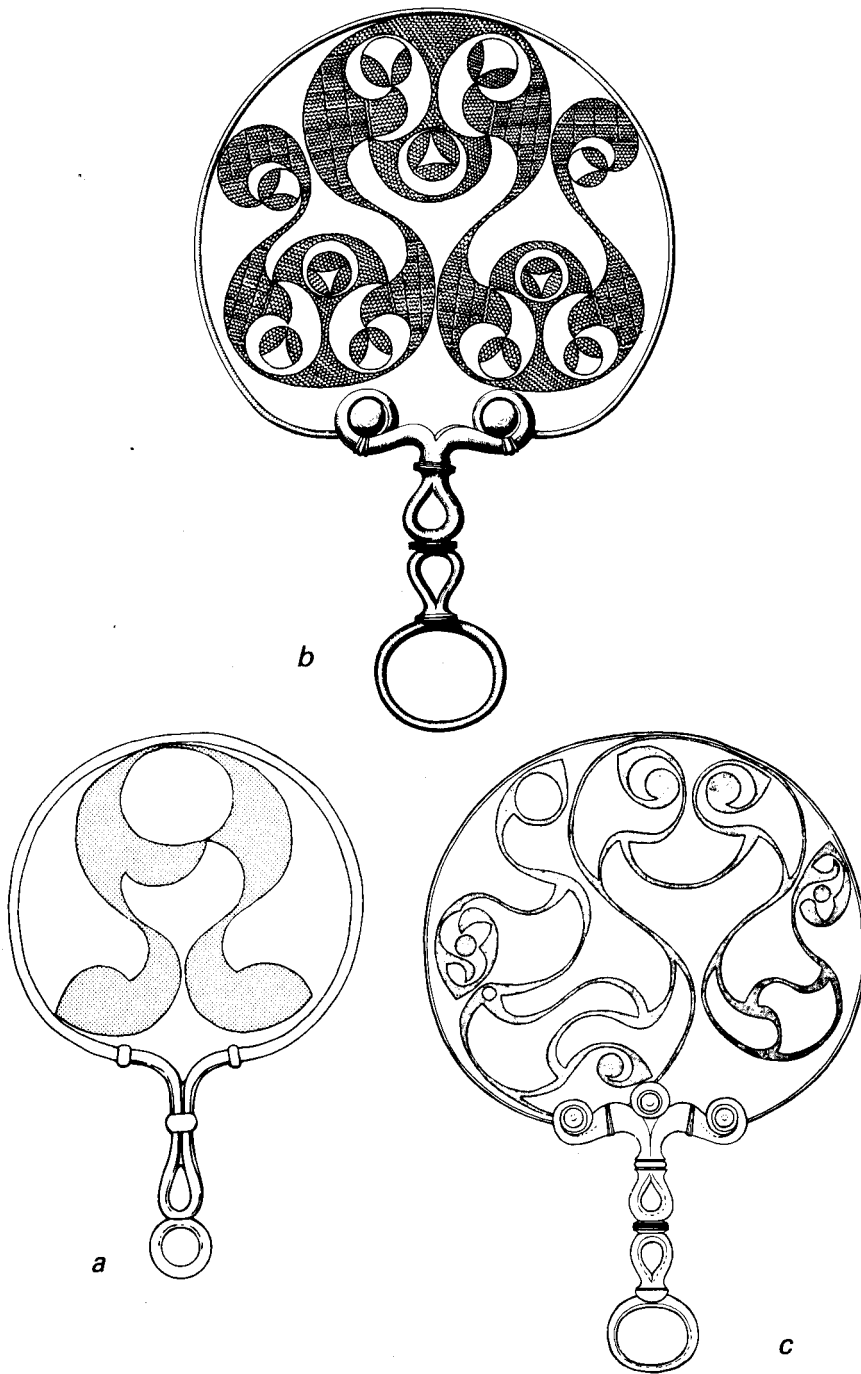
[68] ECABI, p. 278, pls. 270–1.

FIG. 3. Three British mirror-back designs, earlier first century AD: a, Colchester, Essex; b, Great Chesterford, Essex; c, the 'Gibbs' mirror (perhaps Kent). (After *ECABI*.) These mirror designs show the emergence of a Celtic wit from the gracious but subtle symmetry of a basic composition schema such as a.

crucial, and yet more elusive, is Ireland, virtually untouched by Rome during the first five centuries AD.

With the refined intellectualism we have here traced among the élite in Britain during the generations just before Romanization, it is not surprising that a more generous reassessment of the cultural life and art among the people of Romanized Britain is now emerging. As well as their inner Celticness, they had also a southward-looking taste, which is emphasized by the pre-Roman century of British coinage.[69]

We can see during the Roman age in Britain how some of our spontaneous 'Celtic' features survived. The unifying through-composed arris ridge proves effective in dictating the posture of a small dog from Aldborough in Yorkshire (Pl. XII);[70] from here also comes the rein-ring showing a man's head with heavy eyebrows.[71] This latter piece might have been in use well into the second half of the century, for chariots were sporting as well as fighting vehicles. Also from among the Brigantes, the bucket-heads and sceptre-heads in a second-century burial at Brough show how deeply-rooted native ideas (including the idea of bucket-burial) could live on alongside a simulation of Imperial pomp.[72] But these pieces show more: one sceptre-face peers from the opening of a close-fitting hood whose outline contradicts nature by carrying on round the eyebrows and down the nose. And one bucket-mount from Brough shows a most un-Roman threatening misanthrope, carrying us back to the Montsalier head many centuries earlier. The well-groomed bucket-creatures from Welshpool show how native ideas were permeating the better quality ateliers of the second century AD.[73] Bucket-escutcheons (Pl. XIIIa) carry a firm thread of continuing Celtic tradition into the post-Roman world,[74] as also does the animation of S- and other finials (Pl. XIIIb,c), and Celtic swell and whirligigs (Pl. XII,d,e).

There is a hint of the through-composed line acting visually against natural shapes, in the tombstone put up at Great Chesters on the Roman Wall for a British girl Pervica,[75] which shows a native sculptor's dissent from orthodoxy, the arm-lines continu-

[69] Toynbee 1964, pp. 29–37; Henig 1985, pp. 3 f..

[70] Toynbee 1964, p. 126; Smith 1852, pl. 25, fig. 13.

[71] Richmond 1954, p. 40; ECABI, pp. 194, 266, pl. 156.

[72] Corder and Richmond 1938, pls. XXIX, XXXI.

[73] Boon 1961, pl. 10.

[74] Pl. XIIIa; Hawkes 1951.

[75] Kendrick 1938, p. 24, pl. XI.

ing up and joining in a great arch over the breast, quite against
nature, but dictating the stance of the figure (Pl. XII).

Roman stock designs were invigorated by British craftsmen. A
bronze skillet of the first century AD is actually signed by
BODVOGENUS F[ECIT], an old Celtic name, but not specifi-
cally British.[76] He followed the Capuan models, but he did
choose to fashion over the handle-end twin smooth fleshy-bodied
dolphins, with intertwined tails disturbing the frontal symmetry,
and he instinctively perturbed it a little further by his hand-work
on the shell between the dolphins. British brooch-makers in the
first century AD elaborated the fantail brooch into thè gilt-bronze
Aesica brooch,[77] and fashioned the Roman 'Augenfibel' more to
their own liking, first in silver-gilt, then developing with full
spatial freedom the exquisitely expressive creatures of the 'elfin'
brooches with impish upturned snout[78] of a local south Midland
group (Pl. XIa). British craftsmen also began trying their hand
at making small statuettes, and innate Celtic taste may be
surfacing in the bold parallel arrised folds slanting across a small
figure of Mercury (and other figures) from Wiltshire (Pl. XII).[79]
This might suggest that the idea may have been the Celtic
equivalent of·the classical artists' occupation with drape folds as
a counterfoil to the shapes of nature. Celtic elements in the third-
century Bath sculptures have often been discussed,[80] and the
simplified rendering of acanthus foliation in the fine Cirencester
capitals suggests also the possibility of a British hand at work.[81]
Native work there must be also in later mosaic design,[82] though
the 'Celticity' (as contrasted with rusticity) is not easily defin-
able.[83]

The age of change from pagan to Christian ways is the most
enigmatic in the history of Celtic art,[84] largely because of dating
uncertainties. It is in the workshops and taste of the Celtic world

[76] Toynbee 1964, p. 320, pl. LXXVb; Brailsford 1951b, pl. XVIII.

[77] Collingwood 1930, pp. 38–42, pl. II; Toynbee 1964, p. 341; ECABI, pls.
186, 201.   [78] Oxoniensia, viii–ix (1942–3), 194–5; ECABI, pl. 154.

[79] Toynbee 1964, pl. XVIb; Brailsford 1951b, p. 54, pl. 16.

[80] Richmond and Toynbee 1955; Toynbee 1964, pp. 130 ff., 138; Cunliffe
and Davenport 1985.

[81] Toynbee 1955, p. 165, pls. 97–100; Toynbee 1964, pp. 145–6.

[82] Henig 1985, pp. 15–18.

[83] Unless it may be seen in the way bulging dolphins at Frampton, Dorset,
are given a spurious internal body-structure (Kendrick 1938, pl. XXI).

[84] As also in language: Jackson 1953, p. 61; D. E. Evans, Language Contact
in Pre-Roman and Roman Britain', Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen
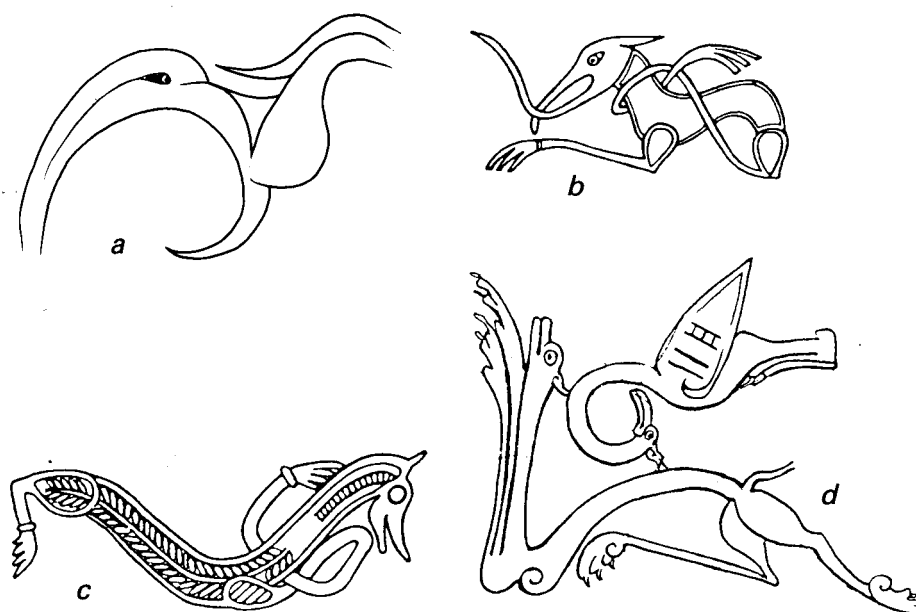Welt, ii, Bd. 29.2 (1983), 949–87.

FIG. 4. Influence of flexible Celtic lines in effective animation of strapwork: a, Witham shield, third century BC; b, Book of Durrow, later seventh century AD; c, Lichfield Gospels, later seventh century AD; d, Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, maplewood drinking vessel, early seventh century AD.

at this time that we should seek the reserves of ideas which seem to have leavened the strait ways of Germanic ornament tradition.[85] The crucial question is how the supple inflexions of swell (Pl. XIII*b*) came to be worked in to and relax the monotony of interminable strapwork, whether it be Germanic, classical, or even Celtic (and however intricate the interlace), to breed swelling bodies and gracefully moving animal shapes (Fig. 4).

Irish workers, with their apparently continuous craft practice, were in this matter very influential. But we must not neglect other Celtic provinces—Wales, Caledonia, and elsewhere in Britain where there remained free kingdoms such as Elmet. Even within Saxon England (and also in Gaul) some groups may have continued Celtic craft practice; it is difficult to avoid this view when dealing with the hanging bowls (Pl. XIII) and other enamels.[86] These matters are highlighted by the hanging bowls in an early seventh-century context at Sutton Hoo, where Germanic and Celtic crafts seem to be at work cheek-by-jowl, yet do not seriously intermingle stylistically.[87]

[85] Haseloff 1981, *passim*.
[86] Notwithstanding much discussion.
[87] Bruce-Mitford 1983, iii, 290–5.

The coming of a new medium, the persuasively handled brush or pen on vellum, giving rapidly flowing lines and sweeps of infinite flexibility, opened up a new era in Celtic art. The Cathach of St Columba, of the later sixth century, is our earliest example.[88] It is eclectic (though its art is scanty) bringing together details that are Italian (the animals, Fig. 5), Coptic and

FIG. 5. Details of brushwork shaping: a, b, c, Cathach of St Columba, sixth century AD; d, Book of Armagh, AD 807; e, f, Psalter of Ricemarus, later tenth century AD; g, Corpus Christi Coll. Cambridge MS 199, work of a Welshman Ieuan, later tenth century AD (Henry 1967, 108).

[88] Henry 1965, pp. 58–67, 166–7, pls. 9, 12; Lawlor 1916.

Byzantine (the rows of S-s and dots, Fig. 5, which Irish scribes so readily adopted), and innate Celtic (swelling S-bodies, and the almond set in a cusp, Fig. 5). The Italian connections are backed by some manuscripts with Irish features, bearing the *ex libris* of the monastery at Bobbio, south of Milan.[89] Here is a glimpse of the style of the earliest Irish *scriptoria*, before the rise of the distinctive Hiberno-Northumbrian mansucript art-styles, which developed the expressiveness of fluent, swelling shapes to the full, though they still retained much strait strapwork and rectilinear block décor.

Northumbria and its neighbours were a great cultural mixing-ground which, with Iona and Ireland, produced in the seventh and eighth centuries many of our well-known manuscripts. The St Chad gospel book of about AD 800, the work of an Irish illuminator (possibly working in Britain),[90] shows several of our initial spontaneous 'Celtic' procedures. The St Luke folio (Pl. XV) shows a gloomy figure, on which the artist has perturbed the frontal symmetry. And he has not been able to resist play with the feet, which show a restless impatience (notwithstanding the stigmata). Then the arms and the clothing are made to give un-natural through-composed lines, great swirls which give the whole décor its character, and the lower hem of the cloak rising in the centre into a vertical staff. The St Mark figure shows a rectilinear strap-border turning into a free strap hung over St Mark's left wrist, to fall in a slanting curve and end like an ear, with a curled return[91] like the dogs' ears on the Basse-Yütz flagons (Pl. VI). Other manuscripts from this milieu similarly show artists' interest in these basic principles.

Celtic masters of brush and pen carried their fluent styles through much of Christian Europe from the seventh century onwards. The bird-beast with slender gripping bill and sensitive rounded head, used so much in design construction, is one of their happiest devices; here Celtic brushwork is giving brusque Scandinavian animal ornament a real freedom and interest, seen to profusion in manuscripts, on metalwork or sculpture. A manuscript in the Cologne Cathedral library, perhaps the work of an Irish scribe in eighth-century Europe, displays some subtleties: the first page [92] shows how the artist could not resist

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[89] Henry 1965, pp. 27, 61 ff.

[90] Henry 1965, pp. 162, 174 ff, pl. K.

[91] Henry 1965, pl. 103; cf. also the arm-wings on work of AD 1045–52, Pl. XVI, Fig. 2; Henry 1970, pls. 28, 30; also Henry 1967, pl. 8.

[92] Henry 1965, pp. 162, 170, 174 ff., pl. 63.

relieving the dull monotony of repeating interlace, and he goes
further to allow the one loose end to grow a fine head and bill,
which grips the cross-stem and so locks the long intertwining
thread. Here is surreptitious but very real dissent from staid
frontal symmetry. The same manuscript has an initial letter
devised with such simple ingenuity as to amount to piquant wit
(Pl. XIV).[93]

The Book of Armagh, made in AD 807 (one of the very few
datable books),[94] shows freehand brushwork with even fuller
swelling shapes, and beasts with stubby muzzles (Fig. 5). Its
scribe, whose name, Ferdomnagh, for once we know, was a
virtuoso with brush and pen; note the way he uses curves with
great fluency, to create expressions of eagerness or resigned
acceptance, and how he brings a through-composed line up from
under the mouth, to carry on into the feline's ear, accentuating
its alertness.

A recent find of a remarkable sculpture (in local stone) at
Repton in Derbyshire[95] indicates that Irish sculptors also were at
work abroad in the eighth century. Its imagery is unusual and
perhaps has Celtic elements; but the brash sticking-out semi-
circular ears—no great artistic achievement—are very character-
istic of Irish ways in presenting the human head at this time.[96]

We may look for a moment at a Scottish problem—the
Celticity of the Picts. Jackson[97] warily considers the Pictish
language to be Celtic. But language is a fickle ethnic index (as
USA and Ireland both testify), and Pictish art shows little real
sign of Celtic character, little of the expressiveness we have been
viewing here. Only in the bowls in the St Ninian's Isle treasure[98]
is there any sign of pliant swell—and these bowls may be
extraneous to the Pictish tradition. The art suggests that 'Pictish'
was not a fully integrated Celtic culture, whatever the affilia-
tions of the language. The crucial point is not so much the
language they spoke but how they used it to express thoughts,
feelings, and ideas.

In the Viking Age much metalwork of Irish derivation was

[93] Henry 1965, pl. 101.

[94] Henry 1967, pp. 100 ff., pls. 18, 29–30, 33.

[95] Biddle and Biddle 1987.

[96] Henry 1965, pls. 47, 69; Henry 1967, pp. 8, 12–13, 79; Henry 1970, pls.
28–9, 46, 55.

[97] Jackson 1955a; 1955b.

[98] Wilson 1973; the hanging-bowl, no. 8, is an earlier intrusive piece in this
assemblage. Cf. Stevenson 1955 for earlier views.

carried into northern Europe, where its ornament exerted a pervasive influence (Pl. XVI*b*), and the term 'Irish Urnes' is not without significance.[99] Work of this age was very accomplished, but in some ways beginning to stagnate stylistically, though some of the major works of the twelfth century in Ireland itself are of the very finest quality (Pl. XVI*a*).[100] From the tenth century onwards Celticness in manuscript illustration became diluted by the pressure of Carolingian classicizing taste in Europe and in Britain.[101] Some manuscripts are even aggressively barbaric, as though tinged with a Saracen element, and in metalwork there was a rising interest in Scandinavian ornament. We seem to be drifting away from a purely Celtic world. But Celticness did not wholly disappear; it continued as a leavening deeply rooted in the mainstream of Carolingian manuscript tradition in Europe.[102] Irish manuscripts of this age gave also wide-ranging lessons on early medieval iconography, as artists seem to have become more aware that they must be less devoted to abstraction, and communicate a message.[103]

Can we detect here any of our ancient primary Celticizing devices? The book-shrine of the Stowe Missal (made at Clonmacnoise about 1050) has at one point a complex composition (Pl. XVI, Fig. 2), with a central figure whose arms curl to form wings which return into whorls, a through-composed line, exactly as the ears of the Basse-Yütz flagon dogs (Pl. VI, Fig. 2), playing havoc with nature. On the Lismore crozier,[104] an animal-head finial shows the eye shooting out an un-natural runner along the nose and round the snout. The Tau Crozier[105] exploits the nature/anti-nature concept. On the Glenkeen bell-shrine[106] the outer corner of the eye returns over the top of the eye, along the eyebrow and down the nose. And on the Breac Meadhog,[107] some figures are given an un-natural aspect by the sweeping arrises between the flutings; the whole apparel is a counterpoint of vertical flutings and swirls, and the hair trails off into the architectural surround. In these great works, the finest artisans of

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[99] E.g. Henry 1970, pp. 192, 201; Kendrick 1949, pp. 113 ff.
[100] Henry 1960; Henry 1967, p. 106.
[101] Henry 1967, pp. 101 f.; Henry 1970, pp. 200–5.
[102] Kitzinger 1940, pp. 39 ff.
[103] Henry 1970, pp. 74–5, 77, 82, 88, 92–3, 95, 116, 198, pls. 28–30.
[104] Henry 1970, pl. 25.
[105] Henry 1970, pl. 19.
[106] Henry 1970, pl. 18.
[107] Henry 1970, pls. 31, 34–7.

eleventh/twelfth-century Ireland seem instinctively to feel their ancestry.

Art work in the establishments through Romanesque and later medieval Europe which preserved some Celtic connections tended to follow the main streams of style, influenced by the predominant *scriptoria*, schools, ateliers, and masons' lodges. But there are signs of Celtic infusions; Celtic imagination made some contributions to animal frieze composition, seemingly of Irish derivation, in French Romanesque carving.[108] We might note also the un-natural sharply arris-edged foliation on some capitals in the Schottenkirche at Regensburg.[109]

Some have been tempted to seek signs of Celtic inspiration for the dramatic sculptural work of the twelfth-century Hereford-shire school,[110] but little case can be made.[111] It is tempting to do the same for the richly varied ogee leaf shapes of later medieval flamboyant tracery which proved so acceptable to Irish, Scottish, and Breton, as well as Flemish, taste into the sixteenth century;[112] its origins are firmly centred in Canterbury and London,[113] but it did appeal to Celtic taste.

Celtic artists and craftsmen of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were somewhat reticent in creativity. Their artistic preferences led, however, to certain trends, such as the conti-nuance of flamboyant designs. There seems also some predilec-tion for long through lines, especially to create contrapuntal effects. The very long straight-draped dresses seen on many fourteenth- and fifteenth-century figures[114] (for which English alabaster figures were probably models[115]) give a distinctive foil

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[108] Henry 1970, pp. 205 ff.

[109] *St. Jakob Regensburg* (Guide, 11th edn., 1983), pp. 6–7.

[110] Stone 1955, pp. 66–71, 76.

[111] These fine works had more distant exotic inspiration: Zarnecki 1953, pp. 9–13; Stone 1955, p. 67. Welsh medieval sculpture is not rich (Gresham 1968); we must look for native expressiveness in simpler works, such as leaves on the capitals at Llanaber in Merioneth (Pl. XVII: Radford 1963, pp. 66–8), though even here the central fleur-de-lys by its modelling seems to betray origins in the Wells-Western British school (Gardner 1927, pp. 23, 28, 31; but note that the Abergavenny screen frieze is 'characteristically Welsh'—p. 51). Jacobsthal, provoked by a poor example, averred (ECA, p. 163) that there was no continuously Celtic tradition through medieval art into modern times—but maybe he himself was not sufficient Celt to set his head on one side and give a further, more quizzical, look (Jope 1986).

[112] Harvey 1950, pp. 77, 88, 92, 95–6, 98, 105.

[113] Harvey 1950, p. 77.

[114] Hunt 1974, pls. 31–2, 115, 176–8, 195, 197–8, 279, 284.

[115] Gardner 1940, pls. 124 ff.

to the human form, and in a simple way even the long arris rising to high up between the legs heightens the mystery surrounding the body of the distinguished thirteenth-century lady[116] in Christ Church in Dublin. More venturesome is the contrapuntal display of fold lines in the apparel of some fourteenth-century ladies at Cashel[117] (which was *not* taken from alabaster work), and the voluminous swirling sleeves of the sixteenth-century ladies at Kilkenny are very distinctive.[118] But all this does not create a new style. Again, Welsh monument design followed even more closely the practice of the orthodox schools.[119] In early seventeenth-century work at Saint-Thégonnec in Brittany we see a very forceful use of through-composed arris ridges, coming up from under the chin and running into and over the nose, so to intensify the anguish of the figure beside the captive Christ (Pl. XVII); note also the stylized arrised zigzag folds along the length of the sleeves. An extreme example of through-composed arrises dominating a décor with its simple crossed diagonals (derived from the rod and staff) is seen in the curious late fifteenth-century figure on an O'Mara tombstone at Toomavara in Tipperary (Pl. XVII).[120]

Can we follow any of these marks of artistic instinct and dissent further towards our own times? In the eighteeenth century, painters and sculptors in the British Isles were dominated to a large extent by the precepts of the great artists or institutions whence they received their artistic schooling. Richard Wilson (1714–82), poetic artist though he was, remained rooted among masters of the past. John Ruskin (1819–1900), however, who had Scottish ancestry (and gave more thought to the construction of a picture than some allow), will sometimes by instinct seek out the continuing lines of geological structure right through his scene, as an unobtrusive but through-

[116] Hunt 1974, pls. 18, 104, 105, cf. pl. 46; contrast pls. 26–8, 42–3. The long straight look had in fact been present in effigy practice in Ireland for a long time: Hunt 1974, pls. 31, 33, 60. In this matter of continuity, it is important also to note McNeill's demonstration of the continuity of the medieval Irish building industry both within and outwith the Pales (McNeill 1986). And is it merely by chance that, in frontal dissymmetry, the earliest three-quarter-profile coin-portait north of the Alps (*c.* 1484) should be of James III of Scotland? (Jope and Jope 1959, pl. XXIV).

[117] Hunt 1974, pls. 26–8.

[118] Hunt 1974, pls. 176–80; cf. also the complex drapes of pls. 313–17.

[119] Gresham 1968; but we might perhaps see something of Celtic tradition in the surprisingly limpid leaf shapes on Romanesque capitals at Llanaber in Denbighshire, Pl. XVII (Radford 1963, pp. 367 f.).

[120] Hunt 1974, pl. 182.

composed framework. Some sculptured capitals carved in the 1860s by the O'Shea brothers of Dublin for the University Museum in Oxford (much overseen by Ruskin) show arrangements of very sharp-edged and veined leaves,[121] a contrapuntal display of long arris lines, pressing nature to the limits of reality (perhaps even beyond) to gain expressiveness. So perhaps the instincts towards expressiveness we saw in the first Celtic artists of the fifth century BC might still in more recent times impel artists with Celtic roots.

Our last example (Pl. XVII) is chosen for its extreme spontaneity. It shows a lightning watercolour self-portrait of Augustus John (1878–1961),[122] in a family group with Dorelia and his son Caspar (here being crammed for Dartmouth, later to be First Sea Lord). John's instantaneous instinct has led him to use the brush-worker's equivalent of our arris ridges in presenting long drapes of fabric of Dorelia's skirt, a centrepiece to give immediate structure to his décor (cf. the Irish later medieval monuments), a device used by artists in many ages. But John goes further; he carries an un-biological, through-composed line in highlights on the fabric of his own right side, and on up the tensed muscles of his raised right arm (seen as highlights on his sleeve), as if making a stiffner to keep it up. The same device is seen more hesitatingly on Caspar—and note how much more weakly Dorelia's arm rises without these highlights. On each figure the right and left eyes are subtly different (cf. Pl. IV); Dorelia's are the most single-mindedly innocent, and Caspar's show a quite perceptible wink. John draws all the feet (even his own, with boots on) most expressively (cf. those of St Luke in the Book of Chad, Pl. XV). John's figures are all very much alive from the perturbation of their frontal symmetry, implying so deftly the muscular tensions inherent in the raised arm posture, with Dorelia as a stabilizing centrepiece. Here in an artist of Celtic stock, of our own day, we see these primary instincts practised with extreme spontaneity, welling up instantaneously from his inner being.

This discussion could have been entitled 'Celtic Art—why "Celtic"?' If we assume that Celtic art is simply the art practised

[121] Acland and Ruskin 1893, frontispiece and suppl. phh.

[122] What little is known of Augustus John's ancestry is set out in his autobiographical notes, *Chiaroscuro* (1952), p. 4, and *Finishing Touches* (1964), pp. 34–8. His father came from Haverford West in Pembrokeshire, but he was never able to extract any further details from his elusive parent. See also N. Devas, *Two Flamboyant Fathers* (1966), pp. 38, 49, 83–4, 195, 270, 279.

by people who spoke Celtic languages, well and good; that would be a definition and an end to the matter. But, as we have already noted, language is a fickle index of men's antecedents, cultural or ethnic. For Pevsner,[123] 'The Englishness of English Art' was largely a geographical issue, a matter of insularity. But with 'Celtic' we are concerned with wider ethnic issues. We have a much larger spatial canvas, and at various points have embraced parts of eastern, middle, and southern Europe, as well as all parts of Britain, and Ireland; wandering through this wide terrain, we have been able to follow some elements of long-term coherence in the concept 'Celtic Art' through some 2500 years.[124]

If, however, we then indulge in some such remark as, 'Sure, that'll be the Old Celt in 'im', we at once imply a biologically heritable factor. Is this feasible? Or must we attribute the continuance of Celtic art traditions solely to teaching, upbringing, and precept? Could there be any biological system, as in the neuron linkages in the brain, which could predispose a person to a hankering after perturbed symmetry, slewed compositions, swelling shapes, or through-composed lines? There are still very many problems for long-term research in the cellular and molecular background to behavioural and developmental biology, but an example such as the eccentric expressiveness of Vincent van Gogh or the genetically heritable condition of muscular dystrophy, might suggest that biological determinants *can* have some directing influence on preferences in vision and presentation, in tactile or motional response.

We have now before us the possible mass mapping of the variability within the human genome,[125] for any human groups we care to explore (even possibly back for some generations in time), and it is possible that computer analysis of these massive multivariate systems may be made to yield correlations with particular modes of expressiveness. All this is very much in the future, but only thus can we know whether the appellation 'Celtic' can really be seen as a coherent cultural and ethnic entity.

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[123] Pevsner 1956, pp. 11–19, 86, 120, 135–6.

[124] The concepts of Hawkes's 'cumulative Celticity' must also be woven into our view of Celtic cultural development (see his essay in S. N. Skomal and E. C. Polomé (eds.) *Pioto-Indo-Europeans: Studies in Honor of Marija Gimbutas* (1987), pp. 203–15).

[125] Jeffreys and Barrie 1981. See also L. L. Cavalli-Sforza and M. W. Feldman, *Cultural Transmission and Evolution* (1981).

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Abbreviations:

ECA   Paul Jacobsthal (1944, reprinted 1969) *Early Celtic Art.*
AEIA·   J. V. S. Megaw (1971) *Art of the European Iron Age.*
ECABI   E. M. Jope and P. F. Jacobsthal (1988) *Early Celtic Art in the British
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