

Viking glass beads from Ireland – an examination of interpersonal contact in the early medieval period.

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This MPhil research seeks to examine the evidence for both large and small scale interaction between incoming Vikings and existing populations in early medieval Ireland, through the study of glass beads. The possible use of such beads as social and ethnic markers within an ethnically diverse island would tend to suggest distinct social identities in the mindset of early medieval populations, both in Ireland and elsewhere.



The lack of substantial studies to date is surprising, as glass beads are a highly useful artefact in archaeological studies and are also quite a common artefact from Viking burials and settlements.

Firstly, their highly portable nature lends itself to indications of long distance trade and this in turn implies the suitability of glass beads as a highly efficient tool to be utilised in the study of trade routes, in this specific case, the trade routes which existed in the Viking world.

As well as this, there are benefits to be gained for the study of glass beads in relation to typological dating. Once a workable chronology of beads can be created from across the Viking world, a typological sequence, i.e. a sequence based on progression and development of form, can be constructed as a definitive reference for future interpretation of artefacts and dating of archaeological contexts.

