



Book Reviews

DRESS AND IDENTITY IN IRON AGE BRITAIN: A STUDY OF GLASS BEADS AND OTHER OBJECTS OF PERSONAL ADORNMENT BY ELIZABETH FOULDS

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With their vibrant hues of cobalt, turquoise and yellow, glass beads add flashes of unusual colour to an Iron Age palette often seen as being fairly subdued. Worn on necklaces, attached to clothing or as hair decorations, they'd have presented bold statements which, when viewed close-up, revealed swirling, hypnotic decoration in contrasting coloured glass (see p.84). Despite their unusual colours and engaging decorative patterns, however, glass beads have been somewhat neglected by archaeologists. Whilst the presence of glass beads at Iron Age sites across Britain has been recognised by archaeologists since the 19th century, concentrated research on these enigmatic objects has been limited to a handful of publications (e.g. Guido 1978, Henderson 1978, Bertini 2012, Bertini *et al.* 2011; Giles 2012, 143–150).

The neglect of glass beads is one of the key issues that *Dress and Identity in Iron Age Britain* seeks to address, and succeeds in doing so. This monograph has been adapted from Elizabeth Foulds' doctoral thesis, which was written at the University of Durham. It is centred on a thorough and comprehensive analysis of glass beads from Iron Age Britain, which is then contextualised within a wider study of Iron Age dress accessories, and deals with important methodological and theoretical issues relating to a challenging assemblage of objects. The volume is split into nine chapters, and follows a thesis-style structure, encompassing an introduction to the subject matter, the presentation and analysis of data, and the discussion of findings.

Foulds opens the first chapter of the volume with passages written by Caesar and Herodian describing the uncivilised appearances of Iron Age Britons: long-haired; naked or clothed in animal pelts; their bodies decorated with woad, tattoos and ornaments made from iron. In doing this, she highlights a second key aim of the volume: to provide an *archaeological* study of Iron Age appearance, one that is based on material evidence rather than the exaggerated stereotypes of Iron Age Britons created by Classical writers.

The remainder of Chapter 1 continues to set the scene, giving a brief overview of the aims and scope of the volume and introducing the methodology, case study regions and previous studies of glass beads on which it builds. Chapter 2 then goes on to elaborate on past studies of Iron Age glass beads in Britain, beginning with the earliest mention of these objects by antiquarians, and working through time. This chapter focuses largely on the work of Margaret Guido, whose study of prehistoric and Roman glass beads from Britain (1978), was previously the most extensive to date. Although Foulds is critical of Guido's culture-historical focus and assumptions about the movement of glass beads in and out of Britain, as well as the uncritical application of her typology by subsequent researchers, the importance of Guido's work for this volume is made clear.

The third chapter of the volume situates glass beads within wider Iron Age dress, providing a theoretical background for archaeological approaches to portable objects and explaining sources of evidence on Iron Age dress. Foulds

reviews contrasting theories of dress from anthropological literature, emphasising the fact that she aims to move away from the 'reading' of Iron Age dress towards seeing it as a 'situated practice' (pp.22-24). She draws on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (1990) as a way of considering relationships between dress and identity in the Iron Age, and interactions between individual and group identities. This chapter, necessarily, covers a lot of ground in a short space of time, summarising archaeological debates about chronology, style and death, for example, and the specifics of these topics in Iron Age Britain. Running through the chapter, however, is the theme of identity, which is briefly revisited later in the volume.

Chapter 4 returns to the four case study regions that form the basis of Foulds' analysis, and that were briefly introduced in Chapter 1: Southwest England, East Anglia, East Yorkshire and Northeast Scotland. The regions were chosen on the basis of the distribution of Iron Age beads in Guido's publication (1978), representing areas with high concentrations of beads in her 1978 study, with the exception of East Anglia, where beads are notably absent. Foulds adds to Guido's data, updating it with data from more recent publications and grey literature, and primary data from museum visits. The nature of the archaeological resource and the history of study in each region are discussed here, focusing on the impact of developer funded archaeology, patterns of settlement and the treatment of the dead. Although this chapter jumps frequently from region to region, it is very effective in demonstrating the regional patterning apparent in evidence for the British Iron Age, and emphasising the fact that this derives from a complex combination of Iron Age activity and archaeological activity.

'Typological Conundrums, Quandaries and Resolutions' is the name of the volume's fifth chapter and, as it suggests, this section of the book focuses on the development of a new typological approach to glass beads. Although Foulds recognises the issues with typological approaches to artefacts, it is made clear that Guido's typology for British and Irish beads (1978) does not capture the diverse complexity of the current assemblage and is unable to accommodate new finds. Foulds, therefore, creates an updated typology of glass beads drawing on data from her four case study regions. Although her typology is more inclusive and flexible than Guido's, Foulds is quick to point out that it applies specifically to her dataset and research questions, and will not necessarily fit the needs of other researchers – a helpful disclaimer considering the potential for the misuse of typologies.

In Chapters 6 and 7, Foulds goes on to use her new typology to carry out a thorough analysis of the beads from her four study regions. She focuses on variations in the shape, size, colour and decoration of beads and carries out a study of archaeological context, looking at the distribution, deposition and excavation of beads with the aim of understanding regional patterns. It is shown that there are complex similarities and differences in the characteristics of the beads themselves between and within the four study regions. The manufacture and exchange of beads in Britain is generally poorly understood, but Foulds' data on the size, shape colour and decoration of beads provide evidence for specific choices made during these processes in different parts of the British Isles. The deposition of beads, which is discussed in Chapter 7, follows highly regionalised patterns, presenting a contrast with the more complex inter and intra-regional variation in bead characteristics.

Chapter 8 comprises the contextualisation of glass beads within a fuller assemblage of dress accessories from Iron Age Britain, and the consideration of the way beads were used and experienced. The first part of this Chapter focuses on evidence from burials, where objects are found in direct association with the body and, in doing this, highlights one of the main challenges of the study of glass beads: the fact that it is very difficult to interpret their functions as parts of Iron Age dress when they are found as individual objects outside burial contexts. This is compounded by the lack of Iron Age inhumation burials in many parts of Britain, which means that this part of the chapter discusses mainly beads from East Yorkshire, where inhumation burials have been found, and several examples from southwest Britain. This analysis further emphasises the regionality of practices linked to glass beads by showing contrasting evidence from burials from these two regions.

Foulds then broadens her discussion to consider temporal and spatial distributions of beads from across the UK in comparison to other dress accessories, specifically torcs, brooches, pins, finger/toe rings and wrist/ankle/arm rings recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). This analysis uncovers some extremely interesting trends that challenge long-held ideas about British Iron Age material culture. Significantly, Foulds shows that the general pattern of a sharp increase in certain types of material culture during the Late Iron Age (e.g. Hill 1995, 85), whilst reflected in brooches, is not reflected in wrist/arm/ankle rings, finger/toe rings, pins and beads, which all peak in frequency during the Middle Iron Age and beginning of the Late Iron Age. Beads also follow a very different pattern of distribution across the British Isles to other dress objects (p.232). Whereas most Iron Age object types from the PAS are concentrated in the South and East of England, there are concentrations of beads in Southwest England and Northeast Scotland (although the fact that the PAS does not record finds from Scotland must be taken into account here, as must the specific biases relating to metal detecting, see Robbins 2014).

The concluding chapter of the volume, Chapter 9, pulls together the varied strands of evidence in the volume to briefly discuss the findings of this research. 'Identity', a key theme of Chapter 3 and a feature of the discussion of Chapter 8, is notably absent from this chapter. Nevertheless, it is helpful and succinct in summarising some of the trends uncovered in previous chapters.

Foulds undertook significant challenges when carrying out this research, focusing on a neglected object type that is difficult to date and interpret, and contextualising this assemblage within a body of objects that is extremely varied and numerous. Although further development of the theoretical discussions of Chapter 3 would have enhanced the final chapters, the book is a mine of information and inspiration, and Foulds' typology, along with the well-illustrated guide on identifying and recording glass beads in the appendices, will undoubtedly be of use to other researchers. Page 246 gives details of directions for future research, and suggests ways in which this research could be advanced, including scientific and experimental studies as well as the study of beads outside the case study regions. I suggest that further exploration of the trends uncovered through the analysis of the dress assemblage in Chapter 8 may also prove fruitful.

Foulds approaches objects with sensitivity, and exercises due diligence in discerning genuine Iron Age patterns from those related to archaeological activity. The integration of beads within the wider dress assemblage is enlightening and demonstrates the utility of object studies that focus not on a single object type, but on larger and more varied assemblages.

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