

Buckland Grave 59



Anglo-Saxon Beaded Necklace

I like the way that 6th century Anglo-Saxon women chose their beads. They liked bold, bright colors and were not afraid to put too many patterns together. I have been accused of having similar taste in jewelry. It is for this reason that I have made a necklace.

I started my research about Anglo-Saxon beads to find out if they were very different from Viking beads. Technologically they are not different. The artist worked with the materials available to make glass. Without going into a chemistry lecture, glass gets its color from impurities in the mixture and from the furnace conditions. (A different color result will happen depending on the furnace environment. Is it reducing or oxidizing? An other way to get a different color from the same chemical mixture is to vary the temperature.) The skill of the glass artist provided a wide range of color options and it is these variations which make some Anglo-Saxon beads different from some Viking beads.

For a short period in time Anglo-Saxon women liked an orange type of barrel or biconical bead, very dark beads, and traffic light beads (named for the red, yellow and green coloring of the beads.) I was most surprised by Brite Bruggmann's charts and graphs which refer to a lot of beads made out of other substances than glass. The beads in my necklace are multicolored and could have been made locally, but not necessarily. The skills needed to make glass beads, were not skills of the common man and thus they are a luxury item. I have chosen to flaunt my wealth and wear glass beads.



Koch 20 yellow, from Mill Hill Grave 95

Margaret Guido, in her book "The Glass Beads of Anglo-Saxon England c. 400-700 AD," set out to prove that Anglo-Saxon burials could be dated by the type, color and style of beads which were found in the grave. She was very disappointed when her research did not turn up any strong trends. Brite Bruggmann in her book "Glass Beads from Early Anglo-Saxon England" applied a computer to her analysis and finds the opposite. She has found a few trends.

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Koch 20 white from Buckland Grave 42

Several years ago at Pennsic I stumbled across a beehive glass furnace in the back of the Arts and Sciences classroom area. I watched a few people use the furnace and then pack it up for the evening. This past year I came prepared with glass and old garb, but the furnace did not appear. Disappointed, but not one to give up easily, I decided to learn to make beads with a modern torch first, so I could better understand how glass behaves.

In reading Brite Bruggmann's book it took me a bit to dig out the information I needed for this project. I chose to focus on beads which were found in the Buckland and Morning Trope Cemeteries, with the occasional Mill Hill Grave. That allowed the beads to match the area and time period in England where the fish pin was found. I next had to manipulate the photographs, so the scale was 1 to 1, as it made it easier to make the beads. I have made a lot of beads over the past year. I have gotten much better at the shapes and sizes I can produce. I no longer need to grind the sharp ends off of every bead. I have learned to make stripes, waves, and dots for decoration. (I hope to be able to make my own stringer and twisties soon, which will in turn allow me to make beads with a more delicate pattern on them.) I have chosen a waxed linen tread to string my beads on, because the weight of the beads is fairly substantial. In the future I hope to find out about clasps for a necklace and work on making my decoration a bit more delicate..



Koch 34 Blue, Morning Thorpe Grave 375