The Pagan Lady of Peel Castle Isle of Man
Late 900 AD

Recreation of her Necklace and Amulet

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Manx Transport Heritage Museum

Recreation

What is this?

This beautiful necklace was made with 71 unique beads. It was discovered in a dig of the Peel Castle on the Isle of Man in 1982. It is estimated that the beads were made of glass, amber, and jet and their origins were from Scandinavia, Anglo-Saxon and the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

This find was a spectacular one not only as to the number of beads, their varied sizes and designs, but also of the fact that she was a Pagan woman buried in a Christian cemetery.

These beads were possibly gathered throughout her lifetime given as gifts from her husband or possibly for services rendered. While doing my research it was noted that an amulet (the large amber donut like bead) and several other unusual items such as “an iron spit, have been compared to similar items in female graves that are thought to be seiðr-staffs, indicating that the women interred might have been a seeress or sorceress of some sort.” (Price; Gardeła)

Necklace on exhibition at the Jorvik Visitor Center in York, England

Why did you choose to make this?

As I have been a lampworker for over 15 years, I greatly enjoy recreating medieval necklaces not only to wear and display, but to use as a teaching tool to show new lampworkers what can be made.

I often will do research online to find necklaces that would be a challenge. The necklace is beautiful. Some of the beauty of this necklace to me was the number of varied sizes, shapes, and design elements. The original necklace was made of glass, jet and amber beads. I studied the colors of the beads to try and locate soft glass in colors that closely matched.

How did you make it?

I have a Nortel Minor Burner oxygen/propane torch. Each original bead was carefully studied so I could match it's size and overall design. Then the glass rods were picked out, and the basic bead was made. Some of the beads have designs on them. Several have slices of glass cane inlaid in them. I studied the design of the slices and tried to copy the design as I made the strip of cane.

Cane making can be very difficult. For this bead I started out with a flower optical mold (see 1st pic). You take a rod of glass that would be the center color of the cane, after you melt part of the rod you force it into the mold and pull it back out. You have a flower made. In order to finish the rest of the slice you fill in with another color rod the spaces of the star to make a circle. When the flower is filled in you take the rod and attach another rod to the end of it (called a punty). Then the cane is placed over the fire and slowly heated up. As the cane turns molten you take each end of the rods and extremely carefully you pull the rods straight away from the center (see 2nd pic). Once the cane is cooled, you can either slice the cane and apply it to a hot bead, or you can take the cane and insert it into a hot bead and cut a slice off. The 3rd pic on the left has a yellow bead with a twisted stringer and two slices of cane on it.

The 3rd pic on the left shows a bead made and indentations pressed on it with my "magic ruler". By heating up small sections of the side of a bead and pressing a thin piece of metal (knife or ruler) and rocking it back and forth you can make a "melon" bead. You can see a melon bead on the top picture on the left.

The 4th picture shows a double color twist stringer being pulled. This is done by laying two different color glass rods on top of each other, melting them into each other and then twisting them very quickly and pulling at the same time. The trick is to do it evenly from both sides. The blue bead in the 3rd pic on the left has this double twisted stringer on it.

There are so many different sized and shapes beads in this necklace. I used several graphite paddles and occasionally dental picks to help shape the glass. After the beads are finished while they are still on the mandrels (the stainless steel rods) the beads are put into a kiln at 1000 degrees (which ramps down to room temperature) for at least an hour to anneal. Annealing the glass helps the glass to cool evenly

and helps prevent cracking. After the beads have been annealed, they are soaked in hot soapy water to help disolve the bead release and are then pulled off the rod. If release remains, a file is used to clean the hole.

I have made many attempts to recreate the amulet, but have been unsuccessful in making it close enough to the original. I will continue to work on it. My amulets are donutlike, but the sides are very thin.

What material did you use?

The glass rods that was used to recreate these beads was Effetre Murano – 104 COE soft glass rods.

What tools did you use?

I use a Nortel Minor Burner torch when I am in my shop at home. When I do demos or teach outside the home, I use a hot head torch and MAPP gas. I used dental picks, professionally made cut graphite paddles, graphite pads, spoons, knives, my magic metal ruler, metal chop sticks, it is amazing the amount of items that work very well with glass. When making a round bead you can also use gravity as a tool. Hot glass wants to be round.

How close to period are the materials, the techniques and tools you used?

The beads in the Pagan Lady necklace spanned several hundred years. Some of them are made of amber and jet. These beads would have been cut and polished. Glass beads are polished with fire. When I made a bead and it has an unwanted edge on it, I can place it in the fire and keep turning it to acquire a nice finished edge or use a molding tool to make a sharper edge.

The glass beads I made are basically made the same way as the originals. Each was made of glass, each made on a mandrel over a fire, and annealed.

Glass bead-makers were artisans who imported glass from Western Europe, or the ancient Roman areas to support their craft. These artisans lived and possibly traveled with the Viking peoples as they crossed what is now known as Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Greenland, England, Gotland, Scotland, Ireland, etc.

Glass was used in many different ways by both the Saxons and Vikings, such as for drinking vessels, window glass, jewelry, enameling and in bead making. Bead furnace remains have been found in many ancient cities in Europe as well as Sweden. In the picture below you can see the hot coals burning and a bead being worked on at the end of the long mandrel.

There are two main ways of making glass. The first is to combine raw materials such as quartz and soda(or potash) or by recycling glass by making a cullet from broken melted glass and then re-using it.

It would be much easier to recycle broken glass. Clear broken glass was often used as different minerals could be added to make different colors.

When clear glass could not be obtained, imported blocks of colored glass were used. These colors were often obtained by raiding ancient Roman sites and re-using mosaic tile. (Regia Anglorum).

The bead artisans would have created a small kiln or furnace (such as in the picture above). The cullet or broken recycled glass would be put into the furnace through holes in the side to melt in a dish inside the furnace. Air was pumped into the furnace to keep the coals (charcoal) hot. Metal rods (mandrels) would be dipped with a clay mixture called bead release. The artist would dip his mandrel into the molten glass and wind the glass on the rod until a desired shape was accomplished. Glass rods could also be pulled from the molten glass and then reheated over the heat of the furnace and melted around the bead release on the mandrel.

The holes in the bead would be made from the glass being wound around the mandrel. The diameter of the mandrel with the bead release on it would determine the size of the hole.

Once the bead size and shape were achieved a design could be added by heating thin pulls of glass and wrapping them around the bead, that was slightly cooled, with a "stringer" that was heated and laid on top.

The final stage of working on a bead would be to move them to an annealing dish. This dish would be kept close to the furnace to allow the extremely hot bead (up to 1000 or more degrees) to slowly cool. This would prevent thermal shock lowering the changes of the bead cracking.

What was this used for? Where is it presently located?

Necklaces and other adornments during this time period were used to show status. As many of these beads were probably gifted to her over the years, I am sure that they had sentimental value to her.

The Pagan Lady Necklace resides at the Manx Transport Heritage Museum, Brickworks,Office Mill Road, Peel England.

glonneydesigns.wordpress.com/category/studio/the-pagan-ladys-necklace-project/

Conclusion

I thoroughly enjoyed working on this project. It had been interrupted a lot with what life threw at me this past year, but I am very glad to have been able to finish it. Well really finish it after I can master the amulet. It is my goal to complete the whole outfit as seen in the Manx Museum. I have the dress made, the knife, and the apron, hat, and amulet to finish yet. This is something I would like to personally wear. It will also be used as a teaching tool.

One thing that was more frustrating with this project necklace more that previously projects is that there were so many pictures of the necklace taken from different angles. I would start making the beads, do a little more research only to find that a solid color bead had a design on it as seen from a different angle. As is shown in one of my pictures there is a black bead with white dots on it. It was only recently that I found a picture with those dots on it.

As everything is, it is a learning experience. One I will continue to be a part of. Thank you for your time and interest in reading this.

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