

# GLASS BEADS FROM EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

CLASSIFICATION, DATING,  
SOCIAL PERFORMANCE

**Mags Mannion**

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## Abstract

Glass beads while undoubtedly one of the most visually stunning archaeological objects are much more than just an archaeological tool and their enduring appeal is a reflection of their aesthetic and symbolic qualities. One of the reasons no doubt why they remain as popular a part of body ornament today as in the past. The inherent workability of glass allows the artisan a level of creativity checked only it would seem by their skill and imagination. The result is a multitude of uniquely individual motifs and designs, combined and interwoven in distinctive patterns and shapes. With its outstanding, almost magical qualities glass lends itself well to the production of religious, symbolic and luxury goods. Furthermore decorative motifs of cables, trails, waves, dots and eyes unite to bring a dimension to beads beyond their aesthetic appeal and underpin the perception of specific bead types as talismans or amulets to ward off danger and offer protection.

This is the first dedicated and comprehensive study of glass beads from Early Medieval Ireland, presenting the first national classification, typology, dating and consideration of the social context and symbology of glass beads. The study was initiated in part as a response to a widely acknowledged dearth of knowledge concerning glass beads in the canon of Irish archaeology (Hencken 1950, 133; Edwards 1990, 93). This dearth of study is in marked contrast to the situation internationally which, over the past number of years, has seen a number of seminal studies, with the result that a considerable body of work is now available on Anglo-Saxon and European beads (e.g. Andrae 1975; Callmer 1977; Guido 1978; 1999; Lunstrume 1976; Templemann-Mączńska 1985; Venclova 1990; Legoux 1993-1994; Rasmussen 1995; Sasse and Theune 1995; Siegmund 1995; Stern 2001; Koch 2001; Brugmann 2004). Moreover, this research was also undertaken in recognition of the important contribution such a study could make to our understanding of various aspects of early medieval Irish society.

An imperative applying to the study corpus is that it is a representative sample of beads current in Ireland during the early medieval period. So as to maximise information on the social context and performance of beads, the corpus is drawn from a range of excavated site types; secular and religious, from as broad a geographical area as possible. The methodology applied in this study focuses on a visual and microscopic inspection of the beads. The application of a dedicated methodology facilitated the consistent and standardised collection of information on all of the beads from the study corpus. The classification of the beads represents a defining goal of this research and has established an eighteen-fold classification comprising fourteen decorated types (based on shared attributes of form and decorative features or motifs), and four undecorated types (based on geometrical shape and colour). Dating for each class was established by analysis of the context information available for individual beads which also produced significant data regarding the social contexts in which beads functioned and performed.

Beads, like all artefacts, contain information on human biographies and are endowed and re-endowed with meanings that extend far beyond their aesthetic or functional appeal, or value as chronological indicators. A powerful way of expressing one's identity is through display, through dress, hairstyle, body ornament, weaponry and jewellery. Being very visible objects of adornment, glass beads possess a suite of the attributes needed to create and portray an individual's identity. In this sense, beads speak to the concept of self-awareness, the expression of a perception of self, and in the wearing of these decorative objects, a medium through which one individualises one's body and one's self. Therefore, in addition to classification, this research also considers and discusses to the performance of beads in Irish society during the early medieval period.

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## **Author's note**

This volume comprises a PhD thesis completed and submitted in March 2013 and this research is informed and facilitated by beads and sites both published and unpublished available at the time. All images unless otherwise stated are the author's own. Dimensions and Munsell colour codes for all beads are included in the catalogue and therefore not all images featured throughout the book may be in colour or to scale. Colour images of each of the Class are included on the colour pages in chapter four.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Glass is one of the more inert materials and, in the form of beads – as opposed to sheet- or blown-glass – represents one of the most durable of archaeological finds. As an archaeological type, beads are also somewhat ubiquitous: they are found in almost every type of archaeological context. The absence of a study to date of the Irish corpus however, means that beads have been denied the possible contribution that they could make to our understanding of past societies, in respect of chronology and their sociology. This dedicated and comprehensive study of glass beads from Early Medieval Ireland attempts to address this via classification, dating, and consideration of the social context and symbology of glass beads.

Despite being a common find, there is nothing ‘routine’ about glass beads and more often than not they are every bit as striking now as when they were first made. Glass has been described as an ‘almost unearthly material’ (Leahy 2003, 105). From the most mundane and ordinary ingredients; sand, lime and soda; artisans produced exotic and ethereal colours and shapes from a substance whose state could be readily altered from solid to fluid by the application of heat, and through human manipulation transformed into a soft and pliable material from which it could be crafted into a myriad of exquisite items of personal adornment. Through a further combination of technical knowledge skill and dexterity, chemicals were added, making the glass translucent, opaque or transparent, and drawing from a most brilliant palette of colours. Glass with its outstanding, almost magical qualities lends itself well to the production of religious, symbolic and luxury goods. Glass beads, as we shall see, in Chapter 6, also lend themselves well to ritual practices and have been, and continue to be, used as talismans or amulets to ward off danger and offer protection in certain cultures today, and the ability to be both aesthetically pleasing and talismanic may in some ways account for the enduring, universal popularity of glass beads.

### **The Irish bead corpus ‘no strings attached’**

As a form of body ornament glass beads have an ancient and universal history. The durability of glass has ensured its relatively good preservation with the result that glass beads are a common and numerous find on archaeological excavations in Ireland from at least the later Bronze Age (Warner and Meighan 1994, 52). Excavations over the past number of years have produced a substantial body of information on many aspects of the early medieval period (Sullivan *et al* 2008, and 2010). Glass beads however, though one of the most common finds from early medieval excavations, are one of just a few remaining types that have not benefitted from dedicated study. That such a study is

long overdue is evidenced by the fact that some fifty-eight years ago, in his account of the glass beads from Lagore Crannóg, Hencken (1950, 133), drew attention to the lack of study of glass beads in Europe. Internationally much has been achieved since then and there are now many studies of beads from both Britain and Europe (e.g. Andrae 1975; Callmer 1977; Guido 1978, 1999; Lunstrume 1976; Templemann-Mączńska 1985; Venclova 1990; Legoux 1993-1994; Rasmussen 1995; Sasse and Theune 1995; Siegmund 1995; Stern 2001; Koch 2001; Brugmann 2004). However research on glass beads from Early Medieval Ireland has lagged behind the work carried out in other countries, despite the acknowledged importance of having a dedicated classification of beads, from dateable excavated contexts (Edwards 1990, 93). The absence to date of such a study may seem odd but might be explained somewhat by the taphonomic processes peculiar to the Irish record. In Ireland the beads are typically recovered as individual finds (see Figure 1), either stray or excavated, and they do not lend themselves to the types of approaches developed elsewhere, such as in Britain, where the regular occurrence of sets (or strings) of beads from contexts such as grave assemblages underpin the research (see below). The lack of context and associative information is crucial because not only does it mean that Irish beads do not fulfil the evidential requirements demanded of corpora elsewhere, but it also suggests that a modified methodology is required for the study of beads in Ireland. The adoption of the custom of unaccompanied Christian burial in Ireland during the early medieval period means that the majority of glass bead assemblages are from settlement sites, which places restrictions on the scope and ambitions of the research. European and British glass bead research, on the other hand, has been based primarily on bead assemblages from grave studies, as for instance, the study of Anglo-Saxon glass beads by Brugmann (2004) and those on Frankish and Merovingian beads by Legoux (1993-1994) and Koch (2001).

The main difference between the two types of corpus, pertinent to classifying beads concerns the detail of context



FIGURE 1: A TYPICAL SINGLE FIND



FIGURE 2: THE NUMBER OF COEVAL BEADS AVAILABLE FROM A SINGLE STRING OR NECKLACE FROM JUST ONE BURIAL (FROM BRUGMANN 2004, FIG. 76 BEADS FROM GRAVE 72 LINTON HEATH CAMBRIDGESHIRE).<sup>1</sup>

information available, and type-associations. The absence of bead combination groups in application of Ireland restricts the type of analyses carried out elsewhere, like Brugmann's work in Britain by (2004). Grave assemblages of bead strings or sets have provided a large corpus of coeval beads (see Figure 2), which underpin key analytical studies allowing scholars to address questions about the significance of glass beads, temporalities of circulation, trade, ownership, status and society. Bead strings also provide the researcher with valuable information on bead combination groups, preserving a 'snapshot' of the types of beads that were combined together, strung and worn, making it possible to determine the pace of change in bead fashions. This is achieved by analysing the frequency with which older beads are displaced by newer styles on bead strings, which not only helps determine the concurrency in use of beads of different periods but also the dating of specific bead types.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the photographs are reproduced without scale. All dimensions are recorded in the catalogue and catalogue numbers are provided. The first digit in the catalogue number refers to the class (obviating the need to state class number every time) references to Figures, tables and figures in this research are Plate, Table and Figure all others are lower case).

However, while early medieval Ireland may not provide an ideal research corpus, beads from settlement sites can provide valuable information on the types of beads worn as part of daily dress, as opposed to ones that may have been selected and worn on special occasions, such as burial. The occurrence of beads alongside other recognised high-status jewellery suggests that they are part of the repertoire of high body-art and were commensurably valued. Adding them back into consideration of body ornament completes the picture. Therefore with a willingness to accept the limitations posed by the available corpus, and by employing a dedicated precise and empirically consistent methodology, it has been possible to produce a classification of glass beads from Early Medieval Ireland.

### The study corpus

An imperative applying to the study corpus is that it is a representative sample of beads current in Ireland during the early medieval period. So as to maximise information on the social context and performance of beads, the corpus is drawn from a range of excavated site types; secular and religious, from as broad a geographical area as possible. The corpus comprises beads from both older and more recent excavations of site-types such as crannógs e.g. Lagore, Co. Meath (Hencken 1950) and Ballinderry, Co. Offaly (Hencken 1942), ringforts such as Deer Park Farms, Co. Antrim (Lynn and McDowell 2011), Garranes (Ó Ríordáin 1942; O'Donnell 1991-1992) and Garryduff 1 (O'Kelly 1962) Co. Cork and ecclesiastical sites like Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly (King 1990-1998) Ballydoo Co Armagh (Conway 2006) and Caherlehillian, Co. Kerry (Sheehan 1997, 1998 and 2009). Older excavations, such as those at Lagore (Hencken 1950), Garranes (Ó Ríordáin 1942), Garryduff 1 (O'Kelly 1962) and Ballinderry 2 (Hencken 1942), are beset with issues relating to context and associations but are balanced by more modern excavations, such as those at Caherlehillian (Sheehan 1997, 1998 and 2009), Clonmacnoise (King 1990-1998), Ballydoo (Conway 2006), Garranes (O'Donnell 1991-1992) and Deer Park Farms (Lynn and McDowell 2011), all of which provide more detailed and secure context information. These latter sites thus supply the much needed chronological parameters for different types of beads as well as a more detailed picture of the range of social contexts in which beads are found.

The assemblage from Deer Park Farms also represents one of the largest stratified glass bead assemblages from early medieval Ireland, with only three of the eighty-six beads coming from unstratified contexts. The information gathered from recent excavations, therefore, can be used in certain cases to refine the dating of specific classes of beads.

What the older excavations do bring to the study, however; particularly in the case of Lagore; are glass bead assemblages which demonstrate the variety and diversity of types current in Ireland during the early medieval period. The excavated assemblage from Lagore crannóg,



for instance, represents one of the most important assemblages of all types of artefacts from early medieval Ireland—in keeping with its status as a royal site—and it is without doubt one of the most important sites with regard to understanding the social context of imported beads in Ireland. The overall artefact assemblage from Lagore also assists consideration of the place of glass beads in the repertoire of body ornament of the time.

While Lagore and Deer Park Farms provide relatively large glass bead assemblages, unfortunately they are exceptions in this regard: most sites produce far less with the result that the sample has perforce been supplemented with beads from the 1908 acquisition by the National Museum of Ireland of the Knowles Collection. This collection comprises a diverse range of beads, which, while they provide an important insight into the tastes of an antiquarian collector, are unfortunately without provenance. The classification presented here is based only on beads from the controlled environment of archaeological excavation. Later the classification was rigorously tested against beads in the National Museum, including those from the Knowles Collection. This exercise provided comparanda for specific classes of beads and also supplemented the corpus with beads from the Knowles Collection. However because they are unprovenanced, beads from the Knowles Collection were only included if they corresponded to types found during excavation. Therefore each bead from the Knowles Collection was individually assessed against beads from the excavated corpus before inclusion. Following the above protocol has increased the size of the corpus without compromising the integrity of the classification or dating of the classes. A small proportion of the beads from the Knowles Collection were omitted because they did not meet this criteria and as such may not be native to or have been present in Early Medieval Ireland. However this may change with time. Finally this approach has rehabilitated into consideration the important Knowles Collection which for the first time can now legitimately, and with confidence, be added to the corpus of early medieval beads.

### **The approach adopted in this study**

The methodology applied in this study focuses on a visual and microscopic inspection of the beads. As the first dedicated survey and analysis of glass beads from early medieval Ireland, the methodology draws heavily from research paradigms, methodologies and protocols established during the study of Anglo-Saxon and Continental beads (Sasse and Theune 1995; Bruggmann 2004). Applying similar methodologies to this research renders them both mutually compatible bringing the study of Irish glass beads to an international audience. A detailed account of the more technical aspects of the methodology is presented in Chapter 3.

For a long time it was believed that glass was produced from locally sourced materials and that different workshops would therefore, produce glass and objects with a constant

and distinguishable chemical composition which was different to other workshops, a model of glass production similar to that inferred in the twelfth-century writings of Theophilus and other medieval manuscripts (Freestone 2005, 008.1.1). If this hypothesis could be proved then it followed that glass objects including beads and vessels could be classified by chemical analysis of the composition of glass from which they were made and consequently where they were made, a viewpoint which most likely retarded the development of a classification of beads from Ireland. The chemical analysis of the composition of glass has resulted in a large body of research (e.g. Biek and Bailey 1979; Henderson, 1981, 1988, 2000a, 2000b; Henderson and Ivens 1992; Warner and Meighan 1994; Stapleton *et al.* 1999; Hoffmann and Heck 2000; Hoffmann *et al.* 2001; Tite *et al.* 2008; Peake and Freestone 2012). However, pertinent to this study, when glass is subjected to chemical analysis the results produced, provide evidence of where the glass was produced but not however, where an object such as a bead or vessel made from this glass was fashioned. Moreover as noted by Freestone (2005, 008.1.1), despite a considerable amount of research, no evidence has been produced, which can support the hypotheses that vessels of similar form or typology were produced from glass of a similar composition, or that all vessels of similar form originated in a particular workshop as inferred from the writings of Theophilus. In other words ‘The chemical compositions of glass vessels primarily reflect the location of the primary workshop, rather than the workshop that made the vessel’ (Freestone *et al.* 2008). Furthermore the locations of workshops producing objects from glass of the same composition may be situated over a broad geographical area depending on the extent of the trade in raw glass and moreover a single workshop may produce objects whose glass composition represents two distinctly different sources (Freestone 2005, 008.1.3; Freestone *et al.* 2008, 31). Analysis of the ingredients used in glass production have recognised changes in the raw material used in glass making around the beginning of the seventh century as evidenced by a change in the composition of glass from alkalis based on material most likely from the Wadi Natrum in Egypt and known as natron glass to one based on ash from halophytic plants and called soda ash or plant ash glass (Freestone *et al.* 2008, 29; Šmit *et al.* 2012, 8). This change was possibly the result of political events in Egypt and also the turmoil of the Christian-Muslim conflict of the seventh and eighth centuries which would have disrupted the normal supply of materials (Šmit *et al.* 2012, 8). Moreover it has also been observed that the transition from natron glass to halophytic or plant ash glass was a gradual process and natron glass continued in circulation for some time as recycled glass, either re-melted and used alone or as a component of a contemporary glass mix used to make objects such as beads (*ibid.* 8). Therefore this study in keeping with the assertion that beads are best classified on their distinct forms, colours and decorative motifs is based on a visual classification of the beads and follows the protocol adopted by most bead classifications (Guido 1978, 1999; Siegmund 1995; Bruggmann 2004).

Furthermore in keeping with the observation of Hirst (2000 120), that the scientific analysis of glass beads can be of more value when conducted *after* archaeological study has taken place, no independent chemical analysis has been carried out for this study, although naturally, any available existing chemical analysis is, where appropriate, incorporated into the study.

### Classifying and dating the beads

Classifying the glass beads from Early Medieval Ireland is the primary aim of this study. To this end the initial research questions of this study focused on how many different types or varieties of beads existed in early medieval Ireland and their susceptibility to classification and sub-classification. While it is clear that glass beads are highly individual artefacts, they also possess common underlying attributes. The rationale of the classification is based on consistency in recording which in the case of glass beads, is a matter of both colour and form. The classification combines attributes of colour, shape, decorative schema, size and manufacturing techniques. The primary division within the eighteen-fold classification offered here is between decorated and undecorated beads. The decorated beads are divided into fourteen classes based on the distinct shared attributes of the form and decorative features or motifs they possess. The description of the features and motifs uses common terms such as collars, dots, bands and so on in order to provide a straightforward method of referencing the classification and also to avoid encumbering the bead types with, as it were, *loaded* terms. The undecorated beads are divided into four different classes according to their geometrical shape and colour, and again the terms employed are those in general use such as globular, annular and biconical. One of the problems faced by glass bead researchers or excavators looking for comparanda is the lack of detail in descriptions of beads in excavation reports. This problem can easily be overcome by the use of a standardised terminology which, as with colour coding, allows information to be easily communicated and compared between studies and reports. Adoption of protocols such as this in cataloguing glass bead assemblages from individual sites has the potential to create a database of what Hirst (2000, 121) refers to as uniformly classified beads, providing in turn an analytical tool that can be used to study various aspects of beads and answer many questions on the distribution, performance and production of individual types.

### Development and structure of the research

While the classification of the beads represents a defining goal of this research, it is a somewhat mechanistic undertaking and in reality the real engine of the research is the context analysis which provides not just the all-important dating structure (which is itself a mechanism for testing the classification) but also significant data regarding the social contexts in which beads functioned and performed. Classification notwithstanding, the *problématique* of attempting such a study *ab initio* and

mining it for information is what guided the progression of the research and the layout and structure of the thesis.

The terminology used in the excavation reports and finds registers to describe the beads varied considerably from one site to another and clearly the need to have standardised terms which addressed all aspects of a beads description: form, dimensions, decorative motifs and so on, needed to be developed prior to the examination of the study corpus. Having a dedicated vocabulary of terms to describe the beads is an important first step in identifying and sorting the beads into type groups according to their geometrical shape, decorative motifs and colour, and from these groups the beads can then be divided into classes of different types of beads.

The original labelling of some of the beads from the older excavations had, over the years, become illegible or in some cases disappeared altogether. In the case of these beads the first task was to examine, measure and photograph each bead and then compare the size, form and decorative features with those listed for each bead in the excavation report, in this way it was possible to match an individual bead to its excavation number in the report. Once this had been achieved it was then possible to determine the find context for the bead. Unfortunately however, the finds register was not available for all of the sites, as in the case of Garranes and Garryduff with the result that the only context information available for the beads was from the site report and consequently was of a very general nature lacking the detail necessary for analysis of association between different beads or other finds from the site. Having a dedicated list of terms which standardised the process and descriptions of the dimensions, form and features of the beads was essential in identifying exactly which bead described in the excavation reports matched the surviving beads from the sites assemblages.

Unfortunately a number of beads from some of the sites were missing, however it was important that every bead from the excavated assemblages should, regardless of what had happened to them since they were found, receive the same consideration in the classification process as the surviving beads. Therefore, as much information as possible on the form dimensions and decorative motifs of each missing beads needed to be gathered and collated in order to first decide if the bead was imported or an Irish bead, and second, if it was an Irish bead, to establish which class it belonged to. Unfortunately, this problem was compounded in the case of the beads from Garranes and Garryduff 1 for, as already mentioned, the finds registers for both sites were not available for examination, and none of the surviving beads were labelled. However, through a lot of cross referencing and study of the drawings and descriptions of beads in the excavation reports, it has been possible to identify and classify either as Irish or imported the majority of the missing beads. A further consideration which arose in classifying the beads was how to assess 'stray finds' *i.e.* finds which were loosely associated with a site prior to excavation. The final decision arrived at was



FIGURE 3: THE WIDELY RECOGNISED RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION ASSOCIATED WITH ROSARY BEADS MEANS THE VIEWER IS EASILY ABLE TO PLACE IT WITHIN A CONTEXT.

that before a stray find could be considered for inclusion either in the classification or among the imported beads, comparanda for the type needed to be identified either among international classifications excavated assemblages. For example among the stray finds, or old finds as they are also called, from Lagore crannóg is a bead described by Hencken as ‘a large annular bead of black glass with haphazard red, yellow and white spots’ (Hencken 1950, fig.68, D and 145). The bead was personally examined and identified as an example of a Guido Schedule 2 xi bead (cat. no. Gui. S2xi. 2). Therefore, although this specimen lacked secure context or provenance as an example of an already classified and dated type it is treated as such and included among other imported beads in the study.

### The social performance of beads

While the presence of glass beads among excavated assemblages from early medieval sites speaks to the importance of beads among the population, the nature of the find context of the majority of the beads i.e. as single finds from settlement sites, restricts analysis of how and where on the body beads were worn. To this end in discussing the performance of beads in Irish society a broader canvas needs to be explored. Beads ‘perform’ because of their ability to convey in a visual manner, unspoken *messages* about the wearer or society using them. The ability to do this is based on an understanding of the significance endowed on the beads by society. This significance or meaning comes from the biography of the bead which can include considerations of origin, rarity, age or restrictions on who is entitled to wear them. Thus the beads signify certain messages about the person wearing them in the same way for example that in modern society owning or wearing rosary beads is a clearly recognised visual *message* about the owner’s religious affiliations because society associates rosary beads with a particular belief system (see Figure 3).

Beads as socially signified objects and also repositories of transferable encoded messages can be passed from one person to another through social exchanges across geographical areas and also through time as objects passed from one generation to another (Kuhn and Stiner 2007, 50). As portable transferable objects the message encoded in the bead can be *read* or understood far beyond the confines of one individual’s physical space or time; in other words their social performance or significance is transferable between societies. In North America, for instance, Iroquois societies have used wampum beads as important and binding social documents, such as treaties, between different groups. The reason they can do this is because the wampum beads can convey a messages *intact* across space, from one group to another because the significance of the arrangement or stringing of the beads can be read by all the Iroquois groups (Hill 2007, 317).

In Chapter 6 an attempt is made to draw together what is known about glass beads from Ireland, and, through comparisons with overseas material, offer some insights into the performance of beads in society in Ireland. The rationale justifying a discussion of the performance of glass beads from Ireland and through comparison with the performance of beads in other countries is threefold. Firstly, as already mentioned, most of the beads are single finds and there is a dearth of information available on how beads were worn in early medieval Ireland. Secondly, burial evidence from furnished graves from earlier periods in Ireland (prior to the introduction of Christianity) demonstrates that glass beads formed part of the repertoire of burial goods commonly found in graves (Raftery 1994, 173-204). It is therefore likely that as the direct descendants of a society that engaged with beads, though Christianised the early medieval population would nevertheless understand the multiple ways in which beads were commonly used. In fact, from the slight evidence we do have of possible bead strings from

Lagore and Deer Park Farms, this does indeed seem to be the case; in other words the early medieval population would seem to have strung and worn beads in the same manner as their ancestors did in the Iron Age. Moreover, the evidence gleaned from Deer Park Farms and Lagore, and from a small number of early medieval burials with beads, is also in keeping with evidence from Anglo-Saxon England and Continental Europe on how beads were worn. Finally, interaction and communication between monastic communities in Ireland and their counterparts in Anglo-Saxon England and further afield is well documented (Ó Cróinín 1984, 30-32; 1987, 41), and furthermore it is considered that not only clergy but also traders and artisans travelled between the two countries (Edwards 2009, 142; Edmonds 2009, 135 and 147). Furthermore, imported goods such as pottery and glass vessels testify to established and far distant trade networks between Ireland and the outside world throughout this period, with sherds of both B Ware and E Ware recovered from Garranes and E Ware recovered from Lagore, Garryduff 1, Ballinderry 2, Caherlehillian and Clonmacnoise (Campbell 2007; Doyle 2009; Kelly 2010). Vessel glass of Frankish origin has also been recovered from Garranes, Garryduff 1 and Lagore, and a palm cup similar to vessels from seventh-century Vendel graves, has been identified among the finds from the Period 1b horizon at Lagore (Bourke 1994, 171-173). Therefore, it seems safe to assume that the early medieval population of Ireland was cognisant of the manner in which contemporary societies engaged with beads. Moreover, when we consider the manner in which glass beads have

been deployed on ecclesiastical ornaments it would seem that Christian society may even have re-imagined ways in which beads could continue to be symbolically significant in society.

Chapter 6 is also attempts to instil an awareness of the potential of glass beads to the furtherance of our knowledge of past societies in Ireland, by way of a discussion of how studies on glass beads have furthered knowledge of Anglo-Saxon and Continental societies among scholars. The present study is therefore an attempt to rectify the dearth of research on an artefact with the potential to contribute to our understanding of the evaluation of status and overseas influences and trade, as well as our appreciation of body-ornament and the role of aesthetics in identity. Beads are intrinsically available to symbolic and ritual practices, and have been and continue to be used in many societies today as talismans or charms for protection and to ward off danger. This dimension of glass beads offers another avenue of research, one which in the fullness of time may provide answers to why certain bead types, such as the enigmatic eye beads, retain their popularity over such a long time.

It is of course impossible in one study to address the many avenues of knowledge which international research has demonstrated an analysis and study of glass beads and bead strings can provided on past societies. Therefore the classification offered here provides a foundation for further coherent work to be undertaken in this area of study.