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Rhynie, A Powerful Place of Pictland

Edited by Gordon Noble

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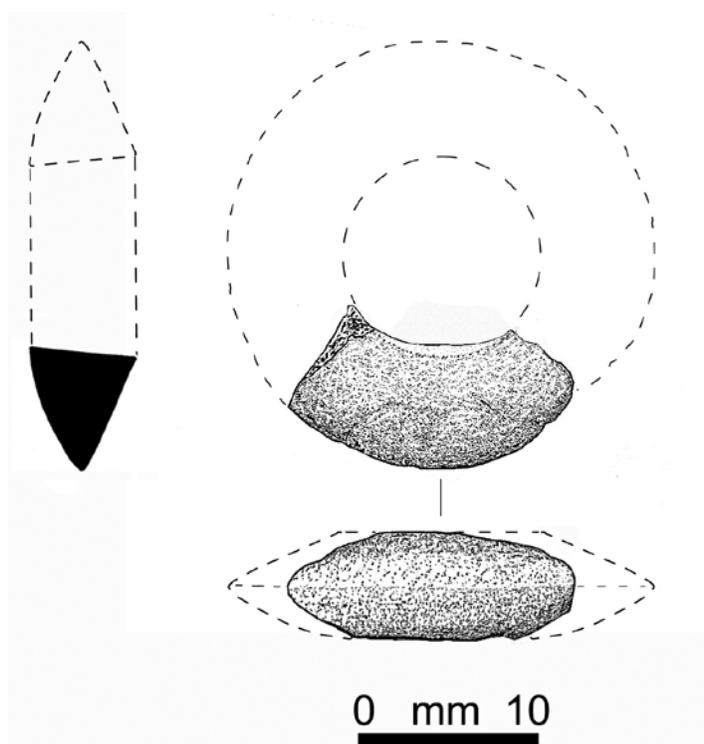
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APPENDIX 2: THE FRAGMENT OF EARLY BRONZE AGE FAIENCE QUOIT BEAD OR PENDANT FROM THE CRAW STANE COMPLEX

ALISON SHERIDAN

This item (SF219) was found in the fill of an early medieval enclosure ditch (C297) but is clearly residual, as it is unquestionably of Early Bronze Age date.

It is a fragment of a quoit-shaped bead or pendant of faience with a triangular-section hoop, measuring 16.1mm in length, 6.65mm in maximum thickness and 7mm in the width of the hoop (ie, from inner to outer edge) (Illus A2.1 and A2.2). Just under a quarter of the circumference of the bead is present; the



Illus A2.1

Reconstruction of the Rhynie quoit bead or pendant. Drawing by Linda Sheridan



Illus A2.2

Views of the Rhynie quoit bead or pendant fragment. Photos by Alison Sheridan/National Museums Scotland

APPENDIX 2

estimated diameters of the outside of the hoop and of the hole are *c* 23.5mm and *c* 11mm respectively. The surviving part of the hole shows that the edge of the hole slopes slightly. The hole will have been made by wrapping faience paste around a small stick, then removing the stick once the paste had dried and the bead was ready to be fired.

It is impossible to tell whether the item had been worn as a bead, with a thread passing through the large hole, or as a pendant, with a thread passing through a small loop fused to the edge of the hoop; both designs are known among Early Bronze Age quoit-shaped faience jewellery in Britain (eg, at Longniddry, East Lothian: Sheridan et al 2004, illus 21.8.12, left).

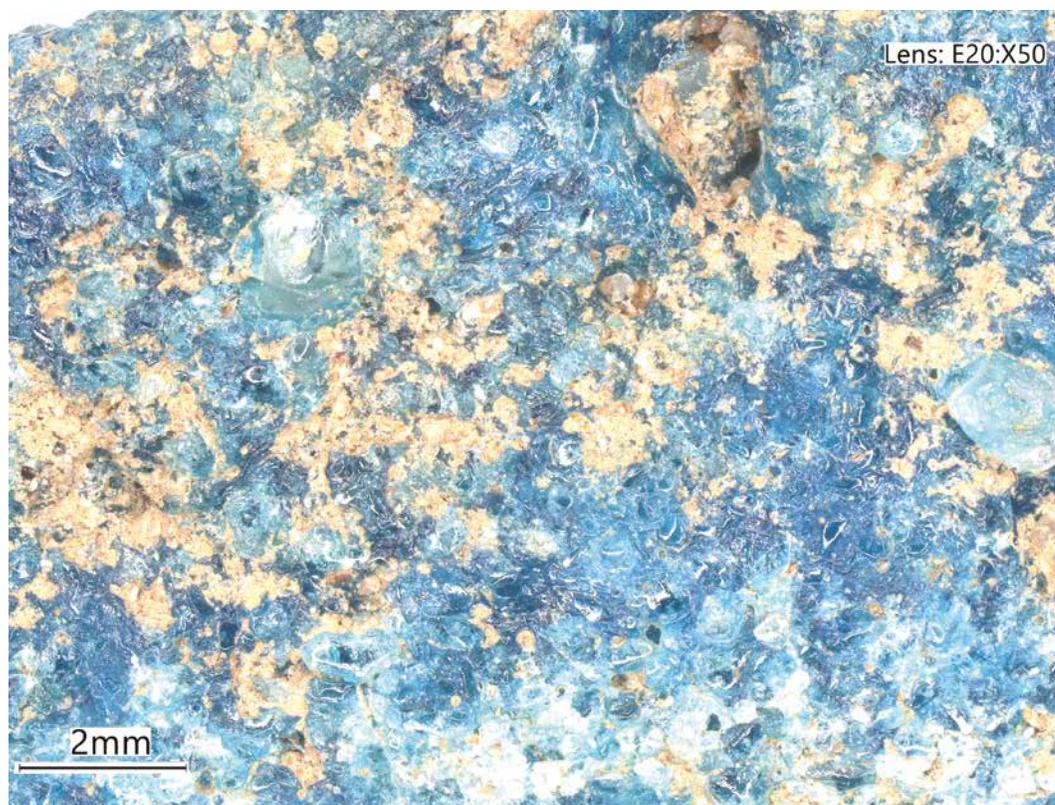
The surface colour and texture of the fragment vary from one side to the other, and there is further colour variation between the sides, the core and the edge of the hole. On one side it is a medium blue colour with a matte appearance, while on the other – the bottom view in Illus A2.2 – it is mostly a darker blue and has a glossy finish. This relates to the differential degree of vitrification – ie, fusing of the constituent sand grains – from one side to the other during the firing of the faience paste. The core colour, visible in the fracture surfaces, is a light grey-brown, matte in appearance, and the edge of the hole, where the glaze is thin, is a mottled pale blue and grey-brown colour, with a matte appearance. The core colour reveals that the glaze had been applied as a thin slurry to the surface of the object, rather than being mixed in with the paste. The surface texture (Illus A2.3) is fairly smooth, with only a small number of vesicles (relating to the escape of gas during the firing of the faience paste); on the matte side, individual sand grains can be observed under a microscope, and on the

shiny side, only a very few such grains can be seen. There is no trace of any heat damage – a feature sometimes seen on faience beads.

The composition of the side with the best-preserved glaze and of the core was examined using qualitative X-ray fluorescence spectrometry at the National Museums Collection Centre, Edinburgh, by Dr Mary Davis; details of the analytical method are appended below. Copper – which would have been the glaze colourant – and iron were detected in both locations, but interestingly, not tin; tin is frequently encountered in British and Irish faience beads, and often in amounts greater than that expected had bronze shavings been used as the source of the copper colourant, so its absence from the Rhynie bead is of interest. The iron could derive either from iron particles in the sand used to make the faience paste, or from extraneous sediment attaching to the surface of the object.

Discussion

Quoit beads and pendants of faience form part of the repertoire of faience ornament shapes in use during the Early Bronze Age in Britain and Ireland, although they are not very common: this is the 31st such find, out of over 300 Early Bronze Age faience ornaments overall (Sheridan et al 2004, 265, 273, illus 21.7.3; Sheridan 2021; with additions). Geographically the closest example of this shape from north-east Scotland to Rhynie is that from a faience necklace found at 102 Findhorn, Moray (Shepherd & Shepherd 2001); that example was associated with two star-shaped beads and 23 segmented beads, buried with the remains of



Illus A2.3

Surface texture (at x50) of the darker blue side of the faience object, where the glaze is glassy. Occasional incompletely melted sand grains are visible, for instance at the upper part of the right edge of the photo. Photo by Alison Sheridan/National Museums Scotland

a young adult female and a neonate in (and above) a large inverted Cordoned Urn.

Radiocarbon dates associated with quoit-shaped beads and pendants, including the Findhorn example, place this ornament type firmly in the second quarter of the second millennium: in addition to the dates for the examples from Findhorn, Trelowthas (Cornwall) and Longniddry (East Lothian) shown in Sheridan and Shortland's publication (2004, illus 21.1), there are dates of 3353 ± 24 BP (1735–1560 cal BC, SUERC-77887) for the Petersfield (Hampshire) example (Sheridan 2021) and of 3212 ± 29 BP (1510–1410 cal BC, modelled, SUERC-74039) for one from Kingsgate, Boscombe Down (Wiltshire); both dates are cited at 95.4% probability (Sheridan 2022).

All the quoit beads and pendants for which contextual information is available have been found in funerary contexts, so it is highly likely that the Rhynie example had originally been deposited in a grave. It is assumed that the first millennium AD activities in the area destroyed that grave, leaving just this fragment surviving as a residual find in the early medieval enclosure ditch. There is evidence suggesting Early Bronze Age funerary activity in the area, in the form of an unexcavated round cairn, the Bell Knowe, around 200m north of the Craw Stane (Gondek & Noble 2015: 130); moreover, sherds of an All Over Cord Beaker, of Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age date, were found in a cattle scrape to the north of the Craw Stane and these may have come from a grave (Cook 2005). The quoit bead will have postdated the

putative Beaker grave and the construction of the Bell Knowe cairn, but it is common for areas to remain in funerary use over generations, so this is likely to have been the case here. The bead predates the Middle Bronze Age roundhouse to the north of the Rhynie Enclosure Complex that was excavated in 2005 (Gondek & Noble 2015).

Note: analytical conditions

The XRF system used was a Bruker CRONO XRF. The analysed area was irradiated with a primary X-ray beam produced by a Rhodium Target X-ray tube and collimated to give an analysed area of about 1 mm × 1 mm. Secondary X-rays were detected with a silicon drift detector with large area (50 mm² SDD with CUBE technology). Spectra were collected at an operating voltage of 40 kV and a current of 50 µA without a primary beam filter to ensure detection of all elements of atomic number 19 or above. Analytical time was 40 sec.

Catalogue entry

SF291, context 297. Fragment of Early Bronze Age quoit-shaped bead or pendant of faience, 16.1mm long, 6.65mm in maximum thickness and 7mm in hoop width. Extrapolated diameters (assuming a fairly symmetrical quoit shape): exterior, *c* 23.5mm; hole, *c* 11mm.