

Ritual in Early Bronze Age grave goods

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A major research project investigating ritual and dress equipment from Early Bronze Age graves in England is nearing completion. Funded by The Leverhulme Trust and the University of Birmingham, a project team of 13 specialists has studied a total of 1500 objects, including c. 6000 individual necklace beads. The study has encompassed exotic goods made from gold, bronze and amber, but has concentrated especially on lesser-researched categories made from stone, animal bone and jet/shale. The scope and aims of the project will be presented and the methods described. In addition to the compilation of standardised databases for objects and sites, selected categories were identified using XRF analysis, and bone materials have been identified to body part and species. Analysis has concentrated on morphology in relation to object function, identification and sourcing of raw materials, traces of manufacture, the incidence of ancient fragmentation and the presence of use wear. Key results relating to function, the recognition of special materials and the definition of heirlooms will be presented for selected categories of object, and contrasts between categories associated with Beaker graves and those from graves of the full Early Bronze Age will be highlighted.