

1970: 224-226; 1969: 288; Szmyt, 1996: 261; Свешников, 1983; 25-26). Solche waren auch in dem Baggerfunde von Juodkrantė vorhanden (Klebs, 1882, Taf. III: 21; XI: 6, 7). Neben den geschmückten Scheiben hatten auch die glatten wohl denselben Sinn gehabt.

Aber die Scheibenringe könnten als eine Homogenität aus den zwei Kulturen angesehen werden. Neben der Scheibe aus der Kugelamphoren - Kultur aus Süden waren die Narva-Kultur Einwoher wohl mit den Schiefferringen aus Norden bekannt (Äyräpää, 1945:18; Kopisto, 1959: 5-17). Obwohl keine Schiefferringe in Šventoji gefunden wurden, waren die Nachbarn in Särnate mit ihnen bekannt (Ванкина, 1970, Taff. XXXVI: 9, 10). Andere Importstücke aus Schiefer (Lanzenspitzen, Hohlmeißel) waren auch in Šventoji gefunden. Sie wurden gegen Bernsteinartefakte ausgetauscht. Das ist deutlich in dem Fundort 23 zu sehen. Für diesen Tauschhandel war da eine Bernstein - Werkstatt eingerichtet, wo serienweise knopfartige Perlen (Abb. 9) und Anhänger gefertigt wurden. Es ist zu bemerken, daß in diesem Fundplatz kein Beil aus einheimischem Gestein vorhanden war - alle waren Importstücke aus Schiefer. Auch manche Bernsteinstücke waren wohl nach den Vorbildern der Träger der kamm- grubchenkeramischen Kultur angefertigt. Die Bernsteinfigürchen aus dem Fundort 26 (Abb. 3: 18) und aus dem Sammelfund von Palanga (Abb. 5: 1) erinnern an die Lehmfigürchen der genannten Kultur, z. B. von Purciems in Lettland (Šturms, 1937, Abb. 2a). Vielleicht könnten auch die Halberzeugnisse für Tierköpfchen aus dem Fundort 26 (Abb. 3: 20) und aus dem Verwahrfund 30 mit den Einflüssen aus dem Gebiete der kamm-grubchenkeramischen Kultur in Verbindung gestellt werden. Es wird auch dadurch bestätigt, daß die Keramik aus dem Fundorte 26 sehr ähnlich der kamm-grubchenkeramischen Kultur angefertigt wurde. Die Figürchen verkörpern wohl irgendein chthonisches Wesen. Doch die Verbindungen mit der kamm - grubchenkeramischen Kultur waren nur episodisch.

Aus diesen Bemerkungen folgt, daß der Bernstein als ein sakrales Material für die Träger vieler Kulturen diente. Es ist auch klar, daß die an der Lagune ansässigen Leute rege Verbindungen trieben und nicht nur Schmucksachen tauschten, sondern auch ihre Weltanschauung verbreiteten.

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## STONE AGE GOLD

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### Abstract

*A new catalogue of amber beads in three megalithic tombs of north-western Scania, Sweden, forms the starting point for this paper which deals with two aspects of amber beads found in Swedish megalithic tombs. First regional variation in the number of amber beads is examined and compared to the projected sources of amber in the Neolithic. An interpretation of registered quantitative differences is based on the idea that amber is in some circumstances used to mark the status of a developing social hierarchy. Secondly different types of beads are discussed, the distribution of the different types in the three Scanian tombs being compared with that in the Rössberga passage grave in Västergötland. It is suggested that observed differences in the distribution of bead types may be a result of different regional traditions within the Swedish megalithic culture.*

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"Amber beads, the main ornament of the Stone Age people, are a regular component of burial equipment in passage graves, but in the one just excavated they occur in unusually large numbers, between two and three hundred."

This is what Oscar Almgren, the famous Swedish archaeologist, wrote on 3 October 1908 in a local Scanian newspaper, Helingsborgs Posten. He was re-

ferring to the passage grave of Gantofta, ancient monument 12 in the parish of Kvistofta, Scania (Fig. 1). He had just completed a two-week excavation of the megalith together with Gustaf Adolf who was then crown prince of Sweden. When the amber beads were re-catalogued in the spring of 1996 the number of beads proved to be even higher than Oscar Almgren thought. 368 beads had once been deposited in the megalith of Gantofta. Only here and in the passage grave of Gillhög in Barsebäck parish, Scania (Fig. 1), have so many amber beads been found (Fig. 2).

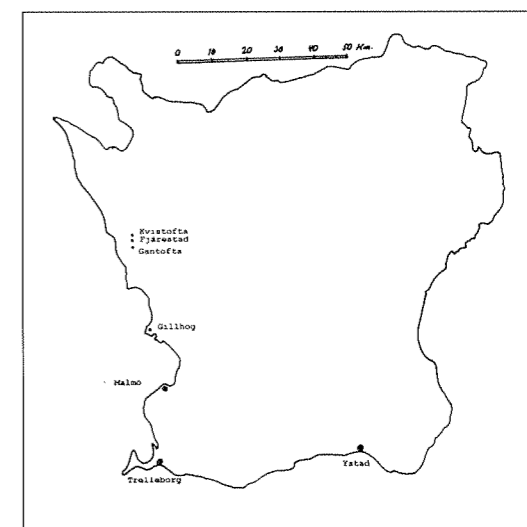


Fig. 1. Scania with megaliths mentioned in the text.

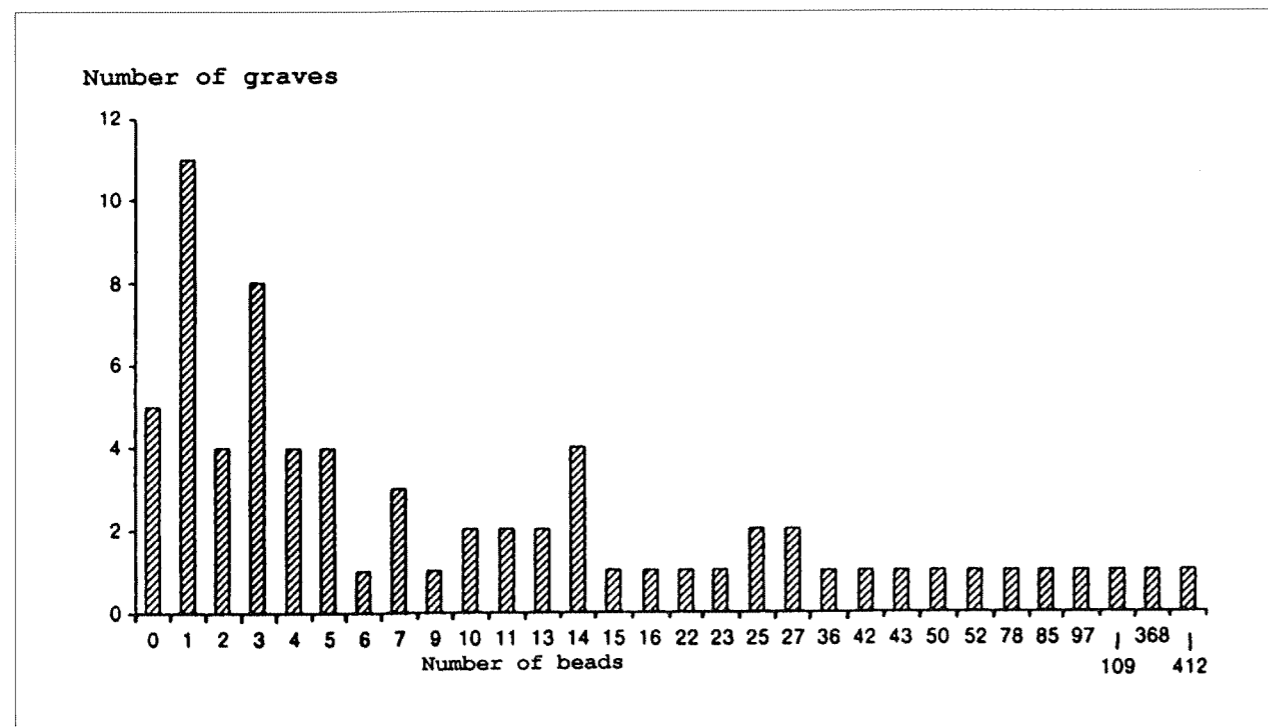


Fig. 2. Number of beads in 70 amber-producing megalithic graves. Based on information in Blomqvist 1989a. 0 = number of beads unspecified. Drawing: Cecilia Bonnevier, Dag Hammar.

### Background

The passage grave at Gantofta is one of seven excavated megaliths in northwest Scania. The results of the excavations have not been published. They were to be described and analysed in the third volume of the series "Die Funde aus Dolmen und Ganggräbern in Schonen, Schweden" (Bagge & Kaelas 1950, 1952). Lili Kaelas began work on the third volume covering northwest Scania and Astrid Wexell continued her work but for various reasons the volume was never completed. With financial support from the Berit Wallenberg Foundation the Museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm (SHM) resumed work on the project in 1996. I started to complete the work which had been previously conducted. It was in this connection that a new catalogue of the amber beads was drawn up.

### The exotic

In the above-cited article Oscar Almgren (1908) presented an interpretation of the amber beads:

"These small amber axes and maceheads seem to

have functioned as ritual symbols, tokens of the thunder god, worn as amulets, just as small Thor's hammers of silver or iron were worn far later in the Viking Age".

Almgren saw the beads as individual symbols, some kind of amulet. In the present paper another interpretation will be forwarded. Amber may have acted as Stone Age gold, i.e. a substance symbolising power, a status material. In my PhD thesis (Taffinder 1998) I examined ornaments and other symbol-laden objects in 93 different ethnographically described societies all over the world. I focused attention on the social function of the ornaments and the accessibility of the raw material from which they are made. It transpired, not unexpectedly, that objects used to legitimise positions of power are more frequently made of raw materials not available to all, often "imported" material or materials otherwise difficult to acquire. This applies, for example, to gold in our own society and time and also in many other societies and at many other times.

Amber does not occur throughout Sweden. In some areas it may have functioned as a desirable status substance. In other areas it may have been a local material

which everyone could collect on the beach. I would like to compare the occurrence of amber in megaliths with its occurrence in nature in order to establish whether it was used as a geographically local or non-local exotic material during the Stone Age. This should cast light on the social function of amber ornaments and consequently on social organisation at the time in question.

For example, in Denmark it has been shown that the amber hoards of the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture, dating mainly from the Early Neolithic, and amber deposited in Early Neolithic non-megalithic burials are concentrated in northern Jutland where the occurrence of natural amber in Denmark is richest (Randsborg 1979, 311; Shennan 1982, 35; Ebbesen 1995, 54). In other words, amber was at this time used as a local raw material and thus probably did not function as a status-legitimising substance in the terms of the model described above. On the other hand, there is less amber in the Middle Neolithic passage graves of Jutland than in the contemporary burials of Zealand. In this phase of the Middle Neolithic amber is an exotic raw material in Zealand, but as a local raw material it is used sparingly in the megalithic graves nearest the richest deposits in nature, i.e. in Jutland. Stephen Shennan sees this as an indication of increasing social differentiation in Zealand, amber acting as a symbol of power (Shennan 1982, 35).

### Quantity

According to an investigation in my thesis (Taffinder 1998), amber is a local raw material in the whole of Scania, but in the rest of Sweden, for example in the county of Västergötland, it must have been regarded as an exotic substance during the megalithic period. It would be interesting to establish whether the distribution of amber in Danish megaliths is repeated in Sweden. However, this is not an easy task, as no corpus of megalithic amber exists. Even published descriptions of amber assemblages in individual excavated megalithic graves are few and far between. Despite the fact that in Lars Blomqvist's compilation of megalithic tombs in Sweden finds are of subordinate importance, the tables he presents probably do give a roughly correct picture of the occurrence of amber in Swedish megaliths (Blomqvist 1989a). Perhaps the distribution pattern will have to be modified once Anders Strinnholm and Tony Axelsson at the Department of Archaeology,

Gothenburg University, have published their corpus of Neolithic amber which is now in preparation. Fig. 3 shows that the dispersal of megalithic amber in Sweden does not entirely match that observed in Denmark. Blomqvist's maps of the distribution of megalithic graves in Sweden show two concentrations in Scania, one in western Scania (Blomqvist's Sk 1 - 91) and one in eastern Scania (Blomqvist's Sk 92 - 137, including Östergötland, Gotland and Öland with one grave in each; Blomqvist 1989a, 226). The largest amount of amber originates from the western Scanian graves. Today the largest supplies of amber are indeed found along the western coast of Scania, but we cannot be sure that this was so in the past (Dahlström & Brost 1995, 51).

This quantitative difference in the occurrence of amber in megalithic graves can be most easily interpreted as a result of the natural variation in amber distribu-

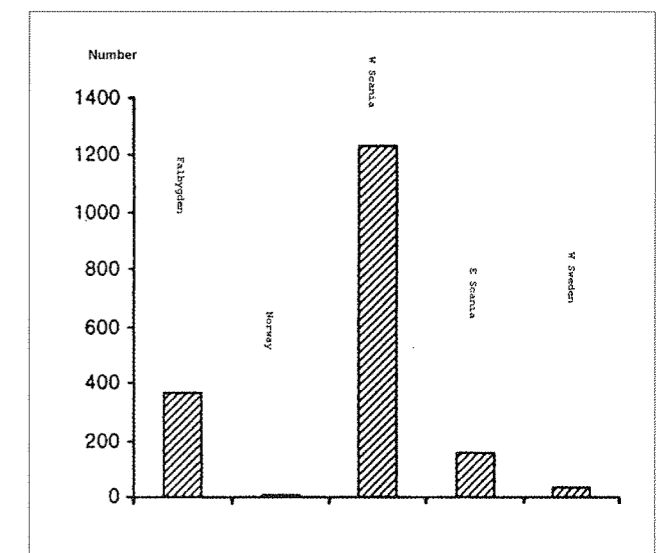


Fig. 3. Distribution of amber beads in five different megalithic grave areas. Based on information in Blomqvist, 1989a. Drawing: Cecilia Bonnevier, Dag Hammar.

tion. In this case the picture matches that discussed for the funnel-necked beaker hoards in Denmark. Amber was used as a geographically local raw material in the Scanian megalithic graves. It would consequently not have functioned as a status symbol according to the model applied. Other interpretations would demand better knowledge of variations in the natural distribution of amber and in addition a more penetrating analysis of megalithic society in the two different areas. Neither can be accommodated in this context. It must also

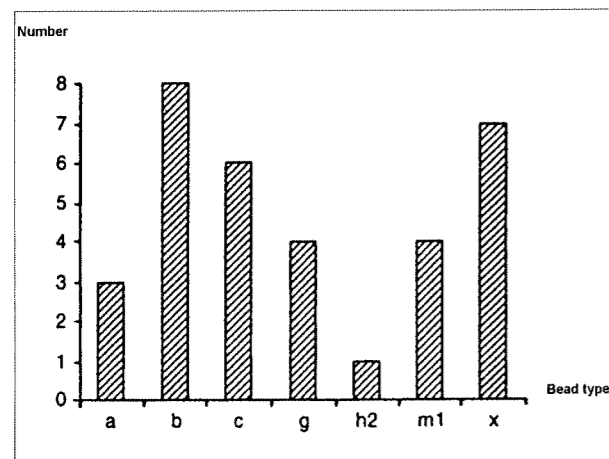


Fig. 4. Distribution of different bead types in Kvistofta passage grave. Drawing: Cecilia Bonnevier, Dag Hammar.

be stressed that the large number of beads in the western Scanian graves depends to a great extent on the large number of beads in the two individual graves mentioned above - the Gantofta passage grave in Kvistofta parish and the Gillhög grave in Barsebäck parish. They account for 63% of the beads in this group.

It is much easier to interpret the occurrence of amber in the megaliths of Västergötland, because amber is without doubt inaccessible in this area. Fig. 3 shows that despite this, the graves here contain a considerable number of amber beads, exceeding even the number in the eastern Scanian group. Neither can it be said that the amount of amber decreases at an even rate in proportion to increased distance from the source. The columns in fig. 3 show clearly that Västergötland represents an irregularity in the fall-off curve for amber distribution. If, for example, the west coast of Sweden (i.e. the west coast north of Scania) is compared with Västergötland, two areas which are equally distant from the source of natural amber, it will be seen that amber is used to a much greater extent in the graves of Västergötland. This may mean that amber played an active role in the megalithic society of Västergötland, for example a role in the legitimisation of status. It may indicate, in contrast, an absence of status positions in the megalithic society of the west coast area. Megaliths themselves may have played different roles in the two areas (see a summary on the role of megaliths in Taffinder 1998, 82).

### Morphology

Amber beads were found in three of the seven graves in northwest Scania, here for convenience termed Kvistofta, Gantofta and Fjärestad passage graves (Fig. 1; Gantofta is ancient monument 12, Kvistofta parish, SHM accession number 13521; Kvistofta passage grave, sometimes called the railway passage grave, is ancient monument 13 in Kvistofta parish, SHM accession number 14267; Fjärestad passage grave is ancient monument 5, Fjärestad parish, SHM accession number 13305; Gillhög passage grave in Barsebäck parish, assemblage owned by the University Museum of Antiquities, Lund). Figs. 4-5 show the different bead types in two of these three graves. The beads are divided into different types on the basis of Klaus Ebbesen's typology (1995). Beads of type b, the club-shaped or bobbin-shaped according to Ebbesen (1995; Fig. 6) predominate in all three of these megalithic graves. This is especially notable in the



Fig. 6. Type b bead from Gantofta passage grave. SHM 13521. The bead is 43 mm long. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

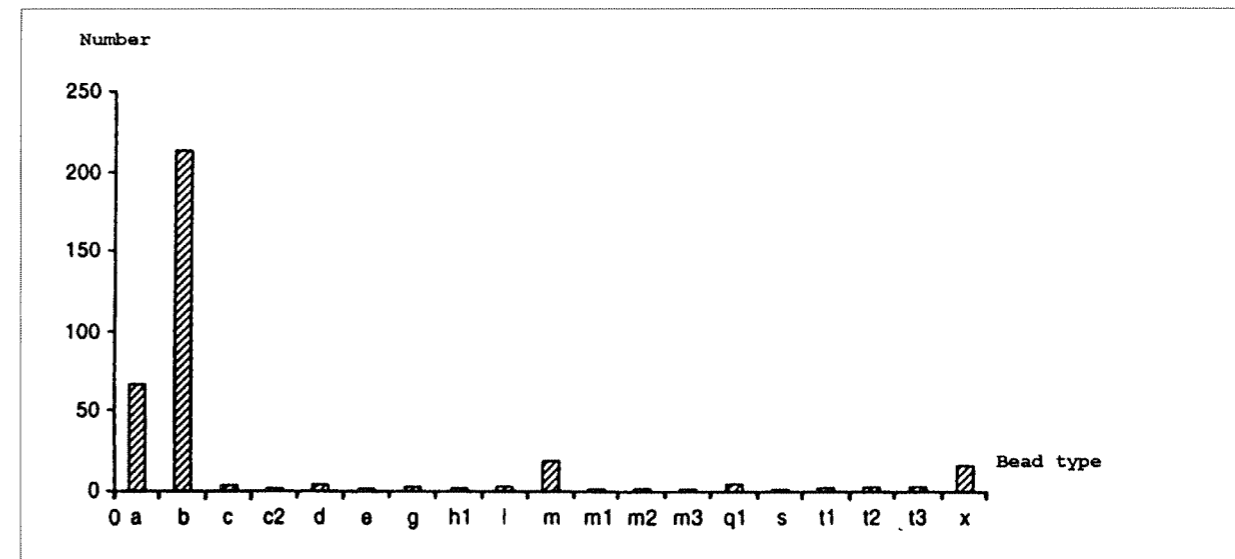


Fig. 5. Distribution of different bead types in Gantofta passage grave. Drawing: Cecilia Bonnevier, Dag Hammar.

large bead assemblage from Gantofta. Beads of type a (Fig. 7), the double-edged axes, are the second most common type. These beads are copies of the ceremonial axes of the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture. It is consequently easy to understand their symbolical overtones.

In contrast, the symbolic significance of the club-shaped beads is more cryptic. Gunborg O. Janzon has focused attention on the similarity between the shape of the beads and the so-called stone tools with shafting grooves (Janzon 1984, 11f). Richard Indreko, who made a thorough study of these tools, showed that a certain type (B according to Indreko's system) of stone tools with shafting groove occurred mainly in megalithic areas but he discerned some differences between the stone tools and club-shaped amber beads (Indreko 1956, 40 ff.). These club-shaped beads have also been found in Irish megalithic graves where they are made of soapstone, a local limestone called blue limestone or semi-precious stones of various kinds. According to Michael Herity the beads are copies of stone tools with shafting grooves. In Ireland these tools are interpreted as instruments for the processing of metal ore. The distribution of these stone tools corresponds to the distribution of megaliths in Ireland and also in Scotland (Herity 1974, 127 ff.).

Gunborg O. Janzon interprets the Swedish stone tools in the same way and she maintains in addition that they were used to build megalithic graves. Megalithic graves in Sweden are not normally directly associated with metal-working, but it is obvious that



Fig. 7. Type a bead Gantofta passage grave. SHM 13521. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

Fig. 8. Copper flat axe from Svenstorps mosse, Stora Köpinge parish, Scania. SHM 2791:337. The axe is 95 mm long. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

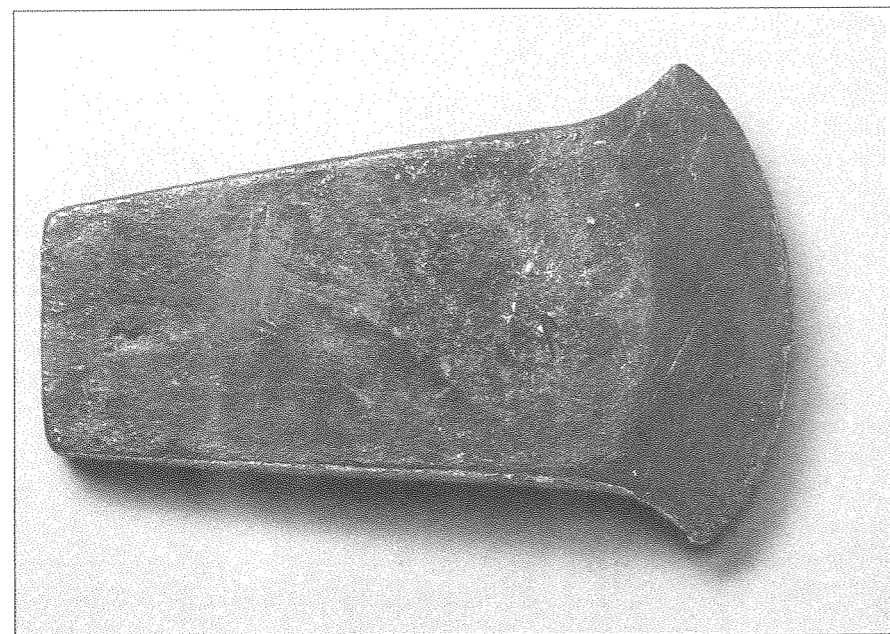


Fig. 9. Type q1 bead from Gantofta passage grave. SHM 13521. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.



the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture in Sweden was familiar with copper objects (Janzon 1984, 11 f.). The problem is that stone tools with shafting grooves of type B are almost always found as stray finds in megalithic areas and are thus unknown in recognised Funnel-necked Beaker contexts in Sweden.

However, there is another bead type which may reflect the fascination of metal tools for the people of the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture. Bead type q1 is a pendant in the shape of a thin-butted flint axe according to Ebbesen (Ebbesen 1995, 40). Some thin-butted axes have splayed edges which are reminiscent

of early copper flat axes (cf. fig. 8). Flint has been used to replace the highly desirable metal axes of copper (Karsten 1994, 60). Amber beads of type q1 sometimes also have splayed edges (Ebbesen 1995, Fig. 3.6). Gantofta has also produced three beads which can be interpreted in this way (Fig. 9). This interpretation of the beads was already advanced by Oscar Almgren (1908).

Neolithic amber beads display a wide selection of shapes. In the grave at Gantofta there are beads of 12 different main types. In his study of the Scandinavian amber hoards dating from the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture Ebbesen lists 20 different types. The different

shapes certainly harboured specific meanings for the people who deposited the beads in hoards or graves. It has previously been recognised that the array of beads in the large amber hoards of the Funnel-necked Beaker Culture in Denmark diverges from that in megaliths. Ebbesen established that the most common type in hoards is the cylinder-shaped bead (Ebbesen's type m). It accounts for approximately 90% of all beads in hoards, while types a and b (double-edged axes and club-shaped beads) only occur in eight of 51 hoards. Only ten of the approximately 47 825 beads in Funnel-necked Beaker hoards are club-shaped (Ebbesen 1995, 44ff.). Beads of these two types (a and b) are also predominant in the grave at Gantofta. This difference must be related to different symbolic connotations, differences which should be studied in more detail. However, such a study cannot be conducted until a corpus of megalithic amber is available.

Pending this corpus, a comparison between the amber-producing megaliths of northwest Scania and one counterpart from another megalithic area will suffice to reveal possible interesting results.

Fig. 10 shows a typological analysis of the beads from the passage grave at Rössberga, ancient monument 2 in Valtorp parish, Västergötland. It was excavated by Carl Cullberg in 1962 (Cullberg 1962) and the finds belong to the collections of SHM (accession number 27911). A total of 87 beads was registered. 81 of these can be fitted into Ebbesen's typological system. The distribution of types differs from that in the Gantofta passage grave. At Rössberga beads of

Ebbesen's type c are predominant (Fig. 11). Ebbesen defines this type as a bead with a lens-shaped cross-section, but it can perhaps also be seen as a copy of simple shaft-hole axes. In contrast, the number of type c beads at Gantofta is very low.

It is difficult to suggest an explanation of this difference. Perhaps it should be seen in association with regional variation in megalithic grave assemblages. The analysis of regional patterns has so far been entirely restricted to differences in pottery decoration in various areas (Hårdh 1986). Documented differences in pottery decoration are seen in terms of regional traditions. These traditions may also be reflected in other parts of the burial equipment. Differences in bead morphology could function as some kind of group marker.

It is also possible that these differences reflect chronological disjunction. For instance, the megaliths of Västergötland may have been used to a greater extent after the construction phase, for example during the Late Neolithic or later. On the other hand this later use of the graves may have been more infrequent in Scania. In this case beads of type c may indeed be copies of simple shaft-hole axes of stone dating primarily from the Late Neolithic. However this interpretation is not in agreement with an analysis of the megalithic find material in general. The catalogue in Blomqvist's PhD thesis shows that, in comparison with graves in other megalithic areas, unusually few graves in Västergötland contain characteristic Late Neolithic artifacts (Blomqvist 1989a).

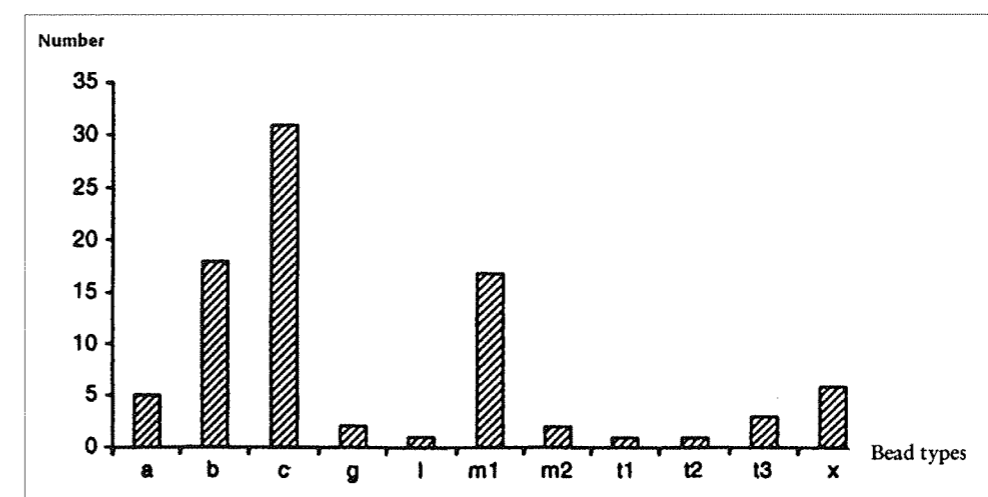


Fig. 10. Distribution of the different bead types in the Rössberga passage grave, Valtorp parish, Västergötland. Drawing: Cecilia Bonnevier, Dag Hammar.

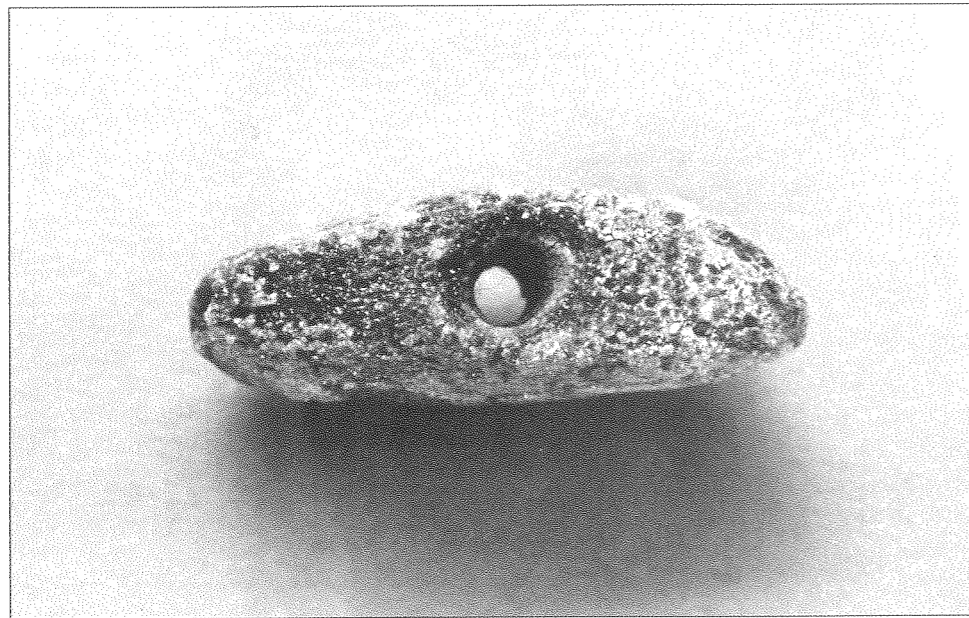


Fig. 11. Type c bead from Rössberga passage grave, Valtorp parish, Västergötland. SHM 27911. The bead is 35 mm long. Photo: Gabriel Hildebrand, SHM.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that the assemblages of the Västergötland megaliths diverge in an additional respect from those of the Scanian graves. They contain tooth beads which are almost absent from other megaliths. Blomqvist lists 13 megalithic tombs with tooth beads. 11 of these are situated in Västergötland and only two originate from Scania (Blomqvist 1989a, Fig. 4:3). It is striking that graves with tooth beads are so heavily concentrated in Västergötland. This seems to represent a local tradition. All the Västergötland tooth beads were found in the burial chamber whereas their two Scanian counterparts came from the passage (Blomqvist 1989a, Fig. 4:3). This difference may also have a chronological explanation. Tooth beads are sometimes found in Late Neolithic gallery graves, for example in Gotland (Luthander 1988) and they are known from three of 71 gallery graves in Västergötland itself (Blomqvist 1989b, Fig. 2:9).

### Summary

In an article of 1908 Oscar Almgren discussed two important aspects of the custom of depositing amber beads in Swedish megaliths - the number of beads and the interpretation of individual bead morphology. In this paper I have tried to continue this discussion by ventilating some fragmentary ideas on these two aspects of megalithic amber.

In some areas, for example in western Scania, amber is a locally accessible material but in other areas, such as Bohuslän or Västergötland, amber is not available in nature. The presence of non-local or exotic

raw materials in what can reasonably be seen as non-functional contexts may indicate the underlining of status positions in society. Ethnographic sources show that status is often legitimised by the use of jewellery made of exotic materials. This may mean that in Västergötland, where the use of amber is exotic and extensive, society during the megalithic period was characterised by a greater degree of inequality than, for example, Bohuslän where amber is used very scantily. Before drawing such conclusions it is of course necessary to analyse possible inequality indicators in other strands of the archaeological record.

Different types of beads enjoyed preference in different areas. They may be markers of regionality, group identity in megalithic culture. Other aspects of the archaeological record, for example the grouping of the monuments themselves and pottery decoration styles may be further indications of this.

Until a corpus of megalithic amber is available these ideas cannot be developed further.

### Note

This paper is a translation and slight modification of an article which was published 1997 in A. Åkerlund, S. Bergh, J. Nordbladh, J. Taffinder (eds) *Till Gunborg. Arkeologiska samtal*. Stockholm archaeological reports 33, 39 - 48.

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