

## AMBER GRAVES OF ZVEJNIEKI BURIAL GROUND

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### Introduction

Amber jewellery is one of the outstanding constituents of funerary equipment in the Eastern Baltic during the Neolithic period. Amber has been found in the grave inventories of specially arranged burial grounds – Zvejnieki, Kreiči, Sope – and in single graves located within residential sites – Valma, Kvāpāni, Abora I and Tamula (Zagorskis F., 1961; 1974; 1987; Loze I., 1968; 1996; Jaanits L., 1957, 1984). All of these graves date from the Middle and Late Neolithic, when natural amber became accessible, the processing of amber, and exchange of raw materials and amber objects began and was organised on a wide scale.

In research on amber of the Eastern Baltic Stone Age, more attention has been paid to amber stray finds and amber artefacts from settlement sites. An important amber-processing centre has been discovered in an inland region – the Lubāna Lowlands of south-eastern Latvia (Loze I., 1969, 1979, 1988).

Amber in the form of grave goods is also very informative. Amber objects help us date particular burials with a greater degree of certainty, since the typology and chronology of amber objects in the East Baltic has been studied extensively (Loze I., 1974; 1975; 2000). The location of amber grave goods in a particular burial helps us to establish how they were worn in the past. Amber ornaments may also be used to understand the spiritual world of the ancient Stone Age inhabitants. Of course, the connection between

living society and mortuary rituals is not very straightforward. The main thing is to understand what particular objects were included in the funerary complex and why they were included (Nordbladh J., 1991, 39; Taffinder J., 1998, 52 - 54).

### Zvejnieki burial ground

Zvejnieki burial ground on the northern shore of Lake Burtneki is still the richest in the East Baltic in terms of the number of 'amber graves'. It was excavated by F. Zagorskis in the 1970s (Zagorskis F., 1987). The Neolithic graves within the burial ground containing amber objects were located on the gently sloping south-eastern end of a gravel ridge, concentrating around the Zvejnieki farmstead (Fig. 1). As the graves had been dug into coarse gravel, the amber objects are poorly preserved. It is not possible to determine the structure, former colour or the techniques of working of the amber objects. Only the shape of the objects and their placement in the grave, indicating the function of the amber items, could be observed in the material from Zvejnieki burial ground (Zagorskis F., 1987, 74–75).

Amber adornments were found in 17 graves and in one so-called 'offering place', with a total of about 210 pieces – pendants, tubular beads, button-shaped beads, rings and discs. Eight male graves and eight child and adolescent graves contained amber objects, while only one female grave (no. 256) contained amber adornments.

Two separate complexes of burials with amber adorn-

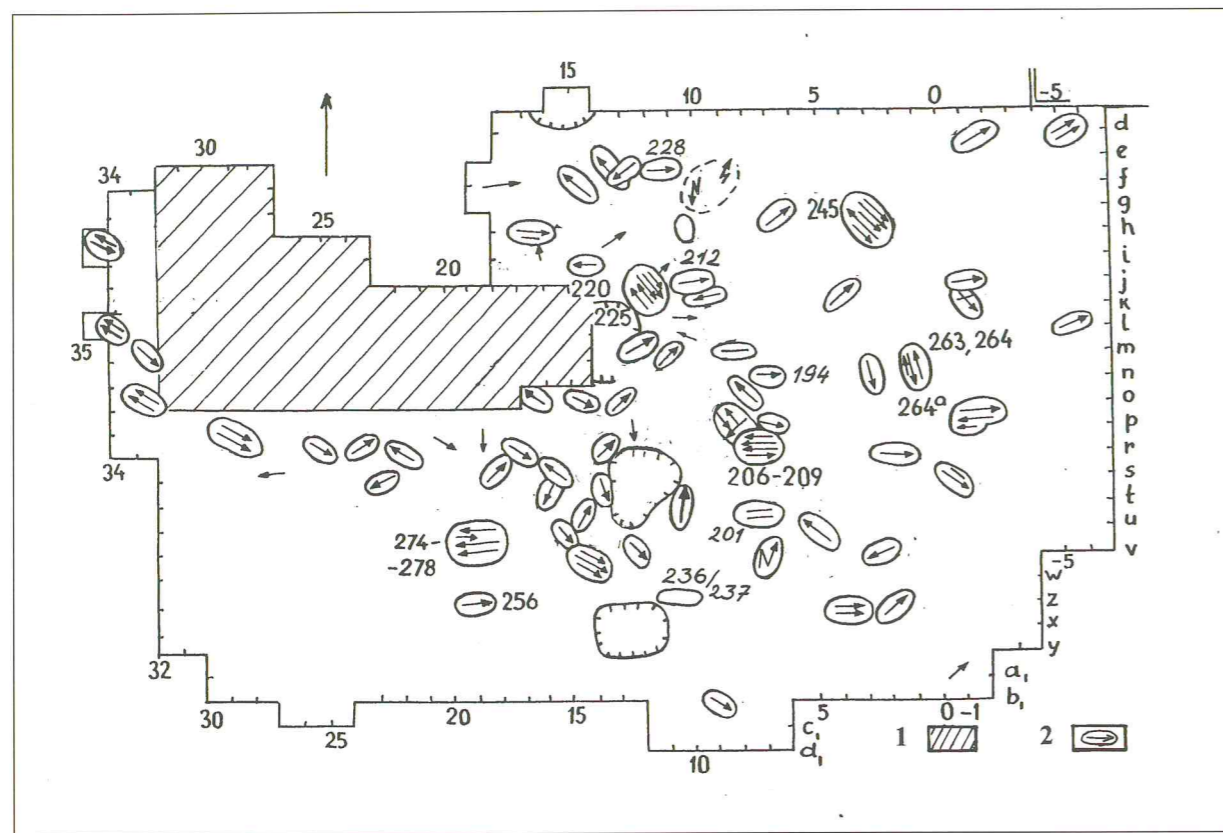


Fig. 1. The location of the Neolithic burials at Zvejnieki burial ground, northern Latvia: 1- Zvejnieki farmstead; 2- burials.

ments can be distinguished in the Neolithic group of graves. These are: 1) multiple or collective ochre-strewn burials with a special amber inventory, offering places and some rare traditions of amber use; 2) single graves with an east-west orientation, a fill of black earth and scarce amber ornaments, sometimes augmented with sculptures carved in bone and antler.

Thus, two different variants of 'amber graves' can be distinguished in the Neolithic part of Zvejnieki burial ground. Whether this reflects chronological differences, cultural or social factors is a question for further research.

### Collective burials

The more interesting and attractive is the first group – collective burials, consisting of between two and seven burials in a common grave. Adults, adolescents and children were buried together. Close to these burials, special 'offering places' were established. Both the collective graves and offering places were very heavily powdered with red ochre. The graves and the offerings contained flint, slate, bone and amber

artefacts and pottery with comb and pit decoration. Some burials in the collective graves were very richly adorned with amber jewellery: oval, flattened pendants with drilled perforations, triangular pendants, barrel-shaped beads, rings and some spacers (Fig. 5).

In this group we may include four collective graves: 1) grave 206–209, containing two adolescents (206, 207), a man (208) and a woman (209). Amber was found on both adolescent burials; 2) grave 220–225, where five adult persons (220 – male, 221 – male, 222 – female, 223 – indeterminate, and 225 – male) and two children (221-a, 224) were buried. A rich array of amber adornments was found on burials 221-a, 224 and 225; 3) grave 274–278, which contained three male burials (275, 276, 277) and two adolescents (274, 278). Amber adornments were found on all three male burials; 4) nos. 263, 264, and 264-a, containing two males (263, 264) and a small child (264-a). Amber was found on one of the male burials (no. 263). We may include in this group one very badly damaged burial (no. 201) with a similar inventory, which may also be part of a collective grave with at least two burials. Two fragments of an amber adornment were found here. All these col-

lective burials were located at the very centre of the Neolithic group of graves (Fig. 1).

The collective graves were 2–2.3 m long, 1–1.5 m wide and reached a depth of 0.6–0.7 m. The bottom of the pit and the fill consisted of black earth, presumably taken from the adjacent settlement, and an intensive layer of red ochre had been poured around the body. The deceased were laid in two layers, one above the other. The dead were usually placed in an extended supine position, or sometimes on the stomach (no. 263) or on the side (no. 208, 225). In these graves three, four, five, six and as many as seven persons were buried together – adults, adolescents and children. The interred were commonly placed in opposed directions, mainly with the head to east or west, but slight deviations were sometimes observed (NW–SE). It is considered that all persons in one collective grave were buried at the same time, i.e. they were contemporaneous (Fig. 2, 3 A).

Amber objects found in these collective graves are represented by: 1) medium-sized oval pendants of segmental cross-section and between one and three drilled holes in the upper part (Fig. 5:2); 2) more massive, heart-shaped pendants (Fig. 5:13); 3) amber rings, medium-sized (dm 2–3 cm) or larger (dm about 4 cm), with a triangular cross-section and rounded margin (Fig. 5:1, 4–9, 14); 4) barrel-shaped beads (Fig. 5:10, 11); 5) some unusual forms, such as a small globular bead, a fragment of a chevron-shaped pendant and a 'spacer' in the form of a rounded triangle with a hole in each angle (Fig. 5:3).

Amber ornaments in these collective burials were used as separate decorations or amulets, or else formed more elaborate adornments – necklaces; sometimes amber items formed a dense covering over the body; and some male burials showed a very rare and special application of amber rings.

Adornment with individual items was found in a small number of cases. A small oval pendant was found immediately under the skull of adolescent burial 206. A separate amber ring was placed behind the skull of male burial 221 (Fig. 5:1). One amber ring with a triangular cross-section was found on the chest of a male (no. 263) in collective grave 263–264, 264-a (Fig. 5:4). These separate adornments were perhaps worn as pendants or fastened to the cap or dress as decoration.

Sometimes the amber items found in the graves 'in situ' formed strings of ornaments, perhaps necklaces. Thus, in collective grave 221–225, amber ornaments formed a pile consisting of eight oval and some

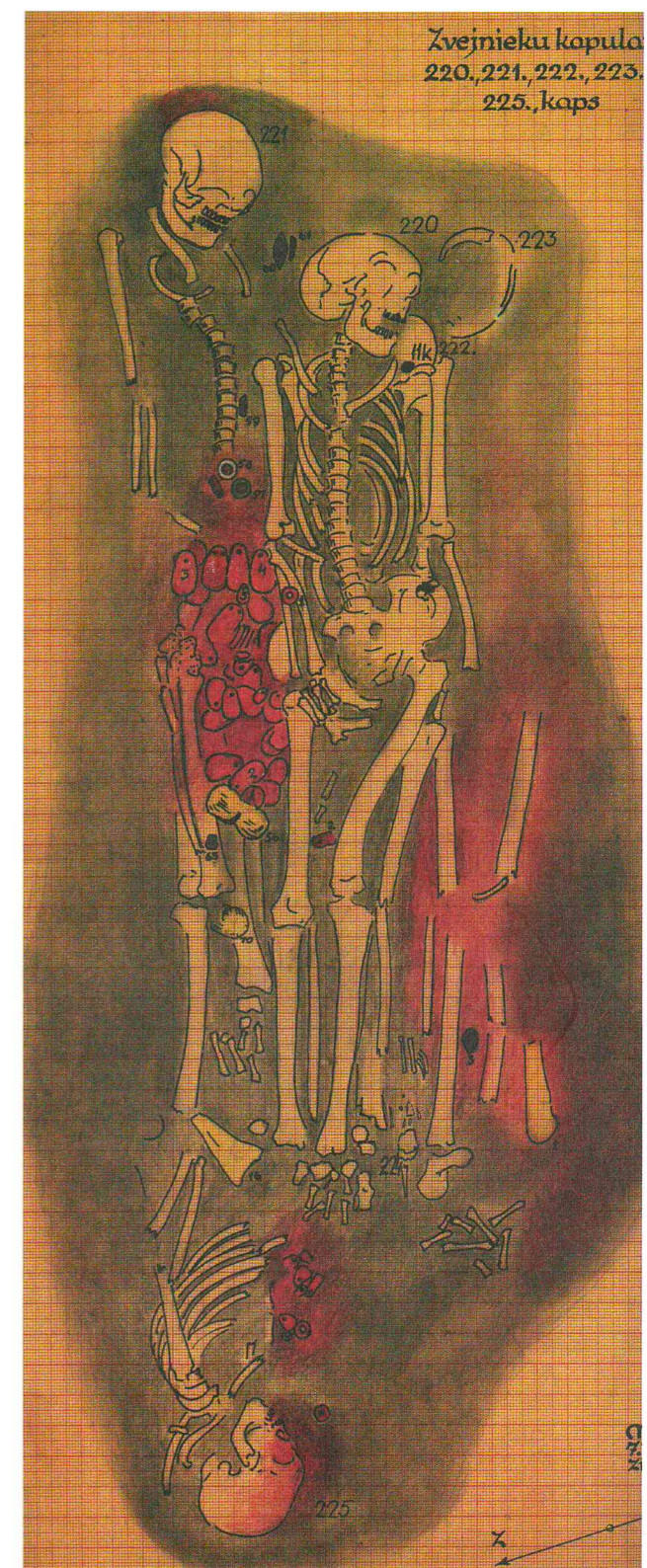


Fig. 2. Zvejnieki burial ground, collective grave, burials 220–225;

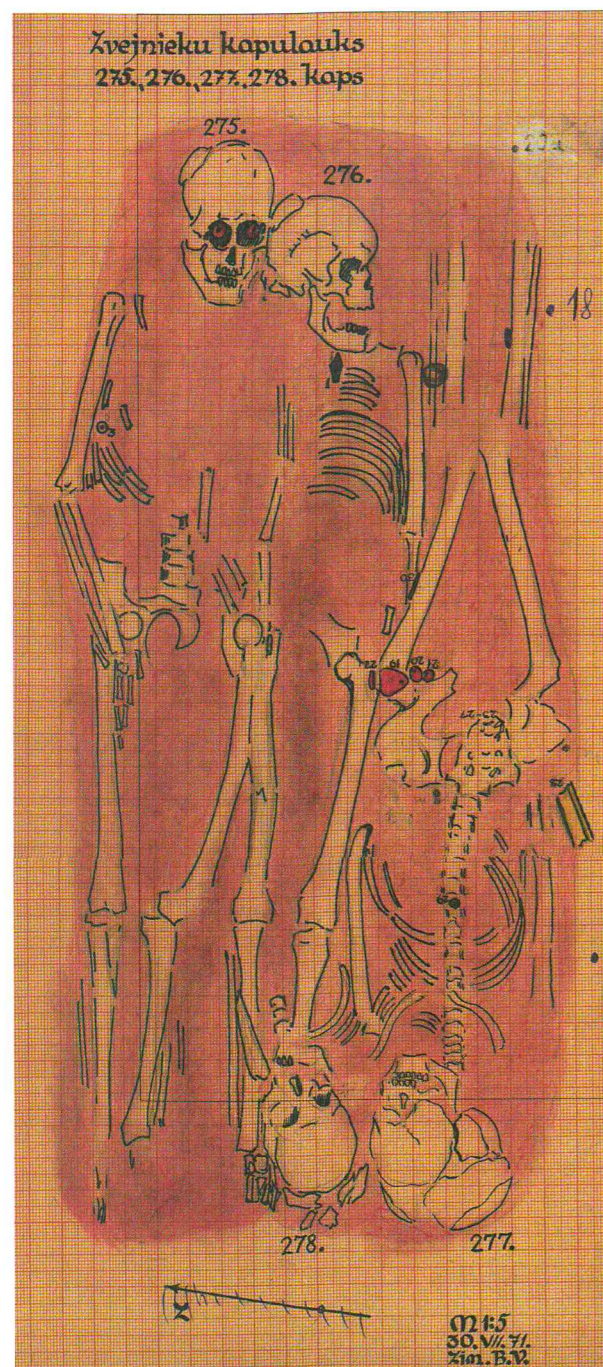


Fig. 3. Zvejnieki burial ground, A – collective grave, burials 275–278;

tooth-shaped pendants, a small amber ring and two larger fragmentary rings. The adornment was augmented with two tubular bone beads. The ornaments were found in the chest region of an adult male (no. 225), also very close to the head of a small child (no. 224). Thus, it is not quite clear to which person the amber ornaments belonged – to the child or the adult (Fig. 5:5). Beautiful amber ornaments were found in collective grave 274–278 (Fig. 3A). The ornaments included a large, massive ring and two rows of flat pendants. A second row included three amber rings (Fig. 5:5). This adornment terminated in five small animal tooth-pendants, four of marten and one of wild boar (determinations by L. Lõugas, Tallinn). Perhaps these also belonged to the adornment. The ornaments were found in the area of the legs of the male (burial 277) but had obviously slipped down from the breast of the adjacent male burial, no. 276 (Fig. 3A).

In one case, the amber artefacts formed quite an unusual ornament. In collective grave 220–225 on a male burial (221) 56 amber ornaments were found. These had been laid close one to another in an intensively ochre-strewn area from the middle of the body to the knees, forming a dense covering. This covering consisted of flat, oval pendants and three amber rings (Fig. 2). It is considered that in this case the child (burial 221-a), buried above the adult, was wrapped in a richly adorned covering (Zagorska I., 1997, 44).

Particular observations were made with regard to amber rings. These are 2–3 cm in diameter, with a hole in the centre, and of lenticular section, with a slightly rounded outer margin (Fig. 2). Such rings were found in all of the mentioned collective graves, usually in the head area. In all cases, the area around the head was intensively strewn with ochre. In some cases, a reddish (225, 263) or bluish (206, 275, 277) layer of clay was observed in the head region of the interred. The forehead and face of male burial 225 was plastered with reddish clay, and when this was removed an amber ring was found in each eye socket (Fig. 5:8). Two more rings were found in ochre-rich earth close to the face (Fig. 5:14). Possibly, the eyes had a double covering. The face of burial 275, on the very edge of the collective grave, was plastered with bluish clay mixed with ochre (Fig. 3). In this case too, an amber ring with a small hole was found in the left eye socket, and one with a larger hole in the right eye socket (Fig. 5:7). Amber rings also covered the eyes of adolescent burial 206 (Fig. 5:6). Pairs of rings were also found in the head region of burial 263, which had clearly fallen from the eyes (Fig. 5:9). Amber rings were not found in the bluish

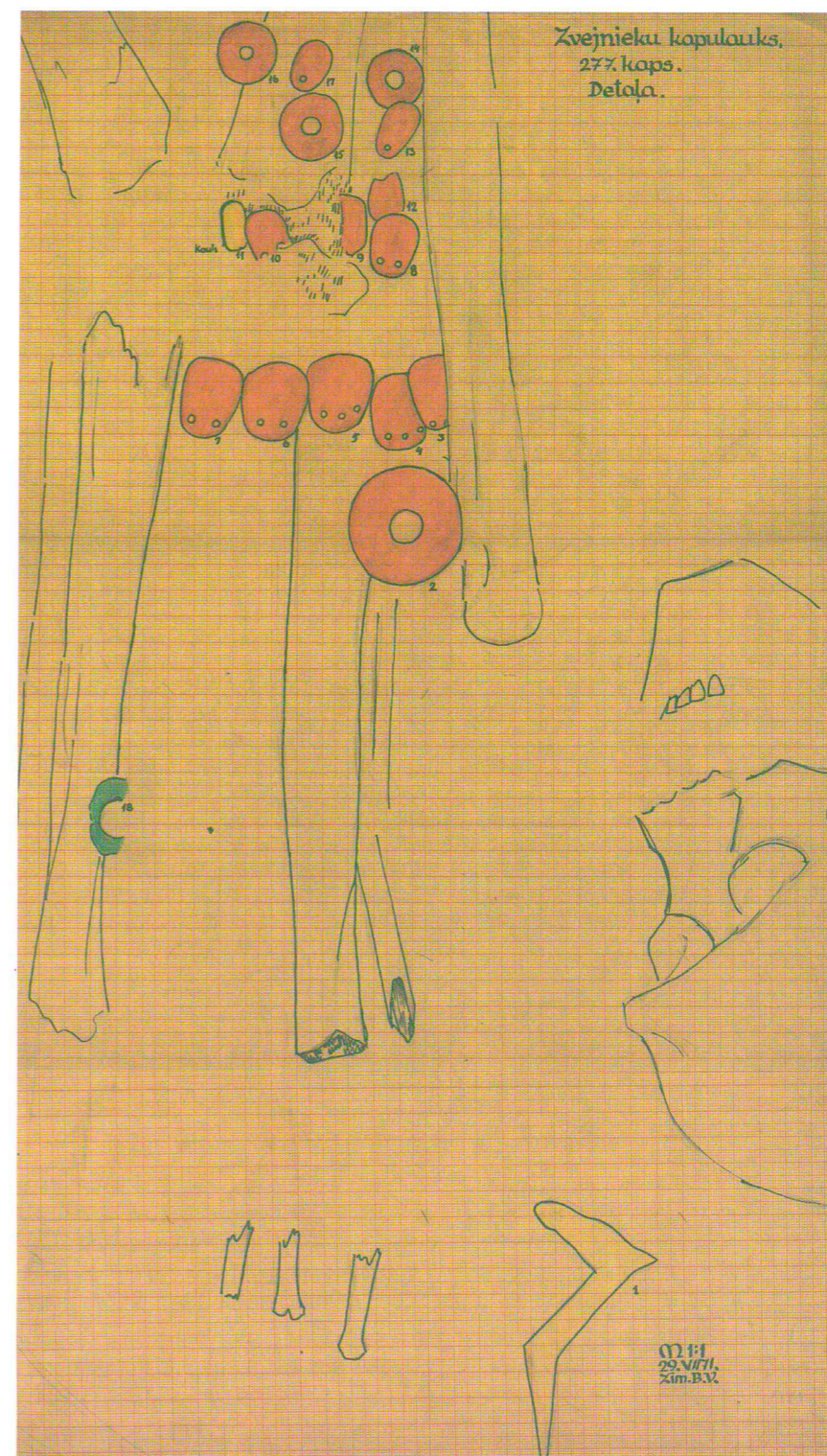


Fig. 3. B – detail of burials 276–277;

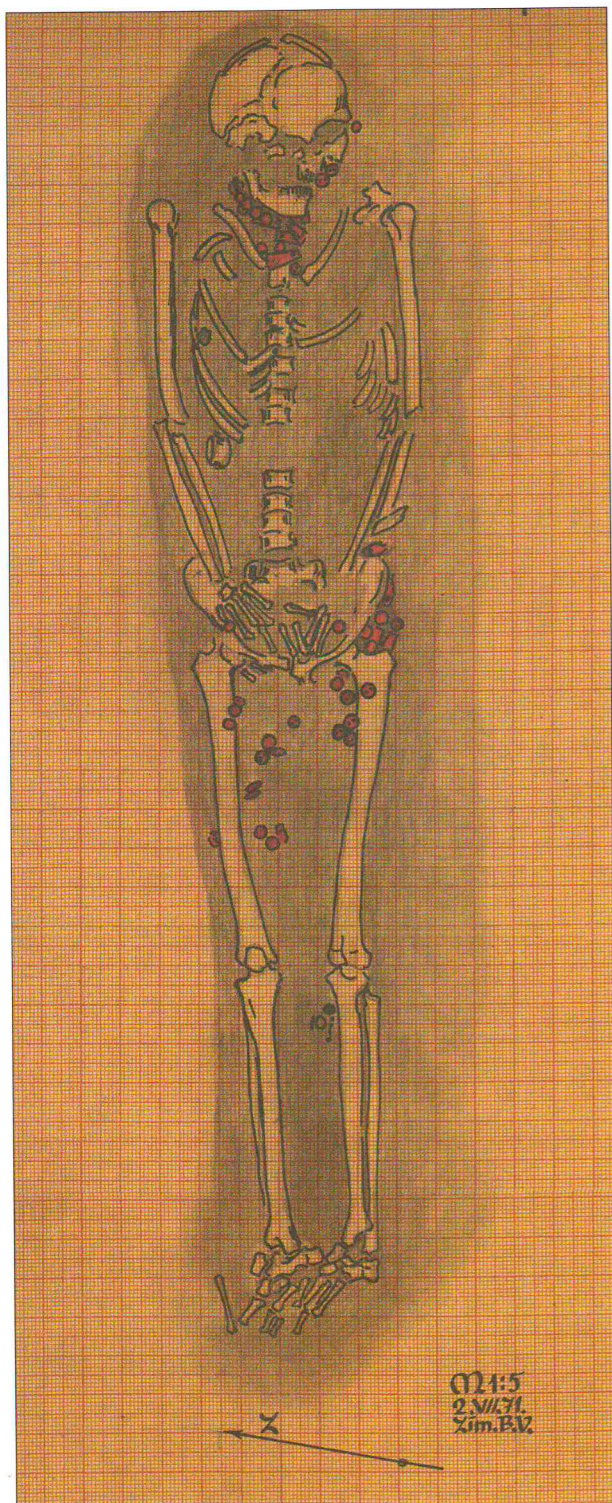


Fig. 4. Zvejnieki burial ground: A – burial 212;

clay on burial 277; however, three such rings were found in the pelvic area and one ring on the chest of the interred.

Amber finds were also unearthed in the offering places. So-called offering places or depots are a completely new feature in Neolithic burial traditions. These places were marked by a very intensive patch of red ochre. In such places, the artefacts were arranged in a compact pile, often deliberately broken as well. The objects are quite varied: bone and antler harpoons, arrowheads and chisels; flint artefacts – arrows, spearheads and scrapers; whetstones, slate rings and amber ornaments. One such offering place was unearthed near collective grave 206–209 (Fig. 6). It consisted of 33 flint, stone, bone and antler artefacts, including three amber items – a massive amber pendant (Fig. 4:3), a flattened oval pendant (Fig. 4:2) and an unworked piece of amber (Fig. 4:1). Such offering places are not unknown in North European Neolithic burial traditions, also being observed in the basin of the Upper and Middle Volga region (Cvetkova I. K., 1975, 102 - 110).

The collective graves, as well as the offerings, as mentioned above, in addition to amber artefacts, also included hunting and fishing equipment and various household implements. Ornaments in the form of animal tooth-pendants were few, these being replaced by slate rings and especially by amber ornaments. In one of the graves (no. 277), two copper (?) rings were also found. The entire inventory – pottery with comb impressions, oval and rhomboid flint spearheads, slate rings and amber ornaments – is characteristic of the East Baltic Comb and Pit Ware Culture (Zagorskis F., 1987, 102; Loze I., 1984, 30-36). Similar finds are known from Suļka bog site in the Lubāna Lowland (Loze I., 1988), and a few amber pendants of the same kind are represented at Sārname bog site and among the stray finds from Juodkrantė on the Baltic coast (Vankina, L., 1970; Rimantiene R., 1999).

According to the established chronology, these graves were dated to the 3rd millennium BC. Now, the new radiocarbon datings for the Zvejnieki burials provide earlier dates. The collective burials have now been dated to the second half of the 4th millennium BC. Burial 206 is dated to 5285±50 years BP (Ua-3643) and burial 225 is dated slightly later – 5110±45 years BP (OxA-5986). Such earlier datings for the Comb and Pit Ware Culture burials – the second half of the 4th millennium BC – are not really surprising if compared with the datings for Typical Comb Ware (Style 2) in Finland, covering the time span from 3300 until 2800 BC (Siiriäinen A., 1973, 9).

Close parallels for the Zvejnieki first complex of amber burials can be found to the north-east – in Esto-

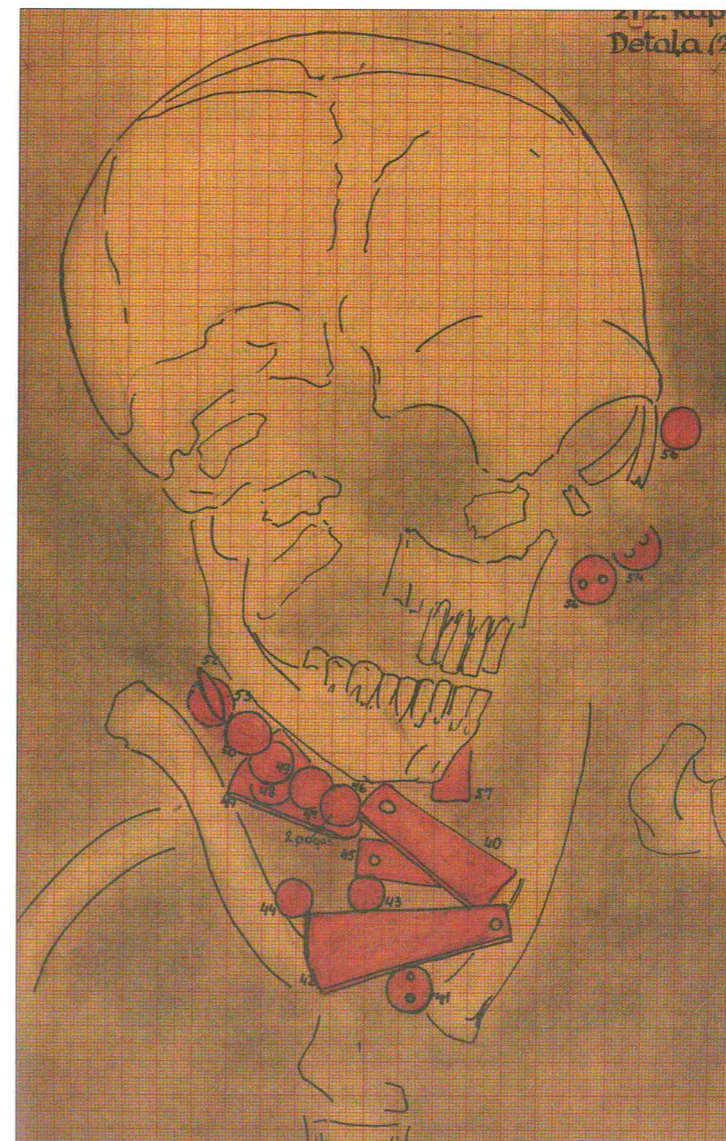


Fig. 4. B – detail of burial 212 (head region);

nia, Finland, Karelia and north-western Russia. Unfortunately, the skeletons have not been preserved in the acidic soil of the northern areas, except for some small fragments of bone. Most commonly, a rectangle of red-coloured earth has been discovered, surrounded by light-coloured sand. These ochre features may be graves containing one, two or even several burials. These graves contained flint, slate and amber objects, often with fragments of Comb Ware. Sometimes, Comb Ware has been found together with copper rings, as at Suovara and Vigainavolok I (Huggert A., 1996, 79, 80). A tradition is observed in these northern territories – Finland and Karelia – that amber adornments are often substituted by slate. All the graves, Type A, along with the corresponding grave

inventory, have been described as a Typical Comb Ware complex (Edgren T., 1959, 24-25; 1966). Also belonging to this complex are small bent clay idols, the well-known north European Type E 2 (Nunez M., 1986, 20). Such figurines are represented in East Baltic figurative art (Loze I., 1995, 20–32), mostly in settlement sites. Collective burial 220–225 also includes a convex-concave clay figurine, perhaps associated with the burial of small child (224) or outside the legs of a man, burial 221.

Grave goods of very similar form have been found in red-ochre graves in southern and central Finland. These include Kolmhaara (Konhilahti), Pispä (Kokemäki) and Kukkarikoski (Lieto) in south-western Finland, Vaateranta (Taipalsaari) in south-eastern Finland and Hartikka in Laukaa, central Finland (Edgren T., 1966;



Fig. 4. C - detail of burial 212 (pelvic region).

Luho V., 1961, 5-34; Torvinen M., 1978, 37-79; Miettinen M., 1990, 39-47; Miettinen M., 1992 a, 24-40; Rätty, 1995, 161-170).

At Hartikka, on a gravel ridge close to the settlement site, nine ochre graves were discovered, three of which contained a rich array of amber grave goods. Interesting are the shredded clay patches in the area where the head and upper part of the body would have lain. In burial 3, two lenticular amber buttons were deposited in the clay layer (Miettinen M., 1992 b, 38). Recently, another burial ground has been found in Central Finland at Kaustinen 2, Kangas, with ochre graves and an analo-

gous amber inventory to that of the collective graves of Zvejnieki burial ground (information from Dr. Mirja Miettinen, Helsinki).

Of course, in all of the mentioned burial fields, very similar amber jewellery has been found - flattened pendants with two and more drilled holes, smaller oval pendants and amber rings. V. Luho has described ochre graves decorated with amber rings, found at the site of Pispä (Kokemägi). Some of these rings bear traces of clay covering (Luho V., 1961, Fig. 12, Fig. 14).

The above-mentioned examples all confirm the existence of a common Comb and Pit Ware Culture area on

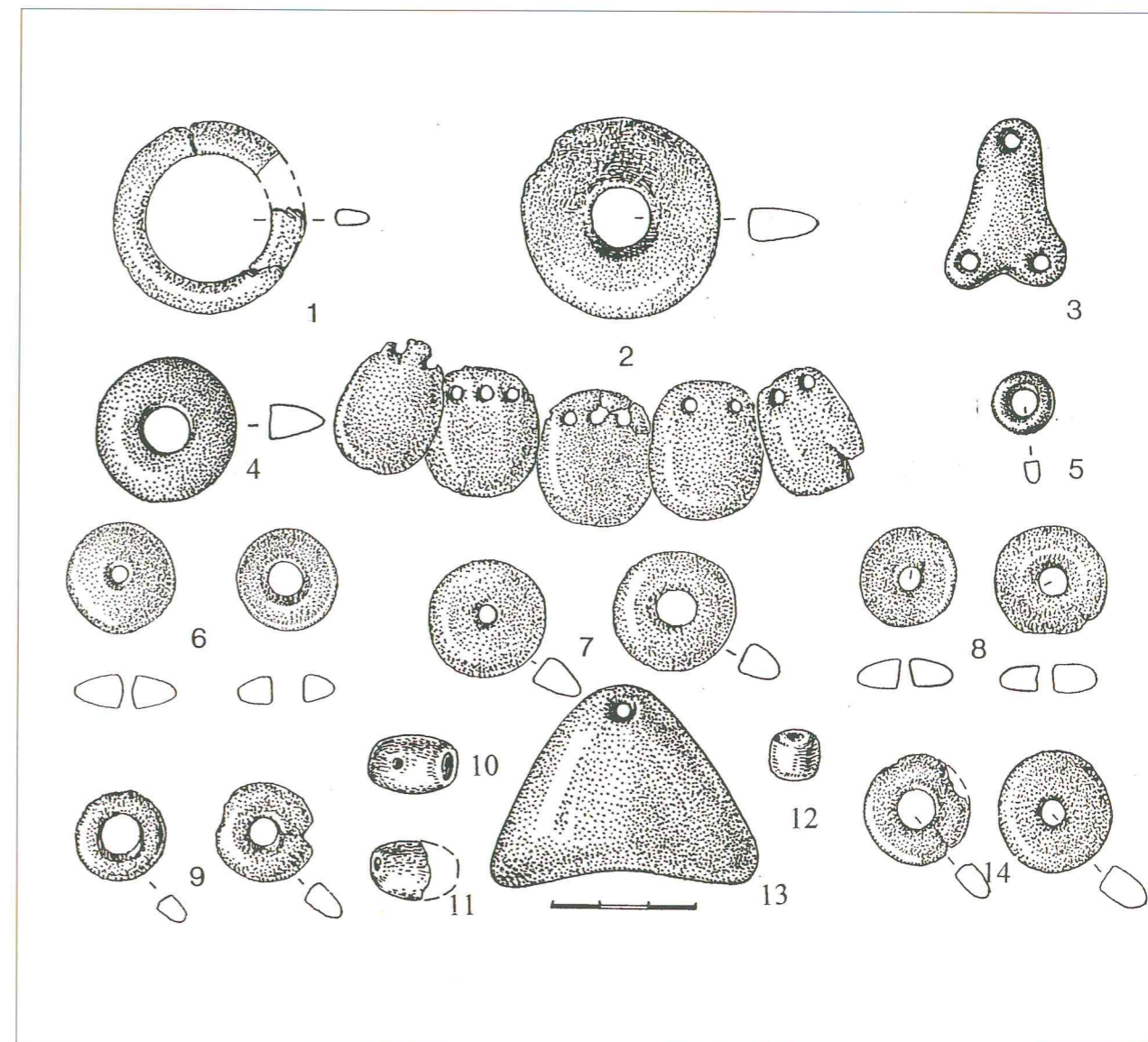


Fig. 5. Amber ornaments from the Zvejnieki Neolithic graves (first group): rings: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 (double), 7 (double), 8 (double), 9 (double) 14 (double); pendants: 2, 13; barrel-shaped beads: 10, 11, 12. (Grave 221 - 1; Grave 275 - 5, 7; Grave 276 - 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13);

the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, characterised by very similar and strong burial traditions, concerning also the arrangement of amber ornaments in the graves.

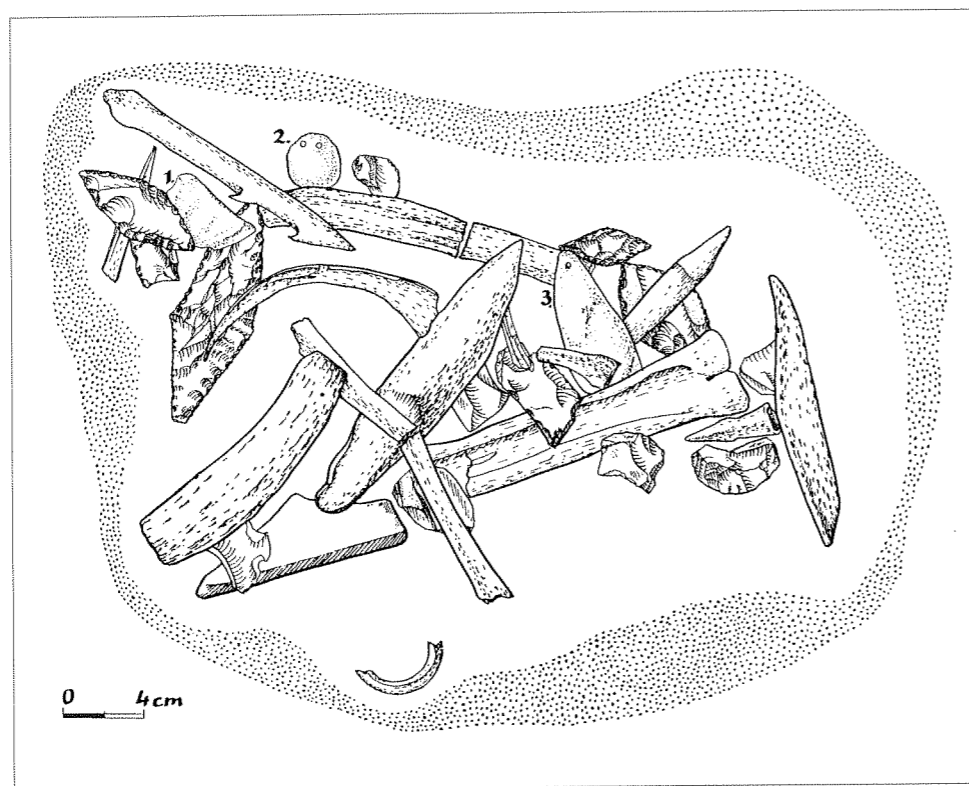
#### Individual burials

Between the collective graves, individual burials were also unearthed. These graves contained only one interred person, sometimes provided with amber grave goods. Amber ornaments were provided for two children (burials 194, 237), a woman (burial 256) and two men (burials 212, 228) (Table II).

The single graves were elongated oval pits filled with dark soil. The deceased were laid in the graves in an extended supine position, with heads oriented west or east. Only in one case (burial 236/237) a woman was buried together with a small child, placed on her right shoulder. A flint knife and short circular amber bead was found in that area. It is likely that these grave goods were provided for the child (burial 237).

The mentioned burials were provided with amber ornaments: round button-shaped beads with a lensatic cross-section, trapezoidal and rhombic pendants and tubular beads of different lengths (Fig. 7).

Fig. 6. The 'offering place' next to burial 207:1 - unworked piece of the amber; 2 - flattened amber pendant; 3 - massive, rounded amber pendant.



Attention should be given to burial 212, where an adult male was buried in an extended supine position (Fig. 4 A, B, C). This man had an amber necklace close around his neck, consisting of 13 button-shaped beads with a V-shaped perforation and lensatic or segmental cross-section (Fig. 4 B). These beads are mainly round or oval, only some of them being rounded or square (Fig. 7:20, 21). The necklace was augmented with five trapezoidal pendants with a straight upper margin and straight or convex lower margin (Fig. 7:28-30). The second group of ornaments occurred in the hip area of the deceased (Fig. 4 C). The adornment consisted of four trapezoidal (Fig. 7:24-27) and two rhombic (Fig. 7:22, 23) pendants and 32 button-shaped beads. These beads are round, with a V-shaped perforation. Unfortunately, the ornaments were not preserved in the original order, but were slightly disturbed. Certainly, the ornament can be imagined as having been fastened to the lower part of the man's dress. A similar tradition, i.e. a grave with amber buttons, is known from burials at the Abora I habitation site, Lubāna Lowlands in south-eastern Latvia (Loze I., 1968, Fig. 2, 30-31). There, a man about 30 years old had been buried, with 27 button-shaped beads in the armpit.

Another example of the functions of amber ornaments can be seen from male burial 228. This deceased

person had very rich and varied ornaments. The first necklace, close to the chin, consisted of four pieces of art: two figurines of birds and two pendants representing human heads, all of them carved in bone and antler (Zagorskis F., 1983, 138-141). The second row of the necklace consisted of 17 button-shaped beads, all round in form (Fig. 7:12-19). A small tanged flint arrowhead was placed on the chest. It is difficult to distinguish whether the amber ornament was indeed a necklace consisting of beads on a string, or whether it had been fastened to the dress.

The final grave with amber ornaments was child burial 194, which was badly damaged. The child was buried in dark soil, with the head to east. Next to the right hand of the child, three quite large button-shaped beads were found, and another similar one at some distance (Fig. 7:8, 11). The hip area of the child was adorned with twelve tubular beads. The beads were of various sizes with a conical perforation, drilled from both ends (Fig. 7:1-7). Four tiny, short tubular beads were also found in this grave (Fig. 7:9, 10). The form of the adornment cannot be determined. In Abora I settlement site near a badly damaged burial a string of beads was preserved *in situ*, consisting of 22 medium-sized tubular beads and a spacer, which showed that the beads had been arranged in two rows (Loze I., 1975, 75).

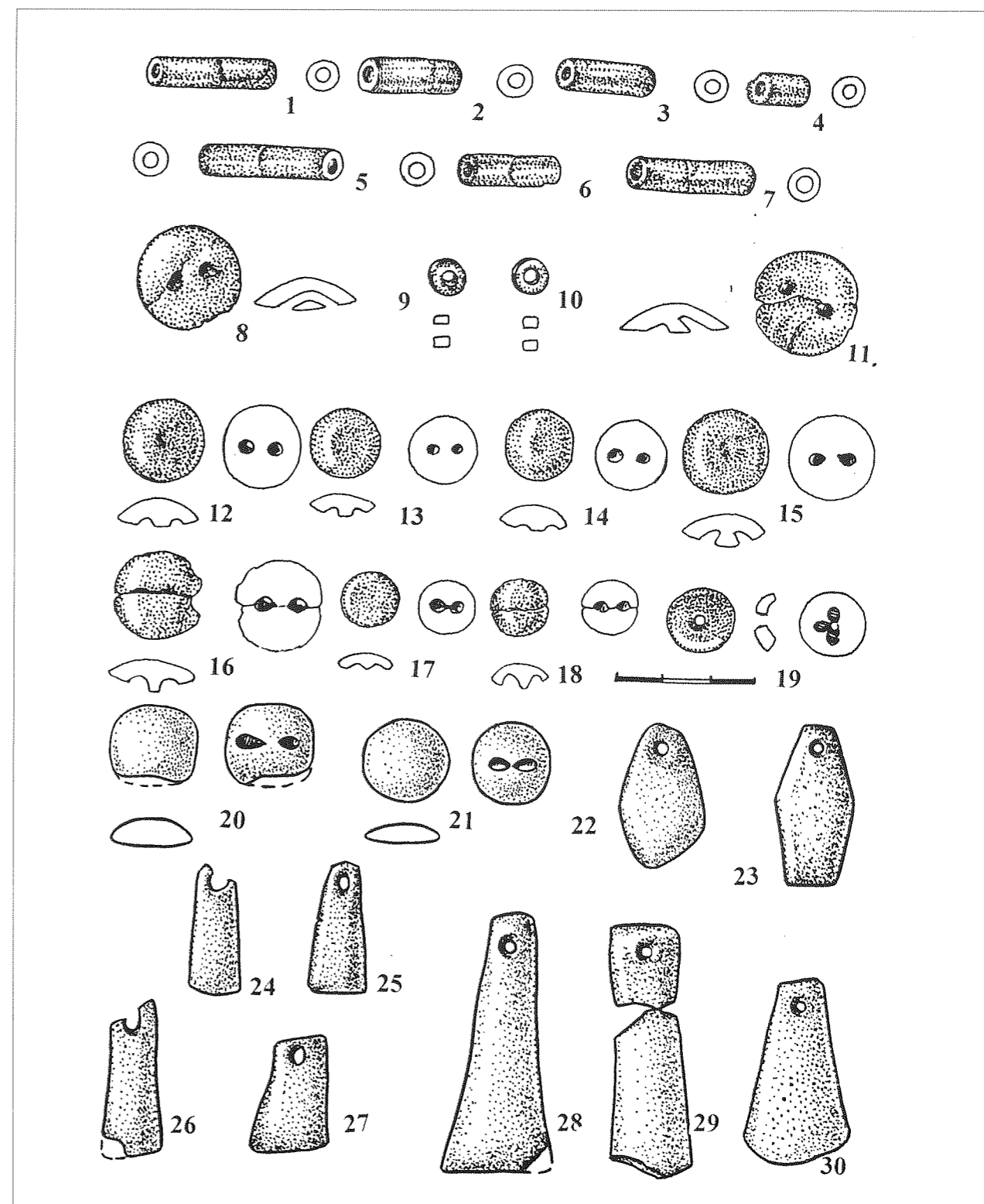


Fig. 7. The amber ornaments from Zvejnieki Neolithic graves (second group): tubular beads: 1-7; short tubular beads: 9, 10; button shaped beads: 8, 11-21; rhomboid pendants: 22, 23; trapezoidal pendants: 24-30. burial 194: 1-11; burial 228: 12-19; burial 212: 20-30

The assemblage of amber ornaments found in the group of individual burials is characteristic of the descendants of the people of the indigenous Narva Culture, who produced the so-called 'Piestiņa Ware' pottery. As this type of pottery was made under the influence of Comb and Pit Ware, the graves could be dated to a slightly later period, the third millennium BC. The chronology of this complex of amber ornaments is based on the typology of amber artefacts, since no burial of this group at Zvejnieki has so far been dated. Similar amber items are known from Sārnate peat-bog site in western Latvia (Vankina L., 1970, 105–114) and from the sites in the Lubāna Lowland – Nainiekste, Piestiņa and Zvidze (Loze I., 1988, 43–46; 94–96; Zagorskis F., 1965, 35–50, Fig. 5). Rounded button-shaped beads, as well as trapezoidal pendants, are mainly characteristic of the Middle Neolithic. Tubular beads have been found in all Middle and Late Neolithic habitation sites. It is quite impossible to distinguish these Middle and Late Neolithic items, except for the fact that later examples are more massive (Loze I., 1975, 66).

A new date, obtained from Sārnate Dwelling M, characterised by button-shaped beads with a V-perforation, cylindrical beads and trapezoidal pendants, belongs to the very end of the 4th millennium BC – 5065±75 (Ua-15984) (Bērziņš V., in print). The previous datings from the dwellings of Sārnate type (Y, V, S) covered the whole of the first half and the middle part of the 3rd millennium BC (Vankina L., 1970, 138–139).

The Middle Neolithic in the Lubāna Lowlands with its impressive amber ornaments mainly belongs to the whole of the 3rd millennium BC, approximately 2800–2110 BC (Loze I., 1988, 101). It must be stressed that already in the middle of this period, under greater southern influence, a new complex of amber ornaments began to form. This complex belonged to the Corded Ware Culture and was characterised by new forms of artefacts and radical innovations in amber working technique (Loze I., 2000, 63–78).

It is likely that the second group of amber graves at Zvejnieki burial ground mainly represents the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. Burial 199, which contained fragments of Piestiņa Ware pottery, is dated to 4825±85 (Ua-15546). It is not excluded, of course, that some of these individual graves could be Late Neolithic, as these traditions continued later as well.

The second complex of amber ornaments can be found at all of the Neolithic sites in the Eastern Baltic. In Lithuania, the majority of similar amber ob-

jects come from the Šventoji settlement sites, as well as from Palanga and from the famous Juodkrantė hoard on the Couronian Spit, western Lithuania (Rimantiene R., 1979, 87–102; Fig. 72, 77, 79; Rimantiene R., 1999, 35–53). The trapezoidal pendants, rounded button-shaped beads and fragments of rings occur at Estonian Stone Age sites such as Akali and others (Jaanits L., 1959, 277–284, Figs. 60, 61).

The second complex of amber ornaments is also typical of wide areas east of the Baltic Sea. The influences of this complex even reached the shores of the White Sea in north-eastern Karelia, testified by finds at the Zalavruga II site (Savatejev J. A., 1977, 188, Fig. 89, 90). A similar inventory is known from the northern part of Middle Finland, from the sites in the River Ii basin – such as Kierikki, Purkansuo Bog and Kuuselankangas settlement site. The last site is located close to the ancient mouth of the River Ii, where remains of many huts were unearthed, yielding an exceptionally rich array of amber items and asbestos pottery sherds (Siiriäinen A., 1967, 36–37, Figs. a-d; Koivunen P., Nunez M., 1995, 26–29).

The corresponding amber complex is known from the other cemeteries in the Eastern Baltic – Kreiči cemetery in the basin of Lake Lielais Ludzas, and from burials at the Abora I and Kvāpāni Neolithic sites in the Lubāna Lowland. At Kreiči burial, a necklace was discovered, consisting of 20 amber pendants and 14 long tubular beads, the latter made from bird bones (Zagorskis F., 1961, 3–18, Table II). Rich in amber jewellery are some burials from the Tamula site, south-eastern Estonia, with grave goods including tubular and button-shaped beads, trapezoidal pendants, rings and figural art as well (Jaanits L., 80–100, Fig. 3, 4; Jaanits L., 1984, Fig. 8).

The great number of amber grave goods at the Konchanskoje cemetery in Novgorod District must be mentioned, north-east of Latvia (Rerich N., 1903, 22–26, Table I; Zimina M., 1993). The latest research in the area south of Lake Onega has revealed a Neolithic settlement site – Tuzozero VI – with a rich array of amber artefacts. The bones, unfortunately, had not been preserved, only red ochre-strewn pits, oriented east–west, were discovered. Ten burials were excavated on the territory of this site, all of them containing amber, totalling approximately 400 pieces. The amber collection was composed of tubular beads of different forms, trapezoidal pendants, round and oval button-shaped pendants and rings. Sometimes the ornaments clearly formed strings on the chest or waist area (Grave 5, 6). As regards the rings, these

were found in seven graves, often two together, in the head area. (Ivaniscev A. M., 1990, 3–20; Ivaniscev A. M., 1992, 86–89; Ivaniscev A. M., 1996, 75–84, Fig. 3). It seems that at this cemetery the amber rings were used in the same way as in Zvejnieki burial ground. The director of the excavations considered that the Tuzozero VI burials were close to the Konchanskoje and Repishche amber finds, belonging to the Middle Neolithic Volosovo Culture. The central part of this culture is represented by sites in the Upper Volga and Oka region. The influence of East Baltic amber working traditions in that region is often mentioned by Russian researchers (Studzickaja S. V., 1994, 67).

### Conclusions

As can be seen from the above, amber and the ornaments made from this material evidently had a special role in the lives of the ancient people of the Neolithic and in their world beyond the grave. Amber, this cool yellow and reddish stone, which appears as if it had soaked up the northern sunlight, was evidently more than just an ornament – it also had magical powers.

The amber ornaments of the Neolithic replaced the tooth-pendants that were so popular in earlier periods of the Stone Age. At Zvejnieki burial ground, animal tooth-pendants have not been found together with amber: only in one case – burial 276, were four small tooth-pendants of marten and one of wild boar attached to an amber breast ornament.

The sets of amber artefacts provided as grave goods have another characteristic feature: neither of the two complexes includes ornaments of irregular, naturally shaped amber pieces, such as have been found in large numbers at Neolithic settlement sites in Latvia – Siliņupe, Sārnate and the sites of the Lubāna Lowlands. It is concluded that both complexes of amber ornaments were made specially for placement in the grave. It has not been established whether amber ornaments were made locally, or whether they were imported as finished products for the mortuary rituals. This was possible, since the Lake Burtnieki basin was connected to the Baltic Sea by the River Salaca that outflowed from the lake. Since only one unworked piece of amber has been found, in the offering place next to burial 207, F. Zagorskis considered that the amber ornaments may have been imported as finished products (Zagorskis F., 1987, 75). It should be added that a complex of amber artefacts worked and shaped

in the same way has not been found at any of the nearby Stone Age settlement sites – neither Zvejnieki I settlement, nor Riņņukalns or Kaulēnkals. Admittedly, the settlement sites, particularly Zvejnieki and Kaulēnkals, have as yet been subject to only minor excavation.

Judging from the placement of amber items in the cemetery, amber artefacts were used as individual pendants (206, 221, 263), formed necklaces (225, 212) or various adornments of dress (228), sometimes providing a dense covering over the deceased (221-a). Ethnographic material shows that amber artefacts, in addition to their role as ornaments, also functioned as amulets that provided protection against dark, hostile forces, symbolising the forces of light and the sun itself (Jēkabsons F., 1929, 474; Šturms E., 1953, 168–178;). This can be seen particularly clearly in the use of amber rings and discs. The larger amber rings seem to have been used as individual pendants (burial 221) or were combined with other forms of pendants (burial 276). The small rings and discs found at Zvejnieki burial ground, of a few centimetres diameter, were, however, most commonly used as eye coverings for the deceased. It was at Zvejnieki burial ground that this use of such rings was first established, since the faces of the deceased had been daubed with reddish, specially prepared clay, in which the amber rings had been preserved '*in situ*'. It should be emphasised that the tradition of covering the eyes with amber rings and discs is observed only on male burials and one juvenile burial (206, 225, 263, 275). A similar interpretation can evidently be given for the use of rings on the burials of Tuzozero VI settlement site and in certain burials of southern and central Finland.

Discs and rings occur widely among the amber finds of the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. They are characteristic of burials of the Globular Amphora Culture and the Bay Coast Culture (Šturms E., 1970, 155–159, 176–180), also spreading further to the north-east, into the area of the Comb and Pit Ware Culture. Such amber rings are also found in Bronze Age burial monuments, as indicated by a find in Reznas barrow cemetery not far from Riga (Šturms E., 1936, Fig. 9: A, 76).

It has already been emphasised that an analogous role to that of amber was played elsewhere in the world by a shining bluish-green stone – jade. To jade was ascribed the power of averting destruction, and it was used to cover the exposed parts of the body of the deceased, jade talismans being provided as grave goods (Spekke A., 1962, 16). Mention should be made of excavations by Russian archaeologist A. Okladnikov on Stone and Bronze Age cemeteries in the area beyond Lake Baikal, where shining green and white jade discs have been found in large

Amber grave goods, Zvejnieki burial ground 1<sup>st</sup> group Table I

Grave	Sex	Pendants	Rings	Barrel-shaped buttons	Under- mined ragments	Totally	Position in the grave
Nr. 201	child	1	-	-	1	2	Grave strongly disturbed
Nr. 206	adolescent	1	2	-	-	3	Pendant under the skull; Rings in each eye socket
Nr. 207	adolescent	-	-	-	1	1	Under the elbow of the right hand
Offering by the grave Nr.207	-	2	-	-	1	3	In the pile of the grave goods
Nr. 220	male	1	-	-	-	1	Between the femurs
Nr. 221 (or 221a)	male (or child)	53	4	-	-	57	1 ring – under the skull, others – at the lower part of the skeleton (221)
Nr.224	child	-	1(frgt)	-	-	1	At the area of the legs
Nr. 225	male	10	6	-	-	16	2 rings in the eyes sockets, 2- by the forehead, others - on the chest
Nr. 263	male	-	3	-	-	3	3 rings by the forehead, one - on the chest
Nr. 275	male	-	3	-	-	3	2 rings in the each eye socket, one - above the pelvis
Nr.276	male	13	4	2	1	20	Left from the upper part of the left hand
Nr. 277	male	-	1	1	-	2	On the chest

Amber grave goods, Zvejnieki burial ground, 2<sup>nd</sup> group of burials Table II

Graves	Sex	Pendants	Button shaped pendants	Tubular beads	Fragments	Totally	Position in the grave
Nr. 194	child	-	4	15	-	19	Grave destroyed
Nr. 212	male	14	43	-	-	57	On the chest and at the pelvis region
Nr. 228	male	-	17	-	-	17	On the chest
Nr. 237	child	-	-	1 (short)	-	1	By the child's skeleton
Nr.256	female	2	-	-	1 fragment of the ring	3	Ring – under the pelvis, 2 pendants- between the legs

numbers. At Verholensk cemetery, for example, such discs have been found near the head and even in the eye sockets, though they are interpreted as decorations of the headdress (Okladnikov A., 1978, 98, Figs. 80, 81).

Thus, the component of the mortuary rites with covering of the eyes of the dead with discs or rings, though sparsely observed, was widespread in the past. Discs and rings are found on burials already in the Upper Palaeolithic, for example in the Sungir double grave, and are regarded as symbols of the sun, sky or universe. In later times, Eurasian shamanistic rituals involved such discs, where the future was predicted by looking through the disc. Interestingly, in the Eastern Baltic, the rings were made from amber – the stone of the sun and light. Judging from the form of the discs and their ornamentation, E. Šturms concluded that the discs made from this shining golden amber represent evidence of a solar cult. Analysing material from the Baltic Sea coast – Poland and former East Prussia – he emphasises that finds of discs are mainly associated with male graves (Šturms E., 1956, 15). It is thought that amber discs, like other ornaments, which were mainly provided for males and juveniles (Tables I and II), reflect the prominent social position occupied by these people in the ancient community.

Based on the finds from the Lubāna Lowlands, I. Loze has already distinguished two complexes of amber ornaments corresponding to different cultural groups of the East Baltic (Loze I., 1969, Figs. 2, 3). These are partially reflected also in the material from the different dwellings at Sārņate (Vankina L., 1970, 111–112). However, the difference is not as clear as it is seen in the burial practices at Zvejnieki burial ground, since the people belonging to these groups were, of course, living side by side and influencing each other. The use of discs and rings can also be observed wherever there are amber artefacts, particularly in burials.

Regardless of the existence of two amber complexes at Zvejnieki burial ground, which can be explained in terms of differing cultural traditions and minor chronological differences, it seems there was a common understanding regarding amber as an ornament and as a bearer of magical properties. This is evidence that the Stone Age cultures were united through inter-group contacts, and had common, stable traditions of spiritual life.

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## SOME ASPECTS OF RESEARCH ON MIDDLE NEOLITHIC AMBER IN THE LAKE LUBĀNS DEPRESSION

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The Lake Lubāns Depression, one of the most densely populated micro-regions in the central part of the East Baltic, lies 350 km from the major areas where amber is washed up, south of Liepāja. The fact that people inhabiting this micro-region in eastern Latvia did not have any amber source of their own, and had to obtain this material through distant or not so distant ‘expeditions’ did not affect their desire to obtain it and work it themselves.

The Lake Lubāns Depression, which covers an area of 100 000 ha, lies at the centre of the Lubāns Limnoglacial Plain of eastern Latvia. Neolithic sites, numbering 27, are located in marshes or on rises with mineral soil within these marshes, which cover 47 000 ha of the total area of the depression (Loze 2000, 109). Lake Lubāns collects the waters of nine rivers, and has only one outlet: the River Aiviekste, a right tributary of the River Daugava with a large basin. Neolithic settlements are located on the banks of Lake Lubāns and the river inlets, as well as in the system of the Aiviekste and its tributaries (Fig. 1). This suggests that the advantages of the geographic location of Lake Lubāns for the Neolithic inhabitants contributed in large measure to the development of an effective zone of economic contacts, with travel both upstream and downstream along the Aiviekste and Daugava.

### The distribution of amber in coastal Latvia

The eastern limit of the distribution of amber passes through Latvia from the north along the coast

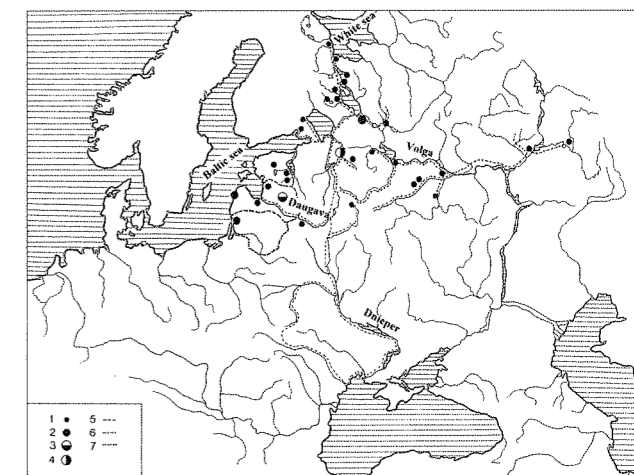


Fig. 1. The distribution of Middle Neolithic amber artefacts in the East Baltic and the East European Forest Zone: 1 – finds of amber ornaments from graves and settlements, 2 – major finds of amber ornaments, 3 – Lake Lubāns Depression, 4 – Konchanska cemetery, 5 – possible Late Neolithic ‘amber routes’, 6 – possible Middle Neolithic ‘amber routes’, 7 – national borders.