

AMBER ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF BELARUS

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The most ancient amber ornaments in the territory of Belarus date from the Late Neolithic. A destroyed work piece is revealed in a burial of the Globular Amphora culture near Krasnaselski in Grodna region (Чарняўскі 1992: 8,11). The object has an age 4080 ± 140 BP (Gd - 9249) (Kadrow, Szmyt 1996: 104). Probably some finds of amber found at the peat sites of Northern Belarus also can be contributed to the Late Neolithic and connected to the late stage of the Narva culture. However it is doubtless that the majority of ancient amber ornaments was found on peat sites of the North Belarusian culture in the Dvina basin (2 millennium BC) (Чарняўскі 1985; 1997: 324) and on the cemeteries of the Middle Dnieper culture in Belarusian Dnieper region (the first half of 2 millennium BC) (Артеменко 1967: 53 - 56).

The North Belarusian culture occupied Belarusian Dvina region, east part of Villia basin and northern part of Berasina and Druts - inflows of Dnepr. In north and east it occupied the southern Pskov region and the western Smalensk region. In Belarus its basic monuments are peat sites of Kryvina peat bog in Vitebsk region. It was found about 40 amber products on three of them (Kryvina - 1, 2, 3 Asavec - 2). The North Belarusian culture was generated on the late Neolithic basis with appreciable influence of the Corded Ware culture. The beginning of it belongs to the end of the Neolithic (beginning of 2 millennium BC), and subsequent stages belong to the early and middle periods of the Bronze Age (down to the third quarter of 2 millennium).

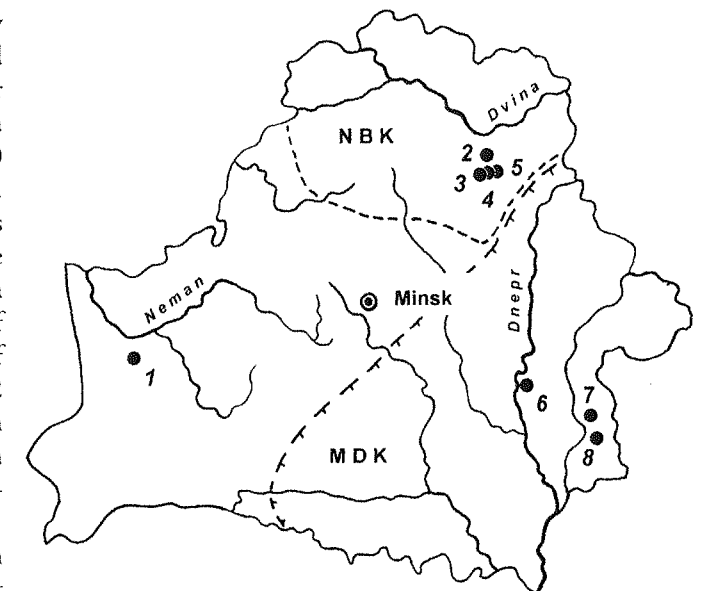


Fig. 1. Amber on archaeological sites of Belarus.
 1 - Krasnaselski; 2 - Asavec-2; 3 - Kryvina-1;
 4 - Kryvina-2; 5 - Kryvina-3; 6 - Hodasavichy;
 7 - Praletarski; 8 - Rudnia Schlagina.
 NBK - North Belarusian culture; MDK - Middle Dnieper culture

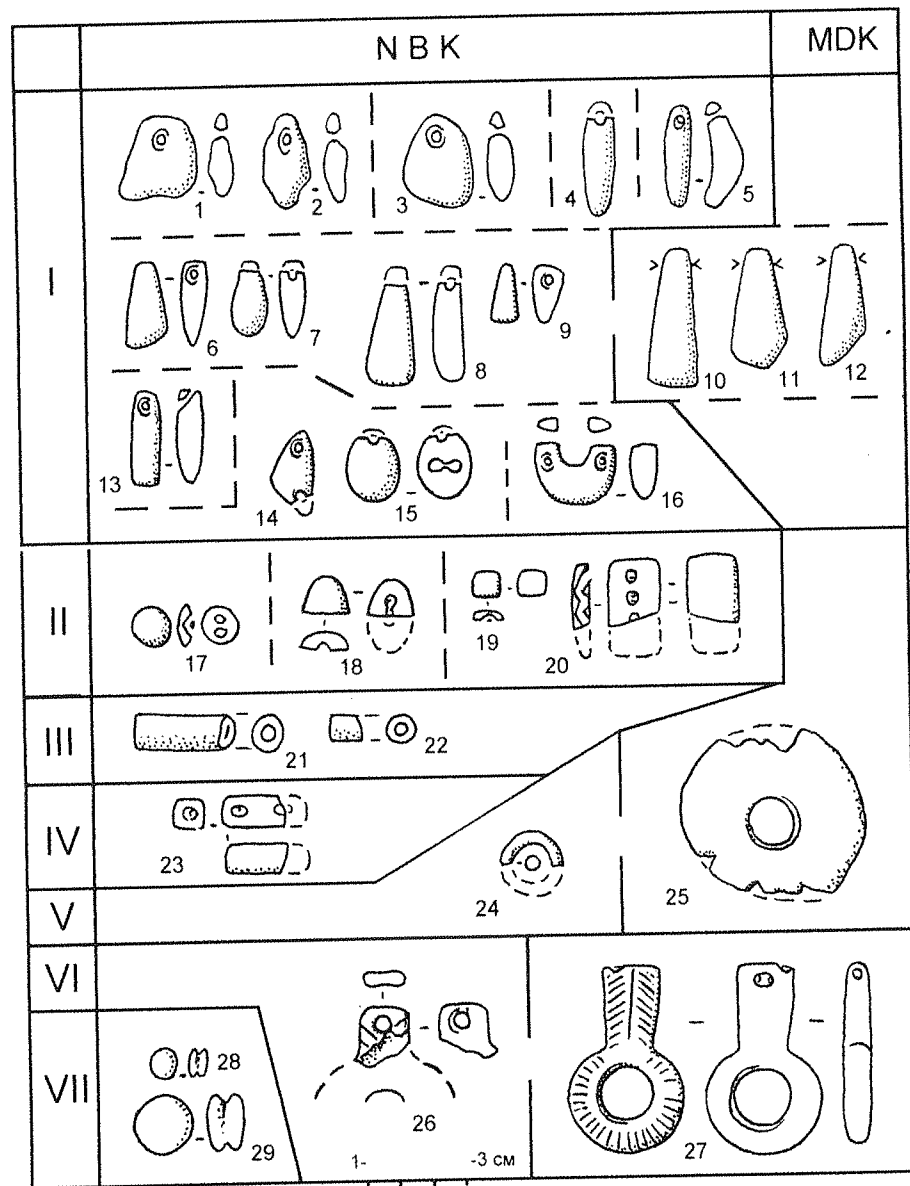


Fig. 2. Late Neolithic and Bronze Age amber ornaments of Belarus. 1, 21 - Kryvina-1; 2 -, 13 - 20, 22 - 24, 26, 28, 29 - Asavec-2; 10 - 12, 25 - Rudnia Schliagina; 27 - Hodasavichy.

The Middle Dnieper culture belongs to Corded Ware cultures. It occupied the southeast of Belarus, the West of Bransk region and part of the northern Ukraine. In our territory it relates to the end of Neolithic and the early period of the Bronze Age and is dated from the last centuries of 3 millennium up to the middle of 2 millennium BC. The amber ornaments are found in burials at Rudnia Schliagina village (Stralitsa) and Praletarski settlement, Gomel region, at Hodasavichy village (Moszka), Mogilou region. In total on these monuments 32 ornaments are found. Besides 20 amber work pieces in burial of the Middle Dnieper culture at Pechkury village in the south of Smalensk region are found.

The amber ornaments from sites of the North Belarusian culture and the Middle Dnieper cultures are united in a uniform complex. In the basic these are pendants, buttons with V-shaped boreholes, cylindrical beads, rods, rings, circles with a loop, doubled washers (Fig. 2).

Pendants. Pendants make about 50 % of all the amber finds of the North Belarusian culture. They made the majority in the Middle Dnieper culture. The earliest pendants have frontal hole. All of them come from the settlements of Kryvina peatbog. The natural pieces of amber without additional polishing quite often were used for ornaments (Fig. 2: 1, 2). However the majority of them were polished, getting flattened drop-shaped form (Fig. 2: 3). Two pendants have finger-shaped form

and a round-shaped section (Fig. 2: 4). A finger-shaped crank-shaped (L-shaped) pendant is represented in one specimen (Fig. 2: 5).

Axe-shaped pendants with sidelong holes make up a distinctive group (Fig. 2: 6, 7, 9). They are good polished, have a thickened top (« a but ») with a hole and a flattened symmetrical or slightly oblique bottom (« an edge »). In some cases a bottom is also thickened (Fig. 2: 8). Axe shaped pendants are basic ornament in the antiques of the Middle - Dnieper culture (Fig. 2: 10, 11, 12). Here they mainly have a slightly convex symmetrical « edge ». Sometimes « an edge » appears as a corner or sloping. The pendants with a sidelong hole allowed to make up necklaces with a latent cord.

A pendant, which has a slanting hole through the top and back plane is the only one (Fig. 2: 13).

Unusual pendants are the workpieces made from the damaged adornments - pendants (Fig. 2: 14), buttons (Fig. 2: 15). A pendant with two holes made from a splitted circle is unusual. It reminds lunule (Fig. 2: 16).

Buttons with V-shaped borehole. Buttons with V-shaped drilled hole take the second place among ornaments on Kryvina peatbog. They are mainly round in form (Fig. 2: 17), however they could be oval (Fig. 2: 18), square (Fig. 2: 19) and rectangular (Fig. 2: 20). The part of the rectangular buttons has double borehole. Sections of round and oval buttons are usually lens - shaped; one plane with boreholes is even in rectangular ornaments. Some objects have design as notches on perimeter. Buttons were used to sew on clothes or headdress. Therefore the majority of them is damaged, a crosspiece between drillings is broken off, or they broken along borehole.

Cylindrical beads. Only two damaged cylindrical beads with a through borehole are found on Kryvina peatbog sites (Fig. 2: 21, 22). In necklaces they could be a connecting elements between pendants.

Rectangular rods. A damaged rod with a square section was found in Asavec-2 site (Fig. 2: 24). The more massive disk-shaped ring (diameter 5,7 cm) of flattened lens- shaped section was discovered in one of the burials of the Middle Dnieper culture at Rudnia Schliagina village (Fig. 2: 25).

Circles with a loop (key-shaped pendants). A pendant in form of a circle with a trapezoid ledge was found at a burial of the Middle Dnieper culture. In a butt-end of a ledge a slanting borehole is made, an ornament from slanting herringbone notches marked on, the notches on the ring are located in radial way (Fig. 2: 27). A small ledge that has broken away from

a ring with a frontal borehole and slanting notches has survived in Asavec-2 (Fig. 2: 26).

Double washers. These ornaments (2 copies) are met also only in Asavec-2 site (Fig. 2: 28, 29). At everyone an accurate deepening for a fastening cord was cutout on perimeter.

Fine splinters of amber ornaments are found in small quantity on Kryvina peatbog sites. Some of them have ring deepening for fastening.

Natural amber in Belarus meets mainly in Western Palesse. But here it deposits in sand and in the large depth and practically it was inaccessible for ancient man. For this reason it is necessary to consider that the amber from settlements of the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age has Baltic origin. It proves to be true by material: the closer to Baltic the more amber finds. With this amber row material on the sites was not met. The ornaments got in our Dnepr and Dvina regions in ready form. They were only under repair on local settlements.

The closest analogies to ancient amber ornaments of Belarus mainly are on the Late Neolithic and Bronze Age sites of southeast Baltic (Loze 1975; Girininkas 1990: 92, 93; Rimantienė 1994: 98, 121, 122). According to these analogies it is necessary to consider that the earliest ornaments are pendants with frontal borehole, round buttons, rings, cylindrical beads. These types of ornaments continued to be in use also during the distribution of Corded Ware. However people of the Corded ware culture have begun to produce new perfect types of ornaments as well axe-shaped pendants, rectangular buttons, circles with a loop (Loze 1975; 55 - 59, 71, 72) The double washers, which were met also in Latvia, have received distribution only at the end of the Bronze Age (Граудонис 1967: 86, 87).

The Late Neolithic and Bronze Age is the time when the amber workpieces were favorite and rather widespread ornaments (Fig. 1). The fashion on it in Belarus has passed in Iron Age.

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AMBER DECORATIONS FROM THE VALDAI LAKE REGION BURIAL GROUNDS

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In the III millennium B.C. amber decorations were widely spread in late Neolithic and Eneolithic sites of the forest zone of the Russia's European part. This was a result of exchange with the Baltic areas.

There are two large Neolithic and Eneolithic cemeteries in the basin of the Msta river and the Valdai lake. The Konchanskoe cemetery is situated on the northern bank of the Sheregodro lake near the Konchanskoe-Suvorovskoe village, 150 km from Novgorod. The other one – Repistche – is situated 50 km. to the East from Konchanskoe, 7 km. from the village Pereluchi.

Topography of both cemeteries is similar, both are situated at 3 – 13m. above water level of the nearest lake or river, 50 – 100 meters from the banks.

These burial grounds were excavated by the North-West expedition of the Russia Academy of Sciences Institute of Archaeology in 1974-88. The expedition led by the author found 267 graves in the Konchanskoe cemetery and 204 in the Repistche cemetery. Amber and slate decorations, flint and stone tools were found.

Normally, amber artefacts were found deep in a layer of ochre, sometimes they were over this layer or at the same level. In some cases the amber artefacts were structured into several layers one over another. Often the layers of amber decorations were separated by a thin layer of ochre or sand. The multi-layer structure of the amber decorations is the result of the decay processes that affected the body and the clothes of the dead.

The following types of amber decorations found at the cemeteries: buttons, rings and pendants.

Totally, over 12 000 of amber artefacts were found at the two cemeteries.

The pendants are of various shapes: rectangular, triangular oval, asymmetric (Fig.1, 2, 3).

Their length varies from 2 to 8cm., width – from 1 to 5 cm., thickness – from 0.3 to 0.8cm. The bases of pendants are straight, sloping, rounded, narrowed or carved. The upper end is usually straight and sometimes sloping or rounded. Some pendants have dents on the sides.

The section of the pendants, irrespective of their shape, is rectangular, lens-type, oval and sometimes triangle or segment-type. The thickness of sides of some pendants differs. Some have curved profiles. Most pendants have a hole in the narrow part and some have even two. It was drilled from both sides. Part of pendants were carved on their sides, base or the upper part. In some cases pendants are carved at the perimeter. Some solar-shaped pendants were found. The front side of some pendants bear an ornament made by dots and shallow pits, sometimes of antropomorphic type (Fig. 4). The hole of some pendants was broken. Sometimes a new hole was bored a little lower or to the side from the old one. Sometimes only the upper part of the pendant was suited for further use. So this remaining part of the pendant was bored again if the old hole could not be used. Broken buttons were also made into pendants.

Button was the most common type of decoration. This type is called "button" not because of its functionality but due to its shape. They were used as beads. Most of