Fig. 5. Konchanskoe cemetery.
Amber cylinder bead necklace, gr.232

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Abbrevations

КСИА – Краткие сообщения института Археологии.

МИА – Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР.

THE BALTS AND AMBER

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Amber has always been attractive to craftsmen and traders. It must have been the early Neolithic period when Lithuanian inhabitants began to produce amberware and ornaments which they traded with their immediate northern and southern neighbours. Amber objects from the Neolithic Age are found in Estonia, the districts of Novgorod and Tver, Finland and Sweden. In the southern neighbourhoods raw amber and amber goods are especially abundant in the burial grounds of the Zlota culture in Poland.

In the Bronze Age the Balts used amber as the main object to barter for copper alloys. Its considerable quantities are located in the zones of copper mines in Middle and Southeastern Europe. To emphasize the importance of amber trade, the researchers of prehistory coined a special term – "Amber route". The Bronze Age saw a number of its ramifications. The principal amber route began from the Baltic coast and led to the lower Vistula. Using the Warta and the upper Oder or their coastlines the amber route crossed Bohemia, Moravia and reached the Danube. From there the route forked: one branch went to Greece, Peloponnesus and Crete (amber beads excavated in the burial grounds of the Mycenae culture are dated to the period between 1600 and 1500 B.C.). Through the passes of the Alps, the second branch went down to northern Italy. Another amber route from the Baltic shores travelled overland up to the Dnieper, then up its mouth to the Caucasus, the eastern regions of the Black Sea and the southwestern areas of the Caspian

Sea (1). Amber objects are found in Ossetia, Middle Caucasus. Interregional amber traffic also reached Asia Minor. In the burial grounds of Šernai (near Klaipėda, Lithuania) was discovered a bronze statuette (dated to 1500–1000 B.C.) resembling a Canaanite god from Syria – Palestine (2).

The old traditions of amber trade are described by classical Greek authors and researchers. Amber is mentioned in Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey", Herodotus' (490–480–425 B.C.) works. Amber was also honoured an exhaustive account after the journey of Pytheas of Massalia to the shores of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea in around 325 B.C.

During the period of the Roman Empire amber became greatly valued and desired. It also brought the Aistians (Balts) into the focus of classical Roman writers and historians who then began to describe their habitations, occupations and customs. In his "Natural History" Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23–79) writes that during the reign of Nero (A. D. 37–68) a member of the equestrian order was sent to the northern regions to procure the supply of amber to decorate the arms of gladiators. According to him, it was a distance of about six hundred Roman miles between the center of amber source and Carnuntum (near Vienna, on the right side of the Danube). He brought back amber in such vast quantities that during the days of gladiatorial contests the whole amphitheatre, gladiators and servants were decorated with amber. The largest piece of amber was 13 pounds in weight (4,2 kg). Pliny the Elder explains
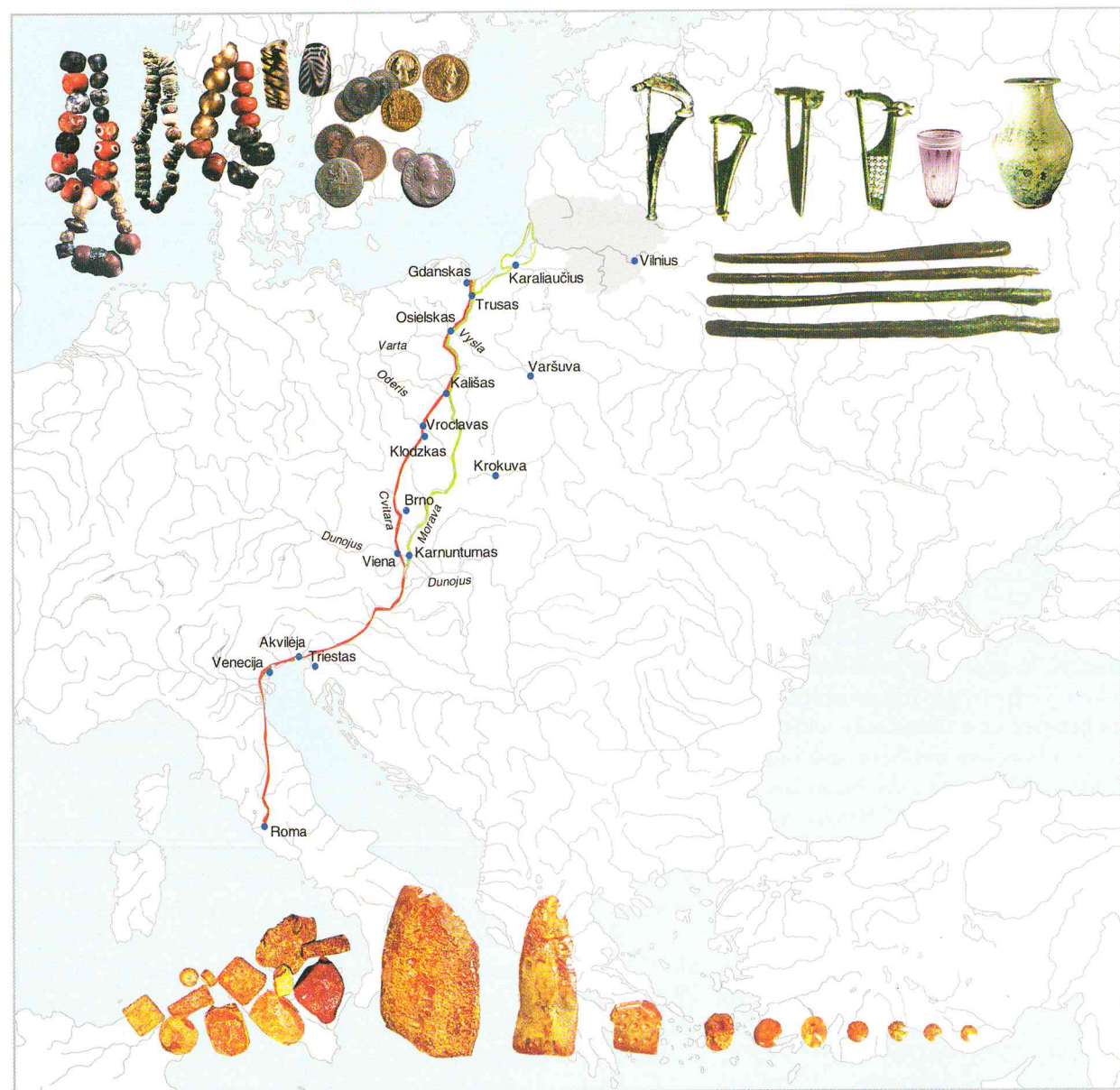
Illus. 1. 1st – 3rd centuries A.D. Amber routes and the Baltic–Roman goods (according to M. Majewski, A.Butrimas and E.Jovaiša, illustrated by A. Makovska).

the passion for amber. He says that instead of wearing neck–rings local women wear amber as they count on its curative powers (it was a widespread belief that amber helps to cure thyroid and other throat diseases) and the magic of its beauty. Whereas P.K.Tacitus (A.D. 55–58 –117–120) states it more clearly and notes that amber had long been part of things cast ashore until Roman prosperity confered it a name.

In his work "Germania" (A.D.98), Tacitus mentions the Aistians (3) – "On the coast to the right of the Suevian ocean, the Aistians have fixed their habitation…" – and describes them as collectors of amber: "… and furthemore they explore the sea for amber, in their language called "Glesum", and are the only people who gather that curious substance. It is generally found among the shallows, sometimes on the shore." (4). He also notes that the Aistians do not use amber: they collect its pieces, sell it raw and are pleasantly surprised to be remunerated. Such Tacitus' observations leave much room for doubt as the above–mentioned facts attest a long history of the tradition of amber. Moreover, the investigations of the burial monuments of the Balts of the period described by Tacitus suggest a versatile character of the amber usage in the Baltic material culture. "We cannot go along with Tacitus who says that at that time the Aistians did not use amber, did not know its value, and only the Romans made it an object of luxury", writes Vl.Katinas, the author of a comprehensive study about the Baltic amber (5).

The ramifications of the "Amber route" and the importance of trade between the Balts and the barbarian cultures to the Baltic, German and Slavic societies have been analysed and discussed by different researchers from different countries. K.Majewski, B.Bilinski contoured the principal branches of the "Amber route": 1) the so–called Klodzko and 2) Morava forks. The first branch was particularly used in the first century under the reign of Flavians and Antonines (Nerva and Trajan). From the metropolis in Pannonia the road approached the town of Vindobona near the Danube, thence it crossed the Klodzko pass and led to the region of the present–day Vroclav and on to Kalisz near the River Prosna. From there the traffic twisted to the north towards the bend of the Wysla (the district of Osielsk) and reached the Baltic Sea and and on to the land of amber in Semba. In the second century A.D. under the reign of the dynasty of Antonines the number of fights with the Marcomannians began to increase, therefore, it was no longer safe to use the Klodzko branch (as it led through the Marcomannic lands). Then the Morava branch came into use. It began in the town of Carnuntum in Pannonia near the Danube. Then up its tributary Morava to the upper Oder as far as the environs of Opole, thence it turned north towards Kalisz. From Kalisz using the road of the old Klodzko branch up to Semba.

During the first and third centuries A.D. the "Amber route", to put it in modern terms, was an entire industry. Large quantities of the Baltic amber have been excavated along the amber route in Vroclav–Partynic, near the Oder in Lower Silesia. It is assumed that the same road must have been used to export animal fur and skin, honey and wax to the Romans. Whereas from the provinces of the Roman Empire came bronze, silver and gold coins, brass and glass bowls, ceramics, glass and enamelled beads, various fibulae decorated with brass and enamel, and, most importantly, non–ferrous metals – copper, zinc, tin, silver (Illus. 1). As is known, the Baltic people had known how to obtain iron, the main metal, from local bog ore at least since A. D. 10–40.

There have recently been published a number of new studies about amber and the amber trade with Romans. Polish researchers have offered a number of more accurate details of the "Amber route" traffic (6). In Lithuania there have appeared some statistical studies which discuss the spread of amber in the burial monuments (7) in Lithuania throughout the Old and Middle Iron Age.

There have also been attempts to analyse the influence of the "Amber route" to the development of the Baltic society and to compare the Germanic people, as described by P.K.Tacitus, with the Baltic community, its life and customs (8).

A recent study "Corpus der römischen Funde im europäischen Barbaricum. Litauen", written by M. Michelbertas, consists of a comprehensive catalogue of Roman artefacts and a map of find spots (9). It shows that the traders of the Old Iron Age relied on rivers to reach the farthest locations in Lithuania, and that enamelled and glass beads, together with Roman coins (Illus. 2), comprise the biggest part of Roman articles. Other goods – such as fibulae, handbells, glass beakers or brass bowls –account only for a small part of all imports.

Another fact which is often overlooked in our archeological literature is that amber was an important trade object (as much as Roman articles were) not only in the Roman provinces but also in the Baltic lands. A map drawn up by M. Michelbertas demonstrates that amber ornaments, together with Roman artefacts, were excavated in most burial monuments in Lithuania. For example, the cemetry of Dauglaukis which is attributed to the culture of the lower reaches of the River Nemunas. Dating to the Old Iron Age, this rich burial monument manifests a versatile usage of amber in the daily life of the Balts.

A 127 burial grouping of Dauglaukis falls into three chronological groups which encompass a period from 70 to 260 A.D. (70–150, 150–220, 220–260). Twelve Roman bronze sestertii were located in ten graves in the cemetry of Dauglaukis. Their biggest part is attributed to the dynasty of Antonines: Antoninus Pius (138–161), Antoninus Pius' adopted successor Marcus Aurelius (161–180) and Commodus (177–192) who was the last in the dynasty. This consecutive order indicates active contacts between the Dauglaukis community and the merchants from the Roman Empire. It might seem that there should have been coins of the Severan dynasty, however, it is not so. Other Roman coins are attributed to the late Roman emperors, e.g., there was found a bronze sestertius of Gordian's III reign (238–244) (10).

Illus. 2. Roman imports in Lithuania and trade network:
1 – enamelled beads, 2 – coins, 3 – fibulae, 4 – bronze vessels
(according to M. Michelbertas, illustrated by A. Makovska).

The community of Dauglaukis lived under the conditions of military democracy, The stratification of society was based on wealth and patriarchal system. Men's graves comprise burial goods which abound in weapons and tools of labour. A man was a leader in the family, household and military. Whereas women's graves were mostly furnished with ornaments, though some burials are equipped with such household articles as awls, needles and, in very rare cases, parts of spinning equipment. It seems that a woman must have been confined to the concerns of the household only.

Private property determined the division of the community of Dauglaukis into 3 classes: 1) "common", 2) "well–to–do", and 3) "rich". An apparent reflection of this differentiation is an average number of burial goods found in a grave of an individual. A "common"

tribal woman had 2.7 burial items, a "well–to–do" woman possessed 7.5 articles, and a "rich" woman owned even 14.4 burial goods. Similar finds come from the graves of men: a "common" man had 2.8 items, a "well–to–do" man possessed 5.1 burial goods, and a "rich" man was equipped with 8. 5 burial items. It is interesting that the well–to–do and rich members of the Dauglaukis community owned the largest share of amber – almost 75.3%. R.V.Sidrys has made a statistical analysis of the amber finds in the cemetry of Dauglaukis and confirmed a direct subordination between amber and rich graves (11).

Grave 41 yielded 97 amber beads, pendants and other articles together with pieces of raw amber (12). Amber was used for decorations by everyone: men and women, girls and boys. The biggest volume of amber was located in the

graves of women and girls (13). Amber beads were often used to adorn necklaces (14). As a rule, amber was used together with enamelled and glass beads, sometimes with brass spirals (Illus. 3).

It is of interest to note that no genuine amber necklace has been found so far with the exception of the cemeteries of Vidgiriai and Plinkaigalis (15), dating to the end of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century A.D. R.V.Sidrys writes: "Amber must have had no high status or high economic value since the merchants of Middle Lithuania did not mediate between the locals and the Romans in amber export" (16). The author demonstrates a poor understanding of the end of the Old Iron Age. Though the merchants of Middle Lithuania did not mediate between the locals and the Romans, archeological finds comprise spectacular collections of enamelled and glass beads, imported fibulae and, most importantly, a very rare sample of imported bronze jug. However, there is no or little amber, and the further from the sea, the less amber is found in the burial monuments of the Old Iron Age. But in the burial monuments of the Old Iron Age only! This pattern, however, does not apply to the Middle Iron Age. Why? In the Old Iron Age a high demand of amber in the Roman Empire made amber a highly expensive good in the amber source metropolis itself. Not without reason, amber was combined with imported enamelled and glass beads to decorate necklaces. With the fall of the Roman Empire, already from the second half of the 5th century A.D. we observe an increase of amber objects in all Lithuanian burial monuments. Therefore, it is not by chance that considerable quantities of amber are found in the above–mentioned cemetery at Plinkaigalis in Middle Lithuania. R.V.Sidrys also notes that "the statistical subordination between amber and rich graves was confirmed in Dauglaukis, as opposed to Vidgiriai which was outstanding in amber." (17). Compared are two burial monuments which are incomparable by definition. The cemetery of Dauglaukis dates to the period 70–260 A.D. whereas the early cemeteries of Vidgiriai date 450 years later. If the author had treated amber as a "high–ranking" good, it would have been obvious that with the decline of the "Amber route", amber became more available to the Baltic tribes themselves.

Amber beads–amulets (18) were located in twenty graves in Dauglaukis. Most of them were found in men's graves, and only some were unearthed in women's and girls' graves. In our literature there are

Illus. 3. Amber as an element of necklaces (illustrated by A. Makovska)
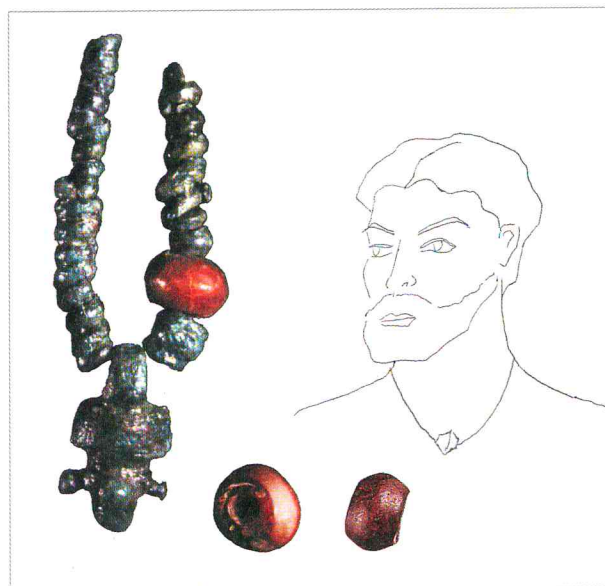
Illus. 4. Amber amulets (illustrated by A. Makovska)

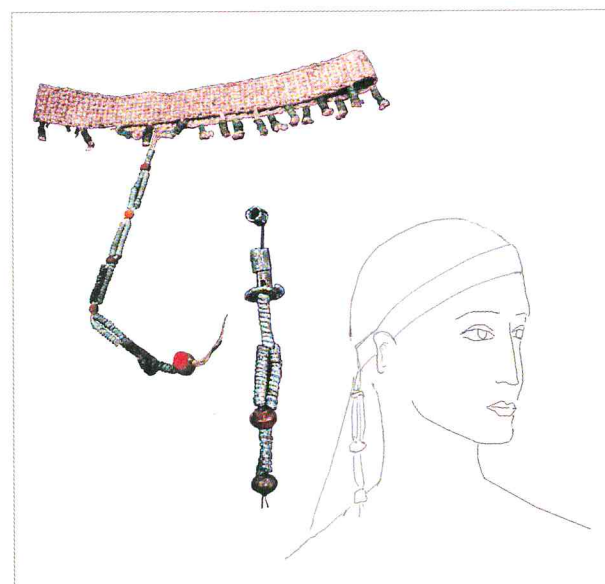*Illus. 5. Amber ornaments of hair supporting sashes (illustrated by A.Makovska)*

no comprehensive studies made on the nature of amber beads–amulets. We can only assume that these amulets are trully genuine. In men's graves they are usually found in the neck area. They must have been hung on a string and worn round the neck. P.K.Tacitus makes a mention of amulets worn by the Aistians. It is true, though, that these were boar–shaped figurines or boar masks which "… protected them, and ensured the safety of the worshipper even among his enemies." (4, 19). An interesting find also comes from men's grave 82 (Illus. 4). It is composed from brass spirals, an antropomorphic brass pendant and one amber bead. Perhaps it was not by chance that amber was coupled with a human–face–shaped pendant?

The women of the Dauglaukis community also wore amber to decorate sashes which supported their hair (Illus. 5). Such ornaments come from four graves (20). Women used sashes, made from woollen cloth or leather, to undertie their hair, and on the back of the head would attach an ornament composed from brass spirals separated by big pieces of amber. It should be added that such finds have no equivalents in the assortment of women's head–dress decorations dated to the Old Iron Age.

Amber pendants are extremely scarce in Dauglaukis. They were accidentally excavated in three graves (21). Grave 63 possessed a necklace which had amber as both 1) a component used together with enamelled and glass beads, and 2) as a pendant (Illus. 6). Amber pendants can vary in form. They can be drop–shaped (grave 70), rectangular (grave 79), "wooden mortar–shaped", etc.

Beside two Roman coins, an amazing article was found in woman's grave 55. It resembles a modern–day thread spool or a fly–wheel. It is the only such find out of all Lithuanian burial monuments dating to the Old Iron Age, and it is hard to say what purpose it served. It might have been a woman's tool used for spinning. Grave 6 was equipped with an amber spindle. Grave 34 deserves a mention, too. It contained three little pieces of raw amber (Ilius. 7).

The burial grounds of Dauglaukis have revealed a wide range of amber usage in the Baltic household. The finds encompass ornaments, items of religious purpose, tools for labour. With its origins in the Neolithic Age, amber tradition was developed in the Old Iron Age.

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13. Graves Nr. 1, 34, 36, 37, 39, 55, 63, 64, 82, 90, 93, 96, 105, 106, 109, 110, 113, 114, 120, 124.

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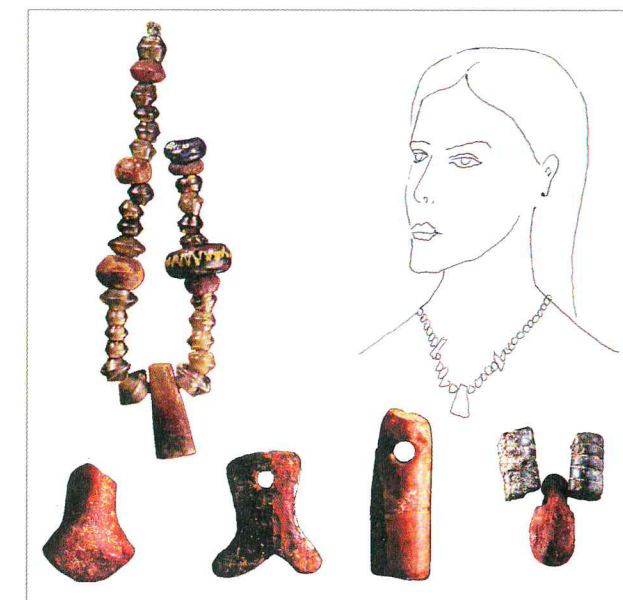
Illus. 6. Amber pendants (illustrated by A. Makovska)
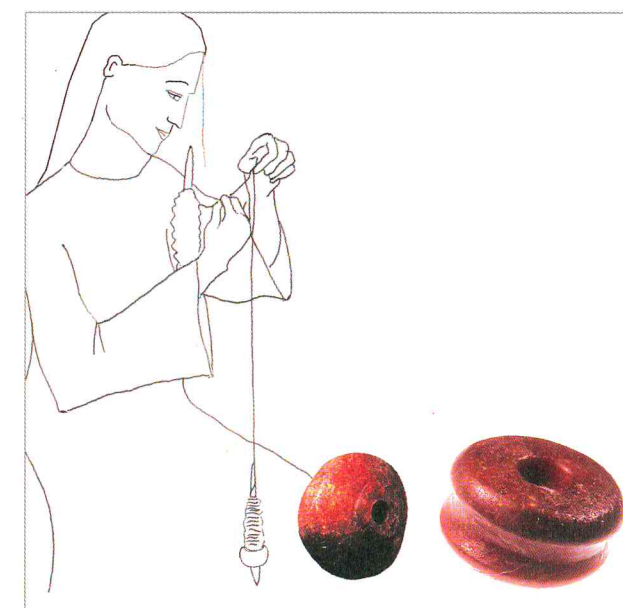
Illus. 7. Amber as household equipment (illustrated by A. Makovska)

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20. Graves Nr. 36, 39, 110, 124.

21. Graves Nr. 63, 70, 79.

ROMAN IMPORTS AMONG THE WEST BALTS: COMMERCE OR "BEADS FOR THE NATIVES"?

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The ancient West Balts came into contact, directly and indirectly, with the advanced material culture and foreign concepts of imperial Rome during the period known as the Old Iron Age (AD1-400) in Lithuanian archaeology. Roman traders and their middlemen arrived to procure natural drift amber, an exotic material that would be transformed in the workshops of Aquileia into items much desired by the fashionable ladies of Italy: finger rings, necklaces and amulet pendants, ornately carved scent bottles and other miniature vessels, mirror-backs, and intricate figurines of deities, theater performers, and cupids riding dolphins and horses (Strong 1966).[1] This trade contact, some archaeologists believe, greatly stimulated the cultural evolution of Baltic society. They term it a "golden age" that saw trade embassies from Rome, and by the early third century cargo ships from the Frisian port of Fectio (near Utrecht, Netherlands) anchor off the Baltic coastline, bringing in sacks of coins, metal tools and weapons, textiles, household wares and personal ornaments to be exchanged for amber (Michelbertas 1972, 1986; Jovaiça 1997, 1998). This allowed Balts to acquire new metal and farming technologies, plants and livestock, which in turn increased productivity and population and began to stratify Balt society into nobles, farmers and slaves.

But is this an accurate reconstruction of Roman contact and influence in the southeast Baltic, and is it consistent with what we know about the simple level of Balt social and economic organization at the time?

The largest excavated cemetery of the second-third centuries, for example, Sargėnai (Kaunas), has only 343 graves, equivalent to an associated community of 35-60 people; one of the largest hill-forts, Eketė, Klaipėda district, is surmounted by a settlement area that measures only 110 by 105m; and it was not until about the first century that Balts learned how to produce iron from local swamp ore (Michelbertas 1986: 18, 195, 207). Were the tribal *Aestii* [2] of Sambia equal trading partners with the Romans or simply "natives" dismissed with trinkets and beads?

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[1] *The fashion for amber led to affectations such as amber knives for cutting truffles, and Juvenal (Sat. 9.50-3) satirizes the custom of ladies carrying balls of amber (to warm the palm of the hand?). According to Pliny (Natural History 37.12), Nero in his verses described his wife Poppaea's ringlets of hair as sucinii (meaning amber-colored, as sucinum was the latin noun for amber). Pausanius (V.XII.7) mentions a life-size statue of Augustus made of amber (presumably a coating?) standing in a round building in Olympia.*

[2] *Tacitus writing in about 98 provides the first description of the Aestii (pronounced like "ICE tea") in his Germania (45.5): "They explore the sea for amber, in their language called glaesum, and are the only people who gather that curious substance.... [which] lay long neglected, till Roman luxury gave it a name, and brought it into request. To the savages it is of no use. They gather it in rude heaps, and offer it for sale without any form or polish, wondering at the price they receive for it." Archaeologists can not define precisely the homeland of the Aestii, but most agree that it was probably the Sambian peninsula, and perhaps included the Lithuanian coast as well (Nowakowski 1992: 226).*