AMBER FROM ANCIENT SITES ON THE TERRITORY OF SLOVENIA

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Introduction


The researches of the pre-historic periods have been mostly orientated to other themes, probably because of the rich metal finds, so that amber remained in the shadow of more complex chronological and settlement studies (Teržan 1984).

The Roman period studies were orientated towards historical and political themes, i.e. studies of territorial appurtenance and political divisions, the formations of provinces and town developing - together with the necropoles. The finds of amber goods are known from Emona graves (Plesničar-Gec 1972, Petru 1972, Petru 1978), but are rather modest in comparison with the rich finds from Petovio (Vomer-Gogovčič 1996, Jesenič 1999, 79). In fact, the Roman amber has not been much researched, the only exception being a short review study (Bertoncelj-Kučar 1979).

The Roman time amber artefacts used to be the subject of anthropological analyses, and unlike the pre-historic amber, has not been researched in the field of scientific studies (Hadli, Orel 1978).

¹ Acta from the conference about amber in Ljubljana 1998 indicate a perfect insight in separate site along the Amber Road, Amber in Archaeology, Pula 1993, (ed. C. W. Bach, J. Brunske).
Geographical position

The modern Slovenian territory has been in all periods of great political and strategic interest. A part of land between the south-eastern Alps, the Adriatic and Pannonia, was always bustling crossroads of important trade and military ways - between the North and the South, and above all, between the East and the West - as a transitory way to the agglomerating Balkans and Italy - as the land of desire (Pavan 1991, 313-329, Šalet 1976, Šalet 1977, Šalet 1988).

Prehistory

The oldest amber find in Slovenia are beads from Debelci vrh, above the village of Pregrad, belonging to the early phase of Utn-Field Culture, Ha A 1 (Terlan 1984, 110). The scientific analyses have established its doubtful Baltic provenance (Hadl, Orel 1978). This find is the earliest witness to prove the Adriatic trade road, which in the Late Mycenaean period joined the continental Amber Road. The studies of accompanying materials indicated Eastern Holdstein and the territory of Mecklenburg as the most probable original sources of raw amber of period (Terlan 1984, 112).

The prehistoric Amber Road was really vivid in the Iron Age (Strong 1966, fig. 1). The longest known pre-historic amber finds derive from the Caves of Skocjan and the graves from Sveta Lucija (Most na Soči), in the Western part of Slovenian territory (Terlan et al 1985, 78).

In most of the Slovenian sites from that period appear amber products - in a form of necklace beads in various sizes and forms. The amount of amber jewellery remarkably increases in the graves of Doljenika Hallstatt Group - in the South-Eastern Slovenia, where the amber beads are found together with the glass ones. Amber products are continuously present from Hallstatt C period to the end of Early Iron Age. They are also found in the graves of Late Iron Age.

In the eastern part of Doljenika they appear at the sites of Malence (Stare 1960-61, 61), Libna (Gusti 1976, 221), and on Magdalenska gora in the West (Hencen 1978). In the South of Slovenia amber was found in Bela Krajina (Dular 1978, 23-26). The central Doljenika sites with amber finds are Valična vas (Terlan 1973, 670), Stična (Wells 1981, 111), and Nova mesto (Knež 1986, 56, Kriz 2000, 38).

In the period of Early Iron Age the necklace amber beads are different in size and form. Spherical beads with holes for fixation prevail, but discus or egg-shaped are quite frequent, too. They can be additionally decorated with cuttings of lines and circles with a dot. Sometimes they are profiled and cut in other forms. The plates in rectangular form with many holes may have been used as ‘separating-link’ for pectoralia, combined with glass and bone beads, from some millimetres to some centimetres in size. Considering various bead combination, three beads of the massive necklace from the Grave V/35 in Kapiteljska njiva (Kapitel’s field) in Nova mesto (Knež 1980, 123: 13) are mentioning-worth – from both sides, at the entrance of string holes, there are pierced sets of canals differently illuminating the bead and creating fan-like ornaments in this way.

In the summit of Hallstatt Period numerous amber products of different types and forms testify the region of Doljenika not to be only amber-trade mediator, but also active in amber processing. Amber beads were produced in form of ram heads (Photo No. 1) (Nova mesto, Kapiteljska njiva, Grave VI/4; Kriz 1997, 37 and 40), and are chemically and formatively similar to glass beads which are proved to be produced in Doljenika, taking into consideration a great amount of them in eleven Slovenian sites. Similar motifs also appear with amber beads in form of bird or duck heads (Photo No. 2), found in Nova mesto, Kapiteljska njiva, Grave V/35 (Knež 2000, 38) and Grave VI/44 (unpublished), where two animal heads, looking at opposite directions, appear. It is not known from where originated numerous amber beads in various forms found at Stična (Wells 1981, Graves V/20, VI/16, VII/7, VIII/1, VIII/11), Magdalenska gora (Hencen 1978, Graves I/9, IV/34, IV/62, VII/40, X/36) and Nova mesto (Knež 2000, Grave V/35). Most probably the bronze fibula with amber coating from the Grave 249 at Most na Soči (Terlan et al 1985, 78) and amber coating of fibula in a form of duck from Stična Grave V/7 (Wells 1981, 73) were produced somewhere in the Etruscan centres. Amber in Doljenika appears together with glass products of certain domestic production.

Some analyses of Hallstatt Period amber in Nova mesto (Knež 1986, 36) indicate its provenance in larger Baltic area. Unfortunately rare but significant products of Late Iron Age have not been analysed yet. From that period, from the 3rd to the 1st century BC, the finds were known mostly from burials by cremation where amber was mostly destroyed in the cremation process. A rich necklace with amber ‘separating-link’ from Grave 11, Kapiteljska njiva, in Nova mesto (Knež 1990, 131) and also amber beads from Spodnji Lanov (Photo No.

6), near Celje (Božič 1998, 146, Abb. 7-9), dated in that period, perhaps gives evidence of continuing trade along the Amber Road.

Roman Period

The Amber Road over Pannonia and the South-Eastern Alps, leading from the Baltic via the Danube, finally reaches the Adriatic at Aquileia and Tergeste. The modern Slovenian territory was cut almost at the centre, so in the 1st century BC it opened the door to the quickly advancing Romanisation (Rossi 1996, 187-197).

In the 1st century BC, Italic trading centres were formed at the edges of the vanishing pre-historical culture groups. A little later, in the middle of the 1st century BC at least, the western part of Slovenian territory was already annexed to Gallia Cisalpina (Salet 1985, Rossi 1996, 187-197).

In Augustan period, along the so-called Amber Road and on old settlement bases, were developing trade centres, i.e. Naapurius, and Roman towns Emona (modern Ljubljana), Celje and Poetovio. Emona and its territory incorporated the Italic Region X, while the newly formed province of Pannonia in the east, and also the already forming province of Noricum in the north-east were established on its borders (Šalet, Koz 1997).

The basic trading centre was Aquileia, which due to its river harbour represented one of the major Mediterranean trade centres. Regarding its size and richness it was compared to Alexandria and Antiochia.

In the treasuries of the Aquileia, Trieste and Udine museums and from numerous catalogues and papers are known rich finds of amber artefacts (Bravaco 1951, 13, Calvi 1996, Bravaco 1996). In Aquileia several workshops for amber artefacts have been stated (Pancierra 1957, 43, Calvi 1996). The researchers have numbered them among the workshops manufacturing semi-precious-stone jewellery. The manufacturing techniques and sometimes even patterns were equal (Calvi 1996). Stylistic analyses of Aquileia materials have shown to recognize many individual masters inside separate stylistic directions, i.e. the master of Elots, the master of fruit on a leaf, etc. (Calvi 1996, 18). In the trade workshops of Aquileia were employed many skilled masters, i.e. gennari, who might have immigrated with the early colonies from the Central Italy, and most certainly there were the masters from the east, too (Calvi 1996, 15). The motives are frequently so-called alexandrinians, for example the ibis among the marsh grass. The artefacts from Aquileian workshops represent jewellery (necklaces, rings with carved woman’s head, pendants), jewellery boxes and objects of various shapes of apotropaic meaning. Among them are frequent various sorts of kernel fruit – pomegranates, figs, dates, grapes – as symbols of fertility and abundance, but also life after death, sometimes appearing on the vine or laurel leaf. There are also many shells, fish or leaves of bread. These are real masterpieces. nature morte in miniature.

At least until the beginning of the Marcomanic Wars,
great amounts of raw amber arrived from the Baltic sites via Amber Road passing the Danube and the Alps to reach Aquileia (Negroni Caracchio 1976, 27). The Aquileian artefacts were found in numerous sites along the Amber Road (Gömöri 1996; Vidoni 1996), but also in towns along the Adriatic (Fadilu 1996) and in the Rhineland (Calvi 1996).

Emona was an Augusteum Roman colony and the centre of many important Aquileian merchant families trading with metallicurgical and building products in Pannonia, Noricum and along the Adriatic (Satül 1987); among them the Barbisi, the Statisi, the Caeurnitis, etc. (Plesničar Gec 1976; Plesničar Gec 1990). Emona has been known from the settlement researches, and mostly for its investigated and well published necropoles (Plesničar Gec 1976; Petru 1972). The finds of amber artefacts are very rare, despite the outstanding Italic modus vivendi of its inhabitants. In Emona graves are found decorated undecorated amber rings, amber spindles (acetta) and various beads.

The ring representing a woman's head from the grave MM 384 (Plesničar Gec 1972, tab. GIV; 6) shows stylistic characteristics of the Flavian period. The ring with a figure of a lying dog was found in the grave MM 662 (Petru 1972, tab. XLIV; 18) and was because of its accompanying unguentarium form dated into the beginning of the 2nd century, which perfectly corresponds with analogous rings from the Aquileian graves, most usually found in the Trianon period (Braun 1951, 17).

Simple amber rings and beads are known from some more Emona graves. Regarding the accompanying grave goods they are dated into the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century (Bertoncelj-Kučar 1979).

The most beautiful amber find in Emona is the necklace of thirteen amber beads (Photo No. 3), which was found in the burial (NM 2572) together with an iron key and a lead weight (Petru 1978, 318). Considering the duration of the square weight the grave was dated in the second half of the 1st century, but regarding the whole grave unit – with the presence of a key – the duration into the Hadrian-Antonine period has been suggested. The beads are very unusual. They are perforated, discus-shaped with the surface cut to small facets, which has been a unique and unusual shape. The necklace was found in a woman's grave, which was proved also by the key as the only preserved part of the jewellery box.

The collection in Museo Nazionale di Aquileia, Museo Civico Trieste and several private collections, at the collection Trippa in the Museum of Udine, the collection Zandani, in the museum of Trieste. There are more than three hundred artefacts, in addition to some pieces of raw amber and semi-products.

The necklace is kept in the National Museum of Ljubljana, inv. Number NM 61833

Mrs Calvi intro the Canal's famous were demi mausole, lemon fork. However, the myth of the Psyche, who has to travel through the dark tunnels of the underground as regis Eros's love, should not be forgotten. In the underground the spindler call her to join them in order to give the destiny of the soul. The motive was perfectly explained by the psychiatrist Jovan (She and He 1974, 1976).

The amber spindles were pierced by a bronze stick and strung with beads of some different size and shape; they were sometimes called 'acetta'. Regarding their shape they look like a spindle and as regularly found only in woman's graves they may have represented the honour, which in the Roman world belonged to a spinner – mother who metaphorically spins the family life threads.

The spindle from the grave NM 383 dates into the beginning of the 2nd century together with the oil lamp with open canal type Loeschcke X (Petru 1972, tab. LXXVII: 31). To the same period belongs the grave NM 813 containing the most beautiful spindle from Emona necropoles and besides oil lamps with closed canal type Loeschcke IX also the unguentarium with bulbously enlarged bottoms (Petru 1972, tab LV; 11).

All the Emona finds appear very analogously to the Aquileia ones, in the graves from the second half of the 1st century and the beginning of the 2nd century (Bertoncelj-Kučar 1979). Only one amber object appears in the grave from the end of the 3rd century – i.e. the necklace with nineteen amber beads. It was found in a rich grave, a sarcophagus from Karlovča Sr.1-Villa Samso (Petru 1972, 122). It belonged to the deceased possessing a rich necklace of Galia's gold coins, too. The belonging annular and ear-rings are characteristic for the second half of the 3rd century. (Petru 1972, tab. CXV, 9).

In Poetoio graves often appeared more amber objects at the same time; for example in the grave 1 from the nearby village Hajdina were discovered four rings, among them one representing a woman's head and the other one with the figure of Amor with lion's skin (Vomer Goy Kovč 1996; tab. 2; 10). In the rich grave 139 were found amber plaquettes – one representing a girl's head in profile, the other one with a fish – and also a small amphora and two shell forms, together six amber artefacts. The grave was dated in the second half of the 1st century and in the beginning of the 2nd century (Izetič 1999, 79, pict. 66; tab. 38; 9, 13).

In the lead sarcophagus of a girl, grave 785, was found
a necklace with seven pendants in the anthropomorphic, phallic and zoomorphic shapes together with the Gallien's coin (Istotič 1999, 80, pict.67; tab. 177; 4-10).

Besides undecorated and carved amber rings are: in Petorio also known rings with the representation of the woman's head, the lying dog, Amor with wings (Photo No. 4), Amor and Psyche, Minerva and the boy playing with a dog (Vomor Gokovič 1996, tab. 1-2). There also appear amber cosmetic instruments (Vomor Gokovič 1996, tab.1:13, 14, tab.3:11), anguientaria of different shapes (Vomor Gokovič 1996,tab.2:9) and boxes (Vomor Gokovič 1996, pict.12, pict. 21, tab.1; 8, tab.3:11). Natura morta are represented as the goose with a fish on a leaf, shells, a loaf of bread, kernel fruit, i.e. dates (Photo No. 5).

Most of the graves are dated in the second half of the 1st and in the first half of the 2nd century, the graves from the 3rd century are very rare. The finds are analogous to many Aquileia artefacts (Istotič 1999, 80).

The finds of raw amber and semi-products identified in Petorio are also worth mentioning (Vomor Gokovič 1996).

It is surprising that in the Celts region, with the only exception of La-Tene period amber beads from the village Spodnji Lanov (Photo No. 5), amber finds were not discovered (Bošič 1998, 146, Abb. 7-9).

This is a short survey of the Roman period amber finds. In well investigated and published Emona necropoleis is amber modestly attested. On one hand there is a complete absence of amber artefacts in Celts, while on the other hand there are rich amber finds in many Poetorium graves, which are not well known, are incompletely published and dispersed in different museums.

In the period when the amber was most in favour, from the mid-1st century to the Marcomanic Wars, in the Roman world was almost always practised common burial. Amber artefacts were the first to be burnt up when buried together with the deceased. The only possible explanation for the amber object to remain undamaged was that they had been lain in the grave layer at the burial of the ashes as grave goods. Can the absence of amber jewellery in Celts and rather modest finds of amber in Emona be compared with the Poetorium finds and explain through different burial customs? Is it possible the amber jewellery not to be so frequently in use - which is almost improbable in the case of the very Italic Emona; and the abundance of Poetorium finds to express the wealth of its citizens? Could be explained as well the amount of amber artefacts in Poetorium by there workshops and the activity of (in Aquileia) skilled masters.

Late Roman and migration period

In the Late Roman Period, precisely in the 4th century, amber grave goods are not known. In the 5th and in the 6th centuries, in the turbulent period of invasions and migrations of different tribes, appear separate graves containing amber artefacts. Amber is presented mostly with necklaces, i.e. as separate amber beads in a glass set of a longer or shorter necklace.

The oldest grave is No. 1515 from the National Museum garden in Ljubljana (Roman Emona), containing a bow fibula of the Eastern Cultural Circle (Knifc 1998), and a necklace with a set of glass and two amber beads (Peruš 1973, p. 127, T. 106, 3-6).

In the cemetery of Drežnice, in the north-western part of Ljubljana, sixty burials were researched. Regarding their grave goods, are besides the native elements also strong East Gothic and Allemannian influences (Slabe 1973). Amber beads appear in the Grave No. 1 (T. 2-1.2), the Grave No. 18 (T.5:11), the Grave No. 34 (T.11:3-12) and in the Grave No. 41 (T. 15).

In the cemetery at Rupnik near Šentjur, to the south of Roman town of Celata (Bolha 1981), in the woman's graves of the native and Germanic inhabitants – coloured glass necklaces with intermediate amber beads are found in thirteen graves among one hundred and eight excavated ones.

Conclusion:

The scientific analyses will only be able to confirm the origin of numerous amber beads in Slovenian ancient sites. They could be of the same origin as some already researched prehistoric materials, i.e. from the Baltic, or could also originate from other sources and workshops, which had been often mentioned by the Roman authors. In the future researches we would like to find the answer.

Translated by Prof. Matevža Veber

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THE AMBER KNEIPENS IN LATVIAN ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

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Before speaking about the kniepens 1 itself, I should give a brief account of the situation regarding Latvian folk costume, of which the kniepens forms a part. In essence, this is a peasant costume, as in other parts of Europe. However, in Latvia there was something of a non-standard situation where the peasant estate was made up of one particular ethnic group – the Latvians, who were prevented from entering other social strata, such as craft workers, where the Germans were dominant. Thus, peasant dress was perceived not so much as an indicator of social identity as an indicator of ethnic identity. Thus, many archaic traditions were preserved, with striking differences between this costume and the urban fashion. In Rucava, where most of the kniepens derive from, the folk costume was worn even up to the 1920s and 30s.

The kniepens represents as special way of fastening the shirt (Fig. 1). It was distributed within a comparatively small area in the very south-western corner of Kurzeme, mainly in the Parish of Rucava (Fig. 2). The name arose through a corruption of a Germanic word with a root meaning ‘button.’ M. Slava explains this in terms of Swedish language influence, a similar form of fastening the neck of the costume being found in the Swedish folk costume, called halkbäpp [Slava M. 1966, p. 102]. However, a more likely explanation seems a derivation from the German word to button: kniepen.

The present paper discusses 36 kniepens from the amber collection of the Latvian History Museum, as well as those illustrated in Volume 1 of ‘Latvijas raksti’ [Latvian letters, 1924, Figs. LIV 531a, LIV 531b, LIV 531, LIV 592].

My interest in 19th century kniepens was aroused by the archaic design of their ornamentation, with concentric circles. Such circles with a central dot (‘compass’ ornamentation) is found in the territory of Latvia already in the Late Neolithic and from time to time became current in ornamentation. They are found in the ornamentation of locally-made 16th century ring brooches, and are particularly connected, it seems, with bone-working. In Latvian archaeological literature they are described as ‘sun-signs’ and connected with solar symbolism.

Two forms of kniepens are found in Latvian ethnographic material: examples made from metal

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1 Plural kniepen

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Fig. 1. Kniepen with two pendants from the collections of the Latvian History Museum (CVVM 25946).