

## AMBER FROM ANCIENT SITES ON THE TERRITORY OF SLOVENIA

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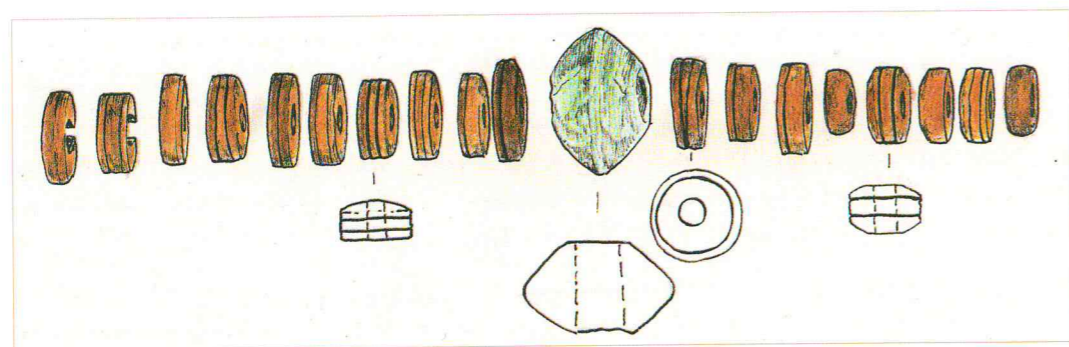


Fig.11 Necklace from Plinkaigalis grave 51  
(LNM AR 700:213)

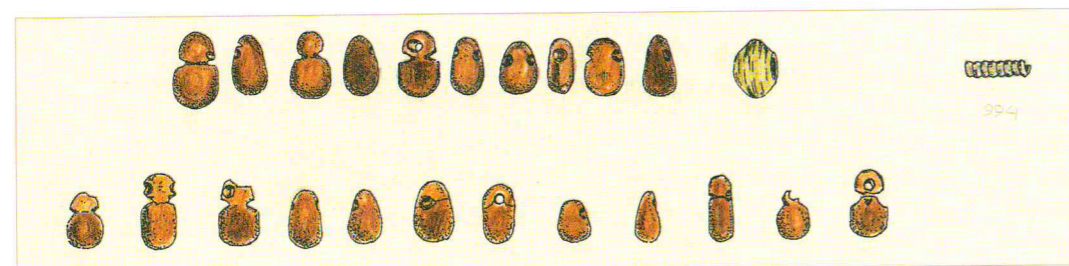
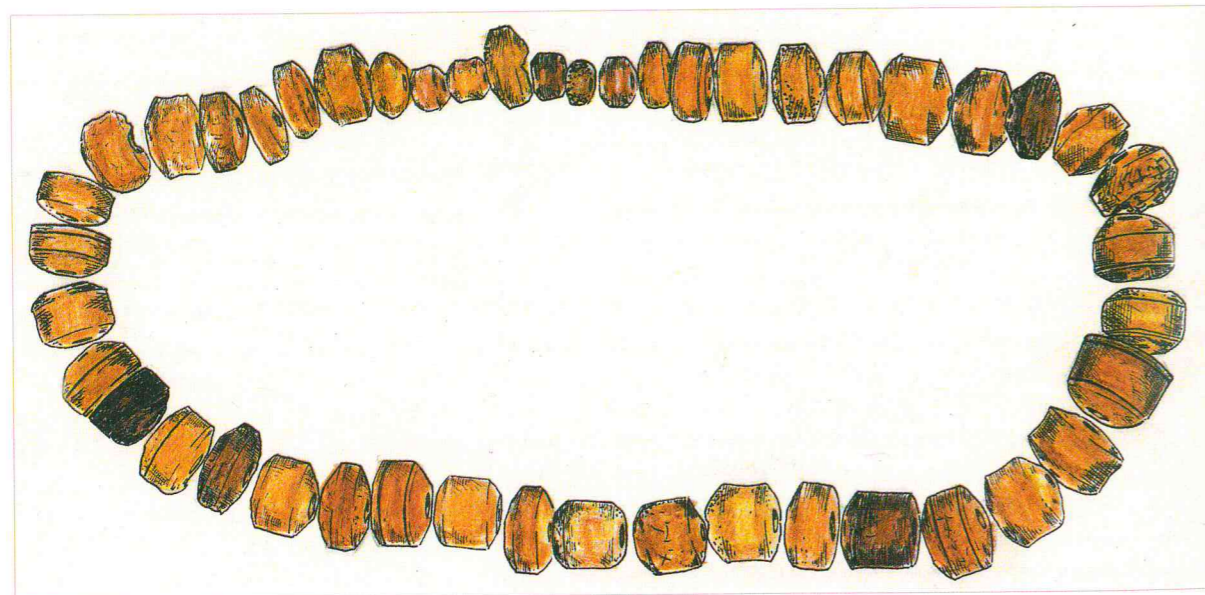


Fig.12 Necklace of amber beads – pendants, glass bead  
and bronze spiral from Plinkaigalis grave 313  
(LNM AR 700:993 - 994)

Fig.13 Necklace from Plinkaigalis cemetery grave 56  
(LNM AR 700:26)



### Introduction

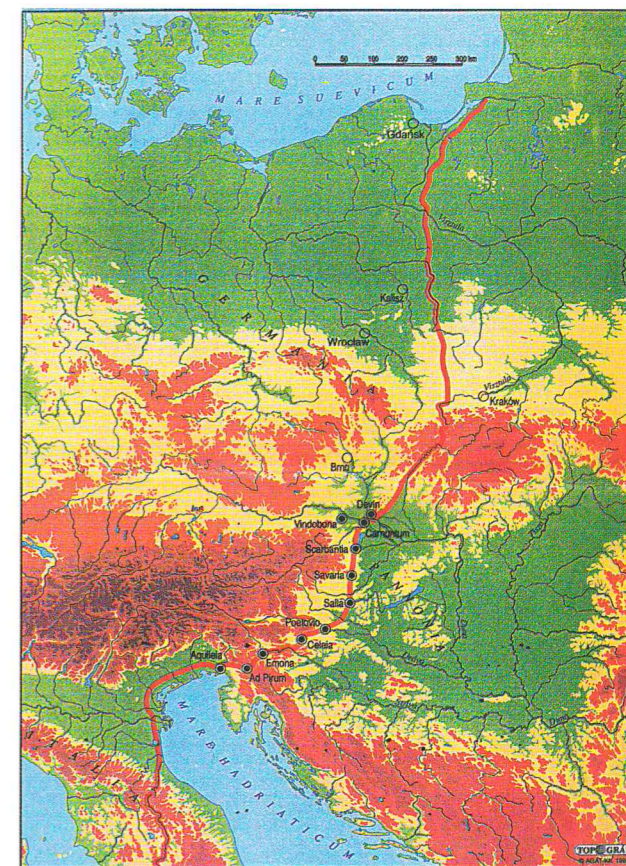
The geographical position of modern Slovenia – at the end of the Amber Road – justifies frequent amber finds in many Slovenian sites (Negroni Cataccio 1976. Rossi 1996. Zaccharia 1996).<sup>1</sup>

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-Gojkovič 1996. Istenič 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 (Hadži, Orel 1978).

<sup>1</sup> Acta from the conference about amber in Liblice 1990 indicate a perfect insight in separate sites along the Amber Road. Amber in Archaeology, Praha 1993, (ed. C. W. Beck, J. Bouzek).



Map. The Amber Road (G. Janos, ed. Landscapes and Monuments along the Amber Road, Sopron, 1999)

## 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 agitating Balkans and Italy - as the land of desire (Pavan 1991, 313-329. Šašel 1976. Šašel 1977. Šašel 1988).

## Prehistory

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

The pre-historic 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 Škocjan and the graves from Sveta Lucija (Most na Soči), in the Western part of Slovenian territory (Teržan 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 Dolenjska 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 Dolenjska they appear at the sites of Malence (Stare 1960-61, 61), Libna (Guštin 1976, 221), and on Magdalenska gora in the West (Hencken 1978). In the South of Slovenia amber was found in Bela Krajina (Dular 1978, 23-26). The central Dolenjska sites with amber finds are Valična vas (Teržan 1973, 670), Stična (Wells 1981, 111), and Novo mesto (Knez 1986, 56. Križ 2000, 38).

In the period of Early Iron Age the necklace am-

ber beads are different in size and form. Spherical beads with holes for fixation prevail, but discus or keg-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 (Kapitelj's field) in Novo mesto (Križ 2000, T:23. 13) are mentioning-worth - from both sides, at the entrance of string holes, there are perforated 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 Dolenjska 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) (Novo mesto, Kapiteljska njiva, Grave VI/4; Križ 1997, 37 and 40), and are thematically and formatively similar to glass beads which are proved to be produced in Dolenjska, 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 Novo mesto, Kapiteljska njiva, Grave V/35 (Križ 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/1, VIII/1), Magdalenska gora (Hencken 1978, Graves II/9, IV/34, IV/62, VII/40, X/36) and Novo mesto (Križ 2000, Grave V/35). Most probably the bronze *fibula* with amber coating from the Grave 249 at Most na Soči (Teržan et al 1985, 78) and amber coating of *fibula* in a form of duck from Stična Grave VI/7 (Wells 1981, 73) were produced somewhere in the Etruscan centres. Amber in Dolenjska appears together with glass products of certain domestic production.

Some analyses of Hallstatt Period amber in Novo mesto (Knez 1986, 56) 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 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 Novo mesto (Knez 1990, 131) and also amber beads from Spodnji Lanovž (Photo No.



Photo No.1  
Novo mesto - Kapiteljska njiva,  
Grave VI/4, amber beads in  
the form of ram heads.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC it opened the door to the quickly advancing Romanization (Rossi 1996, 187-197).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, Italic trading centres were formed at the edges of the vanishing pre-historic cultural groups. A little later, in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC at last, the western part of Slovenian territory was already annexed to *Gallia Cisalpina* (Šašel 1985. Rossi 1996, 187-197).

In Augustean period, along the so-called Amber Road and on old settlement bases, were developing trade centres, i.e. Nauportus, and Roman towns Emona (modern Ljubljana), Celeia and Poetovio. Emona and its territory incorporated the Italic Regio 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 (Šašel, Kos 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 rich-

ness it was compared to Alexandria and Antiochia.

In the treasures of the Aquileia, Trieste and Udine museums and from numerous catalogues and papers are known rich finds of amber artefacts (Biavaschi 1951, 13. Calvi 1996. Bravar 1996)<sup>2</sup>. In Aquileia several workshops for amber artefacts have been stated (Panciera 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 Erots, the master of fruit on a leaf, etc. (Calvi 1996, 18). In the trade workshops of Aquileia were employed many skilled masters, i.e. *gemmarii*, who might have immigrated with the early colonists 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 apothropaic 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 loaves of bread. These are real masterpieces, *nature morte* in miniature.

At least until the beginning of the Marcomanic Wars,



Photo No.2  
Novo mesto - Kapiteljska njiva,  
Grave V/35, amber beads  
in the form of four duck heads.

great amounts of raw amber arrived from the Baltic sites via Amber Road passing the Danube and the Alps to reach Aquileia (Negroni Cataccio 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 (Fadić 1996) and in the Rhineland (Calvi 1996).

Emona was an Augustean Roman colony and the centre of many important Aquileian merchant families trading with metallurgic and building products in Pannonia, Noricum and along the Adriatic (Šašel 1987); among them the Barbiis, the Statiis, the Caeserniis, 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 1972, 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 and undecorated amber rings, amber spindles (sceptre) and various beads.

The ring representing a woman's head from the grave MM 384 (Plesničar Gec 1972, tab. CIV; 6) shows stylistic characteristics of the Flavian period. The ring with a figur of lying dog was found in the grave NM 662 (Petru 1972, tab XLIV; 18) and was because of its accompanying unguentarium form dated into the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, which perfectly corresponds with analogous rings from the Aquileian graves, most usually found in the Traian period (Biavaschi 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 1<sup>st</sup> and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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)<sup>3</sup> together with an iron key and a lead weight (Petru 1978, 318). Considering the datation of the square weight the grave was dated in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but regarding the whole grave unit – with the presence of a key – the datation 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.

<sup>2</sup> The collections in Museo Nazionale di Aquileia, Museo Civico Trieste and ample private collections, as the collection Toppo in the Museum of Udine, the collection Zandonati in the museum of Trieste. There are more than three hundred artefacts, in addition to some pieces of raw amber and semi-products.

<sup>3</sup> The necklace is kept in the National Museum of Ljubljana, inv. Number NM R 11633

<sup>4</sup> Mrs Calvi cites the Catul's famous verse *domi mansit, lanam fecit. However, the myth of the Psyche, who has to travel through the dark tunnels of the underground to regain Eros's love, should not be forgotten. In the underground the spinners call her to join them in order to spin the destinies of the alive. The motive was perfectly explained by the psychiatrist Jonson (She and He, 1974, 1976)*



Photo No.3  
Emona, the necklace from grave NM 2572. Foto S. Habič.

The amber spindles were pierced by a bronze stick and strung with beads of the same or different size and shape; they were sometimes called 'sceptra'. 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.<sup>4</sup>

The spindle from the grave NM 303 dates into the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 unguentaria 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 1<sup>st</sup> century and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Bertoncelj-Kučar 1979). Only one amber object ap-

pears in the grave from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century – i.e. the necklace with nineteen amber beads. It was found in a rich grave, a sarcophagus from Karlovčka St.1 -Villa Samsa (Petru 1972, 122). It belonged to the deceased possessing a rich necklace of Galien's gold coins, too. The belonging *ampullae* and ear-rings are characteristic for the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. (Petru 1972, tab. CXV, 9).

In Poetovio 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 Gojkovič 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 1<sup>st</sup> century and in the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Istenič 1999, 79, pict. 66; tab. 30; 9-13).

In the lead sarcophagus of a girl, grave 785, was found



Photo No.4 Poetovio, amber ring with the representation of Amor with wings. Foto Mojca Vomer Gojkovič.

a necklace with seven pendants in the anthropomorphic, phallic and zoomorphic shapes together with the Gallien's coin (Istenič 1999, 80, pict.67; tab. 177; 4-10).

Besides undecorated and carinated amber rings are in Petovio 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 (Vomer Gojkovič 1996, tab. 1-2). There also appear amber cosmetic instruments (Vomer Gojkovič 1996, tab.1;13, 14, tab.3; 11), *unguentaria* of different shapes (Vomer Gojkovič 1996, tab.2;9) and boxes (Vomer Gojkovič 1966, pict.12, pict. 21, tab.1; 8, tab. 3; 11). *Nature morte* 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 1<sup>st</sup> and in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the graves from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century are very rare. The finds are analogous to many Aquileia artefacts (Istenič 1999, 80).

The finds of raw amber and semi-products identified in Poetovio are also worth mentioning (Vomer Gojkovič 1996).

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

This is a short survey of the Roman period amber finds. In well investigated and published Emona necropolises is amber modestly attested. On one hand there is a complete absence of amber artefacts in Celea, while on the other hand there are rich amber finds in many Poetovio 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-1<sup>st</sup> 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 laid in the grave later at the burial of the ashes as grave goods. Can the absence of amber jewellery in Celea and rather modest finds of amber in Emona be compared with the Poetovio 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 Poetovio finds to express the wealth of its citizens? Could be explained as well the amount of amber artefacts in Poetovio by there workshops and the activity of (in Aquileia?) skilled masters?

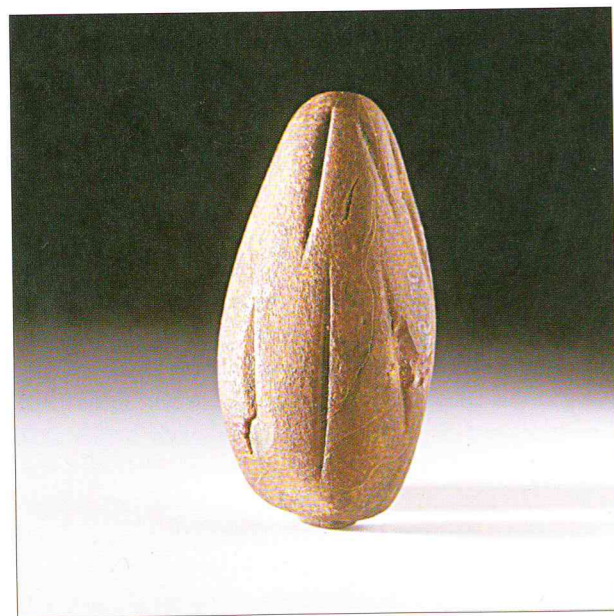


Photo No.5 Poetovio, amber object in a form of date fruit. Foto Mojca Vomer Gojkovič.



Photo No.6 The amber beads from Spodnji Lanovž. Foto Documentation from Regional Museum Celje.

### Late Roman and migration period

In the Late Roman Period, precisely in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, amber grave goods are not known. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and in the 6<sup>th</sup> 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 (Knific 1998), and a necklace with a set of glass and two amber beads (Petru S. 1973, p. 127, T. 106, 3-6).

In the cemetery of Dravljje, in the north-western part of Ljubljana, fifty burials were researched. Regarding their grave goods, are besides the native elements also strong East Gothic and Allemagnian influences (Slabe 1978). 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 Rifnik near Šentjur, to the south of Roman town of Celeia (Bolta 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. Marinka Vebar

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THE AMBER KNIEPĶENS  
IN LATVIAN  
ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL*Baiba Vaska*

RIGA (LATVIA)

Before speaking about the *kniepķens*<sup>1</sup> itself, I should give a brief account of the situation regarding Latvian folk costume, of which the *kniepķens* forms a part. In essence, this is a peasants' 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 *kniepķeni* derive from, the folk costume was worn even up to the 1920s and 30s.

The *kniepķens* represents a 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 *halsknäp* [Slava M. 1966, p. 102]. However, a more likely explanation seems a derivation from the German word to button: *knöpfen*.

The present paper discusses 36 *kniepķeni* from the amber collection of the Latvian History Museum, as well as those illustrated in Volume 1 of 'Latvju raksti' [Latvju raksti, 1924, Figs. LIV 531a, LIV 531b, LIV 531, LIV 592].

My interest in 19th century *kniepķeni* 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 *kniepķens* are found in Latvian ethnographic material: examples made from metal

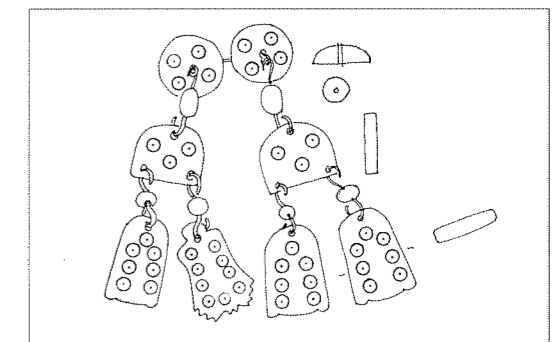


Fig. 1. *Kniepķens* with two pendants from the collections of the Latvian History Museum [CVVM 25944].

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