

Presented project considers the issue of amber in eliciting and upholding the contacts between various cultures and regions of Europe, sometimes very distant. Special attention is paid here to a type of fossil resin geologically connected with European Lowlands, that is succinite. It was known to and used by societies of this area already in the Stone Age, however its importance was merely a local one. Only later succinite gained the status of praised and desirable object of a long-distance trade. Origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to the turn of Neolithic and Bronze Age (second half of IIIrd millennium BC), when as a result of many factors it became increasingly popular among the inhabitants of southern part of our continent. Until now it was believed that in this initial stage the most important recipient of amber-made products was Greece at the time of Mycenaean Culture (IInd millennium BC). This is usually explained by cultural and social processes which led to achieving the status of hegemon by aforementioned archaeological unit, capable of organizing extensive network of exchange, covering also goods from the far north. Moreover, specialized chemical studies proved that the majority of finds from amber are made out of succinite. This in turn confirmed presumption of their northern provenience, strengthening theses about the existence of so-called "amber route", running from the Baltic coast to Greece.

In the description of this view there was little effort made to characterize regions located along this route. Although the course of it was delineated differently, in every concept suggested by individual authors terrains surrounding the Adriatic Sea were always regarded as an important link. Despite of it, their function was considered solely as intermediary, not the consumerist one, as in the case of Mycenaean Culture. It was argued that contemporary societies inhabiting Apennine Peninsula and Western Balkans did not possess the level of civilizational development needed for the appearance of elites generating request for exotic materials, such as amber or exerting the influence necessary to organize exchange trails. Presented project aims at reconsideration of aforementioned conception and testing the thesis assuming greater contribution of the circum-Adriatic cultures in influencing the circulation of amber during the Bronze Age (decline of IIIrd millennium BC – beginning of IInd millennium BC). Secondly, the project is intended to verify traditionally described symbolism of amber as an exclusive good of elites, having high value and thus reserved to certain ways of use and deposition. Finally, it is meant to answer the question, whether the amber is a good indicator of interregional contacts, what were main centers of its acquisition and how they conducted this complicated enterprise?

In order to enable taking up the issues listed above it is necessary to carry out series of analyses by using several methods. Key in this regard is to reconstruct spatio-temporal structure of amber inflow, taking into account its variety and probable region of origin, form and ornamentation in which it was shaped, and context in which it was found, that is other archaeological data accompanying it. Chemical analyzes involving infrared spectrometry allow to define precisely enough the variety of fossil resin to which studied sample belongs and knowledge of its geological deposits can point to a region of Europe from which it was derived. Project assumes also creation of the first, full and up-to-date typology of amber finds from countries of the circum-Adriatic zone (Italy, countries of former Yugoslavia and Albania). It will be based on morphological and stylistic traits of artefacts, as well as it is going to provide their chronology within the periodization schemes for this part of Europe. Moreover, it is planned to specify the date of deposition of selected amber finds on archaeological sites by submitting organic materials associated with them (not amber itself) to radiocarbon dating. Estimating the level of correspondence between the amber objects and other categories of archaeological data will enable to assess their cultural and social attribution. By relying on the current state of research on the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean it will be possible to pinpoint places potentially responsible for the processing and distribution of given types of finds. Association of individual types with regions of the circum-Adriatic zone inside which they appear with different intensity and assigning them to consequent phases of the Bronze Age will allow to create a model of amber circulation in space and time. Such model will be constructed with the help of statistical analyses and finally it will have the structure of a network, within which individual sites and links between them will be properly characterized.

Realization of presented project is motivated by the need to judge the validity of previously assumed theses regarding the role of amber in prehistory, ahead with promoted for the long time idea of so-called "amber route". It is inevitable to realise that it is just a convenient, yet too general metaphor which needs to be specified for each part of Europe. Hitherto gathered information does not allow to treat it as linear, uniform or centrally controlled. Furthermore, it does not enable to approach amber as an exclusive good of the highly developed societies, which used inhabitants of periphery zone to acquire it. It is more probable that amber was one of many objects of exchange which happened at the multiple levels of human interactions. It could have a long-distance dimension, just as regional one, high-pass, as well as low-pass volume. Such complex version requires conducting a detailed study, starting from the micro-scale and finishing at the macro. This problem also touches upon the role of area of modern Poland as a potential source of amber which was involved in the relations with southern part of Europe. Thus, it is important from the perspective of Polish science to properly describe the importance in prehistory of material inseparably associated with our country.