

The Bronze Age in Europe owes its name to particular raw material – bronze. It is an alloy of two metals, copper and tin, whose rare mixed deposits were not easily available to people settling Europe in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC. To a large extent, bronze was made from metals originating from very distant deposits. The limited availability of bronze, coupled with the distinctive and, for a long time, not very widespread technology of production and processing, were decisive factors behind the popularity of the new material. Bronze became a medium conveying the most important social messages, especially those which denoted prestige and power. In most regions of Bronze Age Europe, natural deposits of copper and tin were nowhere to be found. Even the smallest amount of both metals had to be imported. And yet, bronze came into widespread use throughout Europe, while the capacity of individuals or groups to monopolize exchange/trade or production of the metal were among the fundamental elements which brought forth highly stratified communities, with the so-called elites at the top of the hierarchy.

Consequently, the Bronze Age was a period of increased mobility, contact and exchange (in which innovation and knowledge changed hands as well). Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to approach all those phenomena as being exclusively associated with bronze. Metal objects, in the shape of the so-called imports, could travel over substantial cultural and geographical distances. However, given that point of view, the material which reflects the dynamism of the era even better is amber.

Amber is found in nature in a countless number of varieties. Still, those which proved the most significant in European prehistory are in fact few. Among those, one should mention Sicilian simetite, Romanian rumenite and succinite – amber from the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic amber went much farther than the coastal areas in Europe. It is evidenced in very large amounts in aristocratic burials of Mycenaean Greece (Europe's first palace-based civilisation which used writing) and in the Middle East, where in the 14th century BC succinite ornaments were included among the funerary goods of pharaoh Tutankhamun.

Previous studies of amber in European Bronze Age highlighted the long-range exchange of the material. Amber has been the key argument supporting the hypothesis according to which close cultural relations existed between Mycenaean Greece and Central Europe. The core concept which warranted such notions about the distribution of amber is the “amber road” – an idealised route presented in the form of lines connecting the coasts of the Baltic and the Aegean Sea. In turn, this project focuses on the lands situated between the aforesaid seas, i.e. on the territory of the Carpathian Basin. This part of Europe has been traditionally envisaged as a corridor linking the civilised world of Mycenaean Greece with the northern parts of the continent. However, the tremendous diversity of material culture, settlement forms and funerary rituals permits one to assume an internal cultural dynamism which is very likely to be reflected in the multiplicity of strategies of using and depositing amber within the area of research. It is unlikely that the material was treated by the communities of the Carpathian Basin solely as “transit merchandise” travelling to the Aegean. To a large extent (chiefly?) it reached the Carpathian Basin as a result of local demand, at the same time provoking interest in the Carpathian varieties of amber.

The project involves utilisation of methods which will allow researchers to determine the age of deposition of selected amber artefacts and describe their archaeological context. Statistical tools will be employed to analyse the correlations between amber objects and other artefacts, as well as the age and gender of deceased whose burials were equipped with amber. The aforementioned huge diversity and quantity of amber varieties found in Europe is often an obstacle in drawing conclusions about the mechanisms of exchange/trade which were in evidence in prehistory. The project presupposes the utilisation of infrared spectrometry, by means of which main varieties of amber may be distinguished.

The range of planned methods, along with the suggested theoretical model of network analysis will make it possible to demonstrate the underestimated perspective in studies of amber. In this approach, the research departs from thinking in the categories of exchange „routes”, especially covering extensive distances. The primary focus is on interregional interactions and diversification of local cultural phenomena and behaviours associated with amber in the Carpathian Basin.