Early medieval waterscapes
Risks and opportunities for (im)material cultural exchange

Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung 8

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Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung
Band 8

herausgegeben vom
Braunschweigischen Landesmuseum

in Verbindung mit dem
Internationalen Sachsensymposion

durch
Babette Ludowici

Early medieval waterscapes
Risks and opportunities for (im)material cultural exchange

herausgegeben von
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Alle Beiträge wurden einem Verfahren zur Qualitätssicherung unterzogen

Umschlaggestaltung: Karl-Heinz Perschall

Satz und Layout: oeding print GmbH, Braunschweig

Redaktion: Rica Annaert, Tim Bellens, Pieterjan Deckers, Frans Theuws,
Dries Tys, Robert Van Dierendonck, Luc Van Impe, Johan Veeckman,
Laurent Verslype

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der
Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten
sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

Verlag Uwe Krebs, 38176 Wendeburg, 2019

Abbildungsnachweise liegen in der Verantwortung der Autoren

Druck: oeding print GmbH, Braunschweig

ISBN: 978-3-932030-79-6

Inhalt

Amber as passage money on the journey to the afterlife: the role of Jutland amber in the Late Roman and Early Migrations periods (ca. 160-450 AD)[1]

Marzena J. Przybyła and Ewa Rydzewska

Introduction

The value of amber has long been discussed in the context of long-distance contact and trade at various stages in prehistory. This also applies to the Roman and Migrations periods, for which the role of trade in amber gathered in Sambia or in the Vistula Lagoon region has been particularly emphasised, in connection with both the network of contacts within Barbaricum and the long-distance connections with provinces of the Roman Empire (i.a. Cofta-Broniewska 1984; Lund Hansen 1991; Wielowiejski 1991; Kolendo 1998, 131–190; Wielowiejski 1998; Curta 2007; Bliujienė 2011; Bitner-Wróblewska and Wróblewski 2015; Quast 2017, 59–65). In this paper, we would like to draw the reader's attention to yet another source of amber potentially important in that time, namely North Sea amber abundantly occurring on the western and northern shores of Jutland (Ploug 2001). The significance of this source has been particularly widely discussed in the context of the Neolithic and Bronze Age (i.a. Shennan 1982; Larsson 2001; Rowlands and Ling 2013). Possible exploitation of Jutland amber also during the Roman and Migrations periods was suggested as well, but there was no sufficient evidence available at that time to support this hypothesis (Lund Hansen 1991, 189). At present, it seems that several arguments can be shown in its support. The starting point for our discussion will be Late Roman Period[2] and Early Migration Period burials from southern Scandinavia in which amber played the role of obol, i.e. a medium of payment.

Spindle-shaped lumps of amber and the "obol of the dead" custom in southern Scandinavia in the Late Roman and Early Migrations periods

Firstly, we would like to discuss three Late Roman burials in which single spindle-shaped lumps of amber varying from 2 to 4 cm in length were found (Fig. 1A:15; 1B:10; 2:8). One of them belonged to a 25–30-year-old male buried in Simris cemetery, Skåne (grave 54). The discovery, among other objects, of elements of weaponry representing Jørgen Ilkjær group 7 allows the grave to be dated to phases C1b-C2 (Stjernquist 1955, 20–22; Ilkjær 1990, 291–294; Rau 2010, 110–111) (Fig. 1A:15). The second burial, discovered in the Kærup cemetery (grave A3663) Zealand, belonged to a female 30-40 years old and can be referred to phase C3a based on such elements as a plate brooch of Thomas type D (Kærup variant), a pin of Beckmann type 114–115, a brooch of the Haraldsted type, variant A acc. to Rau, an early form of a Bügelknopffibel, and a bone comb of Ethelberg group 3 (Mailund Christensen 2011, 59–61) (fig. 1B:10). The third grave is the inhumation burial of a female approximately 50 years old discovered in Pruszcz Gdański site 5 (grave 17) in Pomerelia (Tuszyńska 2000, pl. I:B17, III:17; Pietrzak et al. 2015, 24–26, 50–51, pl. 13–15) which can be placed within phase C2b based on such artefacts as a pair of Matthes B brooches, an A.VI.178 brooch with a bow of semi-circular section, and an A.162 brooch with a broad, knee-bent bow (Fig. 2:5–130).

An interesting feature shared by these burials is that the mentioned spindle-shaped amber objects were, in all three of them, placed in the mouths of the deceased (Fig. 2:1–3, 2:5). This allows these inventories to be associated with the custom, originating from the Mediterranean, of placing a small coin into the mouth of the dead. The coin was meant to be the payment to a ferryman for crossing the River Acheron/Styx dividing the world of the living from the world of the dead (Gorecki 1975; Alföldy-Găzdac and Găzdac 2013; Găzdac 2014). Therefore, the first two of the mentioned burials have been referred to in studies on the adaptation of the "Charon's obol" custom in southern Scandinavia in the Late Roman Period, and thus introduced into a broader discussion on the extent and ways in which the antique world influenced populations inhabiting this area. Due to the number of finds to date, these studies have been focused primarily on Zealand, where this custom has been recorded in 19 cases. In each case this was a substitute for a classical version of obol, having the form of gold plates, scrap gold, gold wire, gold finger rings of simple forms, fragments of glass vessels, lumps of raw amber, or, of most interest to us here, of spindle-shaped pieces of worked amber (Boye 2002a; Boye 2002b; Bemmann 2005; Drevs Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2011).

Spindle-shaped amber lumps similar to those discovered in Simris, Kærup, and Pruszcz Gdański are known from another 7 burials dated to the Late Roman or Early Migrations Period (Fig. 3). Five of them come from Jutland and two from the triangle between the Elbe and Weser Rivers. They have not been connected with the Charon's obol custom thus far because they originate either from accidentally discovered inhumation burials for which no detailed informa-

Figure 1. A – Simris, Skåne, gr. 54; B – Kærup, Sorø amt, gr. A3663 (A – after Stjernquist 1955; B – after Mailund Christensen 2011).

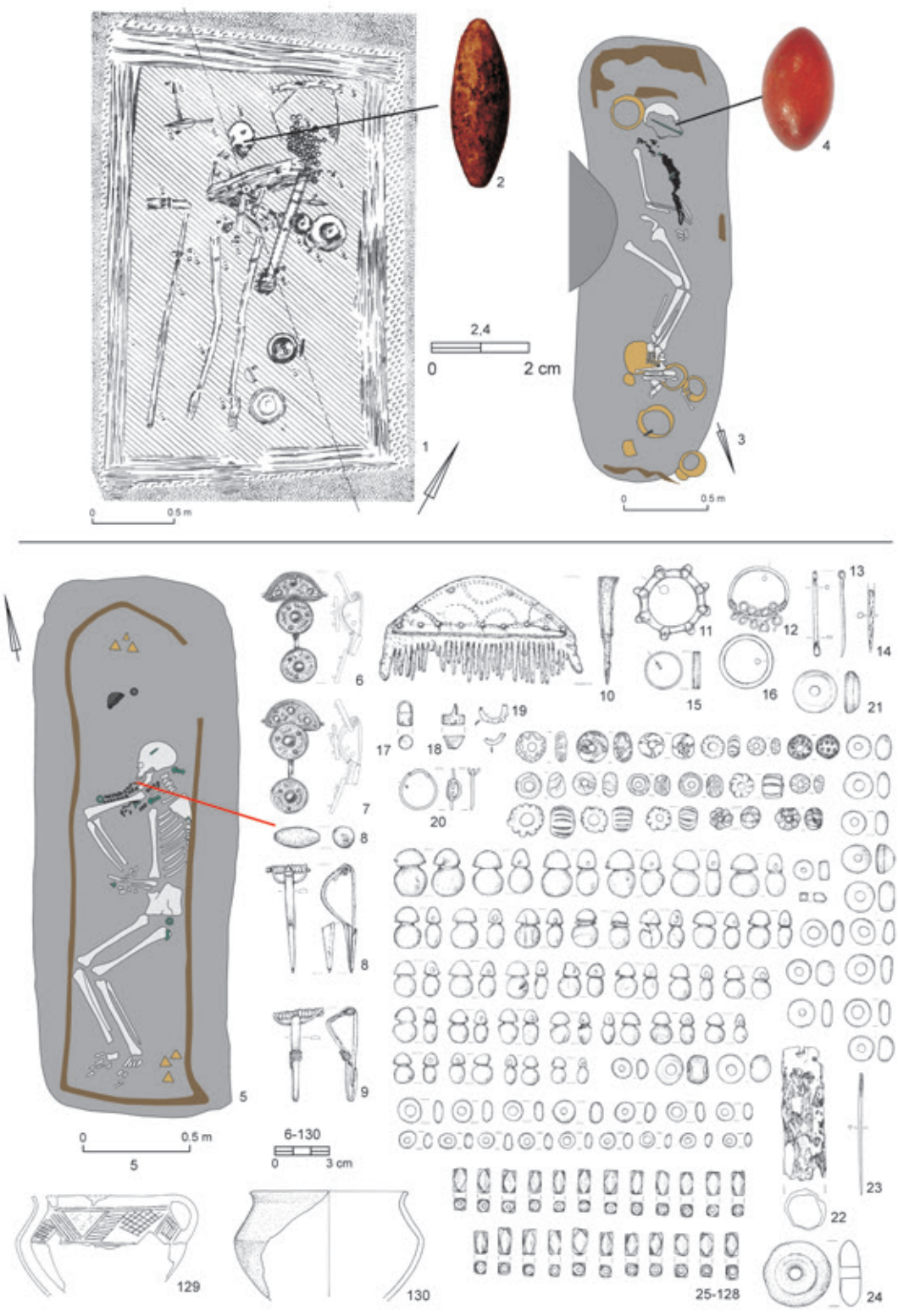


Figure 2. 1 – Plan of grave 54 from Simris, Skåne; 2 – spindle-shaped piece of amber from grave 54 at Simris, Skåne; 3 – plan of grave A3669 from Kærup, Sorø amt; 4 – spindle-shaped shaped piece of amber from grave A3669 z Kærup, Sorø amt; 5 – plan of grave 17 from Pruszcz Gdański, pow. loco, site 5; 5-130 – inventory of grave 17 at Pruszcz Gdański, pow. loco, site 5 (1–2 – after Stjernquist 1955; 3 – redrawn after Mailund Christensen 2011; 4 – after Mailund Christensen 2011; 5 – redrawn after Tuszyńska 2000; 6–130 – after Pietrzak et al. 2015).

Grave	Region	Type of grave	Context	Sex	Inventory	Chronol.	Lit./Mus. no.
Esbjerg, Storgade 72, Ribe amt	Jutland	inhumation	———	———	knive; two clay vessels	C1b-C2	NM C 30324-27
Nørkjær Mark, Ringkøbing amt	Jutland	inhumation	———	female	three fibulae A.195; fibula M.II with semicircular cross-section of the bow; plate fibula Thomas D, var. Grumløse; iron comb P.3	C1b	Mackeprang 1943, 99, cat. 89
Andrup, Ribe amt	Jutland	inhumation	———	female	silver fibula Ethelberg 5a with disc-shaped head; iron comb P.3; two amber beads; three clay vessels	C1b-C2a	NM C 21119-25
Enderupskov, Haderslev amt, gr. 242/1983	Jutland	inhumation	no information, skeleton not preserved	———	Nydam fibula; clay cup	C3b-early D1	Ethelberg 1986, 70
Næsbjerg, Ribe amt, gr. Ai	Jutland	inhumation	———	female	iron comb P.1; two clay vessels; beaded necklace; probably fibulae M.III.3	C2	Mackeprang 1943, 101, cat. 112
Kærup, Sorø amt, gr. A3663	Zealand	inhumation	in the mouth	female, 30-40 years old	i.a. Bügelknopffibel with top-shaped knobs; pin B.114-115; Haralsted fibula, var. A after Rau; plate fibula Thomas D, var. Kærup; antler comb Ethelberg group 3; bronze and silver rings; three beaded necklaces	C3a	Mailund Christensen 2011, 59-61
Westerwanna I, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 821	Lower Saxony	cremation	———	———	glass vessel E.209; fragm. of glass vessel; green glass inlay; bronze fitting	C1b-C2a	Zimmer-Linnfeld 1960, 36, pl. 105:821
Westerwanna II, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 184	Lower Saxony	cremation	———	male	axe; spindle whorl; bronze ring; spring of fibula; pair of scissors; resin; bronze needle; antler needle-case; clay vessel type Ethelberg IV/V	D1	Quillfeldt, Roggenbuck 1985, 34-35, pl. 41:184
Simris, Skåne, gr. 54	Scania	inhumation	in the mouth	male, 25-30 years old	i.a. weapon combination of group 7 after Ilkjær; balteus fastening; game pieces; three layer comb; two gold and one silver rings; belt buckle and strap-end; two pots	C1b-C2	Stjernquist 1955, 20-23
Pruszcz Gdański, pow. loco, site 5, gr. 17	Gdańsk Pomerania	inhumation	probably in the mouth	female, 50 years old	i.a. a pair of fibulae Matthes B; silver fibula A.178; bronze fibula A.162 with knee-like bent bow; three beaded necklaces; silver and bronze pendants; gold finger-ring	C2b	Tuszyńska 2000, 132-141, pl. III:17

Table 1. Grave inventories with spindle-shaped pieces of amber.

tion concerning the position of artefacts in grave is available, or from cremation burials. Four of the mentioned graves from Jutland can be dated within phases C1b and C2: Andrup, Næsbjerg, gr. Ai, Esbjerg, Storegade 72, all in Ribe Amt, and Nørkjær Mark, Ringkøbing amt. A slightly later chronology, within phases C3b and early D1, can be assigned to grave 242 from Enderupskov, Haderslev amt (see Table 1 and Fig. 4B).

As mentioned above, two spindle-shaped amber artefacts are also known from the triangle between the lower Elbe and the Weser. They come from two cremation burials discovered in the Westerwanna cemetery, Lkr. Cuxhaven, of which grave 821 can be dated within phases C1b–C2a and grave 184 probably to phase D1 (in the Scandinavian chronology). In the former case the chronology is indicated by a glass E209 vessel (Lund Hansen 2000, 329–330) (Fig. 3:26), and in the latter by a ceramic vessel having analogies in the south-Jutlandic vessels of Ethelberg groups IV/V (Ethelberg 1986, 58, 88–89) (Fig. 3:30).

Even though for the above seven grave inventories we have no detailed information on the position of spindle-shaped amber objects within the grave pits, their formal

Figure 3. 1–7 – Nørkjær Mark, Ringkøbing amt; 8–13 – Næsbjerg, Ribe amt, gr. Ai; 14–21 – Andrup, Ribe amt; 22–25 – Esbjerg Storegade 72, Ribe amt; 26–29 – Westerwanna, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 821; 30–41 – Westerwanna, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 184; 42–43 – Enderupskov, Haderslev amt, gr. 242/1983 (1–25 – Nationalmuseet København, phot. M.J. and M.S. Przybyła; 26–29 – after Zimmer-Linnfeld 1960; 30–41 – after Quillfeldt and Roggenbuck 1985; 42–43 – after Ethelberg 1986).

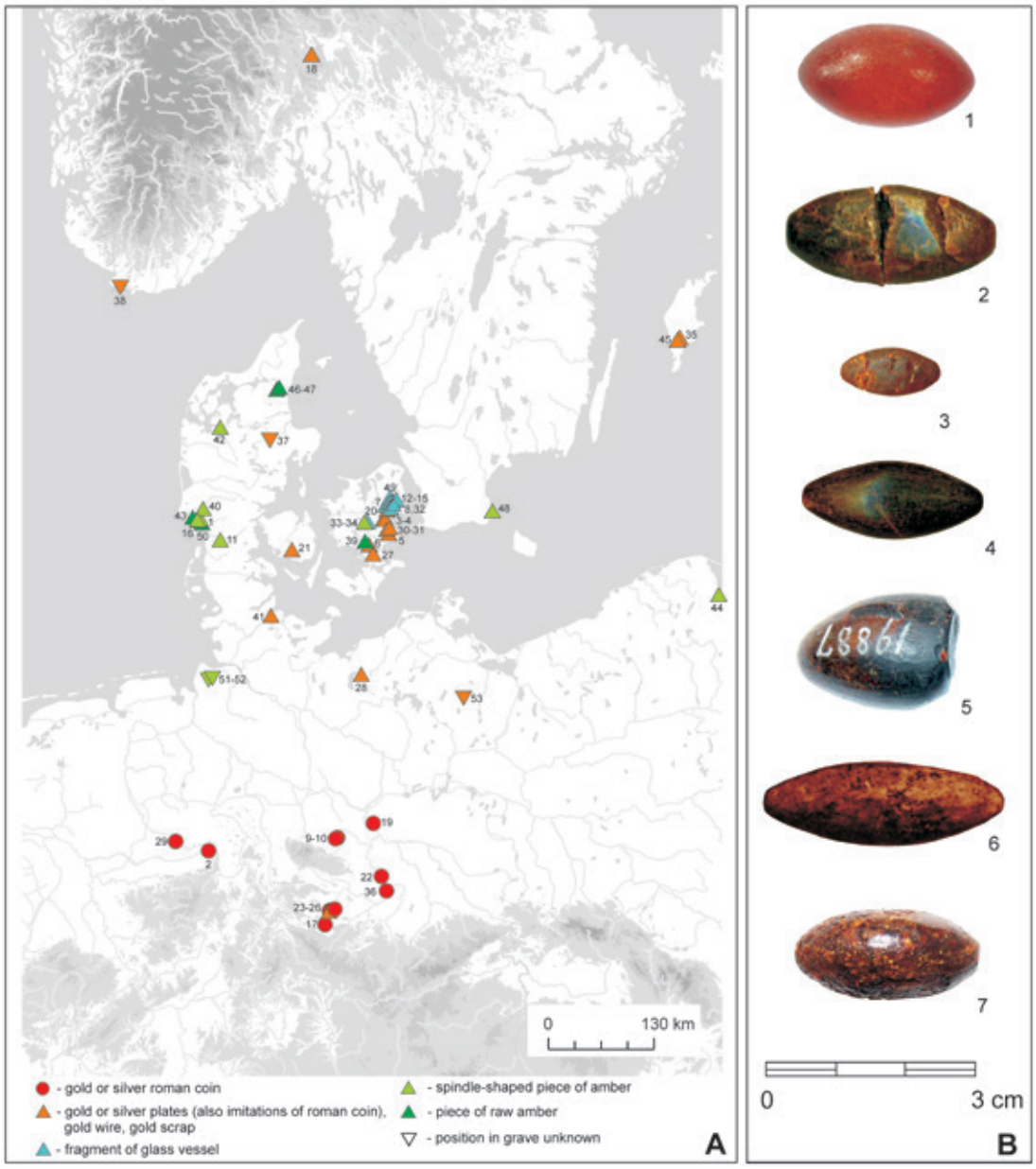


Figure 4. A – Late Roman and Early Migrations Period sites in Barbaricum where the custom of placing an object into the mouth of the dead was recorded (after Bemmann 2005; Drevs Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2011, supplemented with spindle-shaped obols): 1 – Andrup, Ribe amt (C1b–C2a); 2 – Bad Lippspringe, Lkr. Paderborn, gr. 2 (D2, Danubian chronology); 3 – Bakkegård Øst, Københavns Amt,gr. H (C2); 4 – Bakkegård Øst, Københavns Amt, gr. O (C2); 5 – Barup Sandgrav, Præstø amt, gr. 2 (C1b2–C2); 6 – Brandelev, Præstø amt (C2b–C3); 7 – Brøndsager, Københavns amt, gr. 2000 (C2); 8 – Ellekide, Københavns amt, gr. 34 (C2a); 9 – Emersleben, Lkr. Halberstadt, gr. 1 (C2); 10 – Emersleben, Lkr. Halberstadt, gr. 2 (C2); 11 – Enderupskov, Haderslev amt, gr. 242/1983 (C3b–D1); 12 – Engbjerg, Københavns amt, gr. 12 (C2a); 13 – Engbjerg, Københavns amt, gr. 18 (C2a); 14 – Engbjerg, Københavns amt, gr. 4 (C2b); 15 – Engbjerg, Københavns amt, gr. 6 (C1b–C2); 16 – Esbjerg, Storgade 72, Ribe amt (C1b–C2); 17 – Frienstedt, Stadt Erfurt, gr. 898 (C2); 18 – Gile, Oppland, barrow 17 (C1a); 19 – Gommern, Lkr. Jerichower Land (C2); 20 – Greve, Københavns amt (C2); 21 – Hågerup, Svendborg amt (C2); 22 – Halle-Südost, Stadtkreis Halle (C); 23 – Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 18 (C2); 24 – Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 20 (C2); 25 – Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 4 (C2); 26 – Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 8 (C2); 27 – Hastrup, Præstø amt, gr. 2 (C2–C3); 28 – Häven, Lkr. Ludwigslust-Parchim, gr. 2/1967 (C2); 29 – Herzebrock-Clarholz, Lkr. Gütersloh (Early Merovingian Period); 30 – Himlingøje, Præstø amt, gr. 1/1894 (C1b–C2a); 31 – Himlingøje, Præstø amt, gr. 2/1949 (C2a); 32 – Højbakkegård, Københavns amt, gr. 87 (C1b–C2a); 33 – Kærup, Sorø amt, gr. A3663 (C3a); 34 – Kærup, Sorø amt, gr. A3688 (C1b–C2a); 35 – Kälder, Gotland, gr. 2 (C3); 36 – Leuna, Lkr. Merseburg-Querfurt, gr. 2/1917 (C2); 37 – Løvetandsvej, Viborg amt, gr. A38 (C2b–C3a); 38 – Lunde, Vest-Agder (C); 39 – Maglebjerg, Præstø amt, gr. A20 (C2b); 40 – Næsbjerg, Ribe amt, gr. Ai (C2); 41 – Neudorf-Bornstein, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde, gr. 4 (C3); 42 – Nørkjær Mark, Ringkøbing Amt (C1b); 43 – Præstestien, Ribe amt, gr. QJJ (D1); 44 – Pruszcz Gdański, pow. Pruszcz Gdański, site 5, gr. 17 (C2b); 45 – Salands, Linde sn., Gotland (D2); 46 – Sejlflod, Ålborg amt, gr. IB (D1); 47 – Sejlflod, Ålborg amt, gr. SY (D1); 48 – Simris, Skåne, gr. 54 (C1b–C2); 49 – Smørum-Kong Svends Park, Københavns amt, gr. 1001 (C1b2–C2); 50 – Tjæreborg-Jens Kusksvej, Ribe Amt, gr. JØ (C2); 51 – Westerwanna I, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 821 (C1b–C2a); 52 – Westerwanna II, Lkr. Cuxhaven, gr. 184 (D1); 53 – Woldegk, Lkr. Mecklenburg-Strelitz (C1b–C2); B – Spindle-shaped obols from Scandinavia: 1 – Kærup, Sorø amt, gr. A3663; 2 – Næsbjerg, Ribe amt, gr. Ai; 3 – Esbjerg, Ribe amt, Storegade 72; 4 – Andrup, Ribe amt; 5 – Nørkjær Mark, Ringkøbing amt; 6 – Simris, Skåne, gr. 54; 7 – Pruszcz Gdański, Pow. Pruszcz Gdański, site 5, gr. 17 (1 – after Mailund Christensen 2011; 2–5 – Nationalmuseet København, phot. M. J. Przybyła; 6 – after Stjernquist 1955; 7 – Muzeum Archeologiczne Gdańsk, phot. E. Rydzewska).

Grave	Region	"obol"	Position in grave	Sex	Chronol.	Lit./Mus. no.
Maglebjerg, Præstø amt, gr. A20	Zealand	piece of raw amber	at the height of the head or chest; skeleton did not survive	female	C2b	Borby Hansen 2011, 123-194
Tjæreborg-Jens Kusksvej, Ribe Amt, gr. JØ	Jutland	piece of raw amber	at the height of the head	female	C2	ESM 1566x295-297, 299-302,306
Præsrestien, Ribe amt, gr. QJJ	Jutland	initially worked piece of amber	in west part of the grave; skeleton did not survive	———	D1	ESM 1421x1332-1333
Sejlflod, Ålborg amt, gr. IB	Jutland	piece of raw amber	at the height of the head	female	D1	Nielsen 2000a, 103-104; 2000b, 88
Sejlflod, Ålborg amt, gr. SY	Jutland	piece of raw amber	at the height of the head	female	D1	Nielsen 2000a,166; 2000b,140

Table 2. Graves with unworked or partly worked pieces of amber used as obols.

resemblance to the amber obols retrieved from the burials in Simris, Kærup, and Pruszcz Gdański allows these artefacts to be quite confidently interpreted as the manifestation of a similar custom. From the map showing the distribution of spindle-shaped amber objects found in sepulchral contexts one can easily see that the main focus of their occurrence is in Jutland, while single specimens are known from eastern Scania, central Zealand, from the triangle between the Elbe and the Weser, and from Pomerelia (Gdańsk Pomerania) (Fig. 4A). Therefore, the occurrence of spindle-shaped pieces of amber in single graves outside Jutland can possibly be seen as reflecting contacts with the latter territory. What is more, for Scania, Zealand, and the area between the lower Elbe and the Weser such connections can be demonstrated in other categories of artefacts as well. The task is the simplest in the case of the lower Elbe-Wesser triangle. The elements linking this territory with Jutland include tutulus brooches of the Ortbrook type typical of phases C2b–C3a (Przybyła 2018b, 298-300, fig. 10/26), similar variants of M.III brooches (Przybyła 2018a, 126-127, fig. 84:D, F, O), single finds in Jutland of vases (*Trichternapf*) typical of south-eastern shores of the North Sea, the occurrence in both areas of vessels of Ringtved type C having similar proportions and ornamentation (Mackeprang 1943, 29–30, 85; Tischler 1956, 57), and, possibly, single finds of iron combs in the territory between the lower Elbe and the Wesser (Ilkjær 1993, 276–279, fig. 112; Levada 1999). It is worth recalling here that in the above-mentioned grave 184 from Westerwanna the spindle-shaped amber object co-occurred with a vessel representing Ethelberg group IV/V, which probably also links with southern Jutland (cf. Fig. 3:30).

Single elements strongly associated with Jutland have been found in Scania, as well. One example is a cast, zoomorphic fibula from a female grave from Skillinge dated to phase C2a, which finds most analogies in similarly dated brooches from Jutland; the connection is also noticeable in the occurrence of plate brooches of Thomas type D, Dybäck variant, dated to phase C3 (Przybyła 2018b, 363–368, fig. 10/77).

The connection between Jutland and Zealand is a vast issue and has been extensively discussed in archaeological literature. It is quite easy to identify Zealand elements in Jutland, especially in its northern part (Lund Hansen 1995, 389, 392; Przybyła 2012, 44; Przybyła 2015, 351; Przybyła 2018a, 611–614, fig. 17/7-9, 17/13; Przybyła 2018b, 189–191, fig. 123). However, Jutland elements in Zealand are much less common. One such element, namely a brooch of the M.IX type, Store Darum variant, was found in a phase C2b burial of a girl (gr. A3622) in the Kærup necropolis, the same site where the burial with the spindle-shaped amber obol mentioned above was found (Mailund Christensen 2011, 55–56, fig. 8; Przybyła 2011, fig. 10). Importantly, apart from the amber obol the latter burial also yielded a typically Jutlandic ceramic vessel of Ringtved type J (Mailund Christensen 2011, 48–49, fig. 22). This context, despite the fact that the assemblage was found in Zealand, strengthens the hypothesis about the Jutland connection regarding amber spindle-shaped obols. Another example of relationships with Jutland is grave 24 from Engbjerg, København amt, dated to phases C1b2–C2a, where the only pair of brooches of Ethelberg type 5a known in Zealand was found – the brooches which are most common in the western part of southern Jutland (Ethelberg 2009a, 20).

One should also mention other finds of single amber lumps, unworked or only slightly processed, discovered in the mouth, by the jaw, or, where the skeleton has not survived, in the vicinity of the head. Such situations were recorded in four graves in Jutland, one of which dates to phase C2 and the other three to the Early Migrations Period, and in one grave in Zealand dated to phase C2b (Table 2).[3]

The mentioned worked or unworked lumps of amber can be compared with other manifestations of the Charon's obol custom known from Barbaricum. It should be made clear that we are talking here about cases which can directly be

Grave	Gold object	Weight (gram)	Sex	Wealth of inventory acc. to Bemmann 2001[] or Przybyla 2012 ()	Disturbed	Chronol.
Gommern, Lkr. Jerichower Land	aureus, Traianus (112/114)	7	male	[group 1]		C2
Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 20	aureus, Laelianus (268)	6.61	female	——		C2
Emersleben, Lkr. Halberstadt, gr. 1	aureus, Severus Alexander (233), with perforation	5.95	male	[group 2a]	●	C2
Emersleben, Lkr. Halberstadt, gr. 2	aureus, Postumus (259), with perforation	5.42	male	[group 2b]	●	C2
Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 4	aureus, Victorinus (268/270)	4.96	male	[group 2b]		C2
Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 8	aureus, Gallienus (260/268)	3.63	female	——		C2
Frienstedt, Stadt Erfurt, gr. 898	aureus, Philippus II (244/247), with perforation	——	male	[group 2]	●	C2
Leuna, Lkr. Merseburg-Querfurt, gr. 2/1917	aureus, Tetricus (270/274)	3.58	male	[group 2b]		C2
Hågerup, Svendborg amt	spiral of gold wire	6.79	male	——		C2
Brandelev, Præstø amt	golden ring B.2	6.23	——	(group 10A)	●	C2b-C3
Himlingøje, Præstø amt, gr. 1/1894	spiral ring of golden wire	6.25	male,20-35 years old	(group 6)		C1b-C2a
Häven, Lkr. Ludwigslust-Parchim, gr. 2/1967	spiral of gold wire	5.7	male	——		C2
Neudorf-Bornstein, Kr. Rendsburg-Eckernförde, gr. 4	spiral ring of golden wire	5.36	male	——		C3
Kälder, Gotland, gr. 2	imitation of gold coin or medallion of Constantinan dynasty	4.03	male, double burial	——		C3
Barup Sandgrav, Præstø amt, gr. 2	gold scrap	2.8	female	(group 10A)	●	C1b2-C2
Brøndsager, Københavns amt, gr. 2000	gold wire	1.08	boy, about 12 years old	(group 7)		C2
Haßleben, Lkr. Sömmerda, gr. 18	gold plate	0.86	infant	——		C2
Hastrup, Præstø amt, gr. 2	gold wire	0.84	male, 35-55 years old	(group 10A)	●	C2-C3
Greve, Københavns amt	gold plate	0.62	male, 20-35 years old	(group 9)		C2
Salands, Gotland	coin imitation	——	male	——		D2
Bakkegård Øst, Københavns Amt, gr. O	gold scrap	——	three persons	(group 9)		C2
Bakkegård Øst, Københavns Amt, gr. H	gold scrap	——	female	(group 10A)		C2
Lunde, Vest-Agder	gold plate	——	female	——		C
Løvetandsvej, Viborg amt, gr. A38	spiral of gold wire	——	——	(group 7)		C2b-C3a
Woldegk, Lkr. Mecklenburg-Strelitz	gold plate	——	male	——	●	C1b-C2
Himlingøje, Præstø amt, gr. 2/1949	gold scrap	——	female, 40-50 years old	(group 1)		C2a

Table 3. Weights of aureus coins and gold objects used as obols in Late Roman and Early Migrations Period graves in Central Germany and Scandinavia, compared with the categories of grave inventory wealth. The six-tier wealth scale for male graves from Central Germany (with group 1 comprising the richest burials) after Bemmann 2000; wealth scales for Zealand graves – cf. Fig. 5.

referred to the custom known from the antique culture, i.e. objects being placed into the mouth, and being regarded as a medium of payment. Two places where the custom in question seems to be concentrated are Central Germany on the one hand and southern Scandinavia and northern Germany on the other. The bulk of the finds can be placed within phases C1b–C2, although one can also show later ones, dating to phases C3, D1 and the Early Merovingian period, most of them in Scandinavia (Bemmann 2005; Drevs Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2011) (cf. Fig. 4A).

As it has already been raised in the literature with respect to obols known from barbarian burials, the closer to the limes the more similar they are to the classical model, even if in Central Germany in graves from phase C2 the custom gains a tint of a prestige behaviour, with the customary tiny coin replaced by a gold one (Bemmann 2005, 27–29). Apparently, people living there were quite aware of the function of coins as a medium of payment, whose prestige was derived not only from the value of gold bullion alone, but also from the association of their form and iconography with the economic system of the

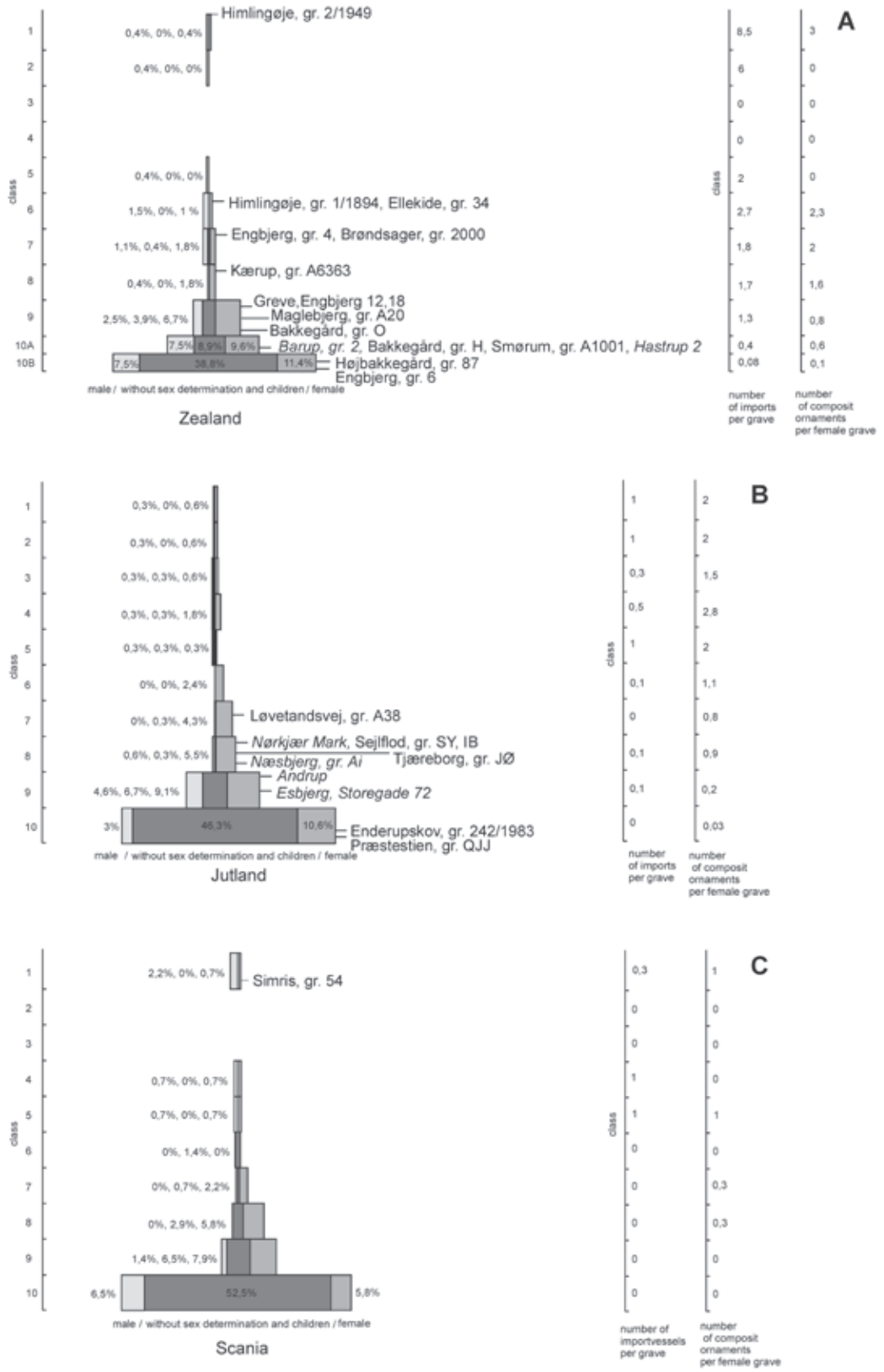


Figure 5. Charon's obol custom in Zealand (A), Jutland (B) and Scania (C): social context (scale of wealth differentiation of grave inventories developed based on Jørgensen's (1988) scarcity index – taken from Przybyła 2011 and 2012). Regional scales include all graves with amber, glass, and gold obols. Graves marked with italics are those with lowered value, discovered accidentally, with incomplete inventory.

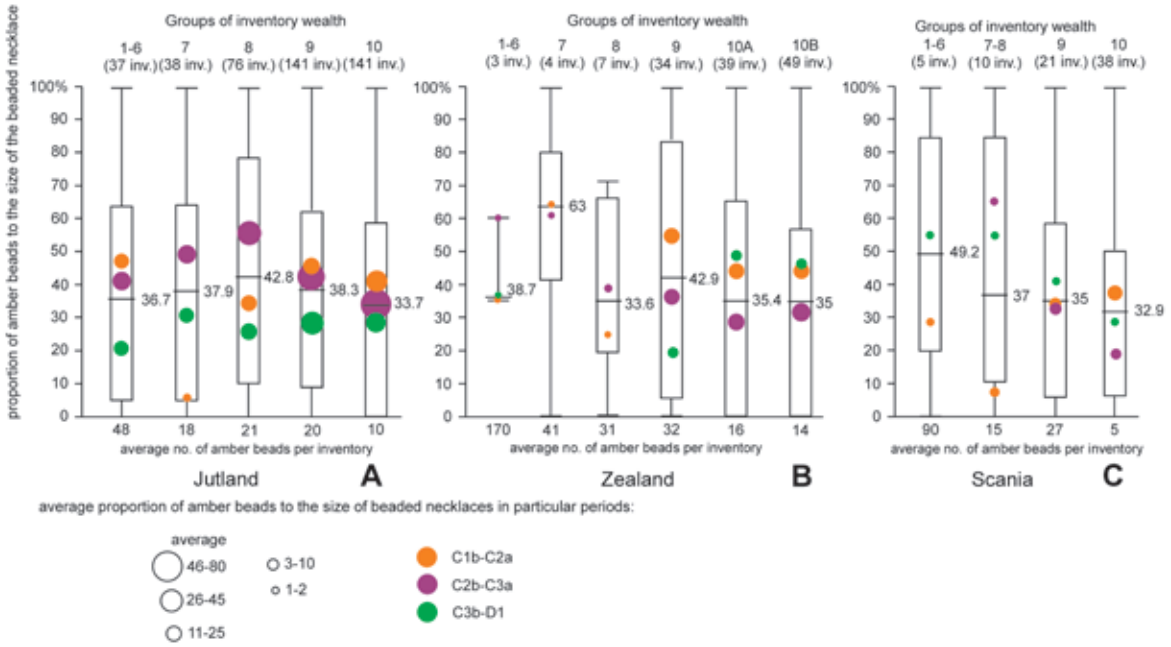


Figure 6. A–C: Percentages of amber beads in necklaces in inhumation graves representing particular wealth categories in Jutland, Zealand, and Scania in phases C1b–D1 (for the scales see Fig. 5). Numbers in colour indicate average values for phases C1b–C2a, C2b–C3a, and C3b–D1. Since the number of inventories representing particular wealth groups in particular chronological spans is very small, this information can be only regarded as tentative.

Roman Empire and the Imperial authority. This is not the same in Scandinavia and northern Germany, where in the Late Roman Period we have no monetary obols (Bemmann 2005, 23, fig. 16; Drevs Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2011). They are substituted by other objects possibly regarded as valuable in local communities, ones which may have functioned in trade as a traditional 'currency'. Gold, which appears here usually as scrap metal, fragments of wire or plates, seems to be a natural candidate for metallic currency. Weight values of gold 'obols' in Scandinavia roughly correspond with the weight ranges of gold aurei occurring in Central German graves in phase C2, although it should be noted that in both cases the values are considerably dispersed (Table 3). The obols imitating coins do not appear in Scandinavia before the close of the Late Roman Period, and continue in the Migrations Period. However, one can give here only two examples from Gotland (Lamm and Axboe 1989, 466, 467, pl. 28:51, 29:53; Bemmann 2005, 39, no. 25, 29).

Another type of artefact playing the role of obols in Scandinavia were fragments of Provincial Roman glass vessels. Examples are known from Zealand, where they were probably placed in graves on a *pars pro toto* principle (Boye 2002a; Boye 2002b; Drevs Dyhrfjeld-Johnsen 2011). The great importance of the inflow of provincial Roman imports to Scandinavia, glass vessels included, for the building of economic and social relationships has been often discussed in literature (Hedeager 1980; Lund Hansen 1987; Lund Hansen 1995, 371–384; Ethelberg et al. 2000, 145–169). Without going into the details of this discussion we can assume that provincial Roman imports were regarded there as exotic, and therefore probably prestige, goods. The third variant of obol, occurring primarily in Jutland, are lumps of amber[4]. Since in the previous two variants we were dealing with artefacts which had a real or symbolic association with objects having an accepted value in the system of trade, the same significance is very likely also in this case.

Comparing the inventories of graves from Central Germany and southern Scandinavia one can point to differences in social contexts of the Charon's obol custom. To illustrate this, we will use the scales of grave goods wealth available for particular regions. In Zealand, the custom in question was recorded in burials of nearly all wealth categories, and scrap gold was found not only in the richest graves but also in those least affluent (Table 3, Fig. 7A). As for Jutland, no obols have been found in the richest graves as yet, while they were identified in those relatively well-furnished and in poor inventories (Fig. 5B). The only known example of obol in Scania was found in a grave representing the highest wealth class (Fig. 5C). The picture is different in Central Germany, where among graves dated to phase C2 the obols, typically in the form of aureus coins, were found only in burials representing the highest category within the scale developed for male burials from this territory (Table 3). Thus, the Charon's obol custom seems to be confined mainly to the elites here, and its adaptation was probably motivated largely by reasons of prestige. The notably more egalitarian nature of the discussed custom in Scandinavia can be explained with the presence in this region of a certain cultural component, perhaps from the sphere of beliefs, which al-

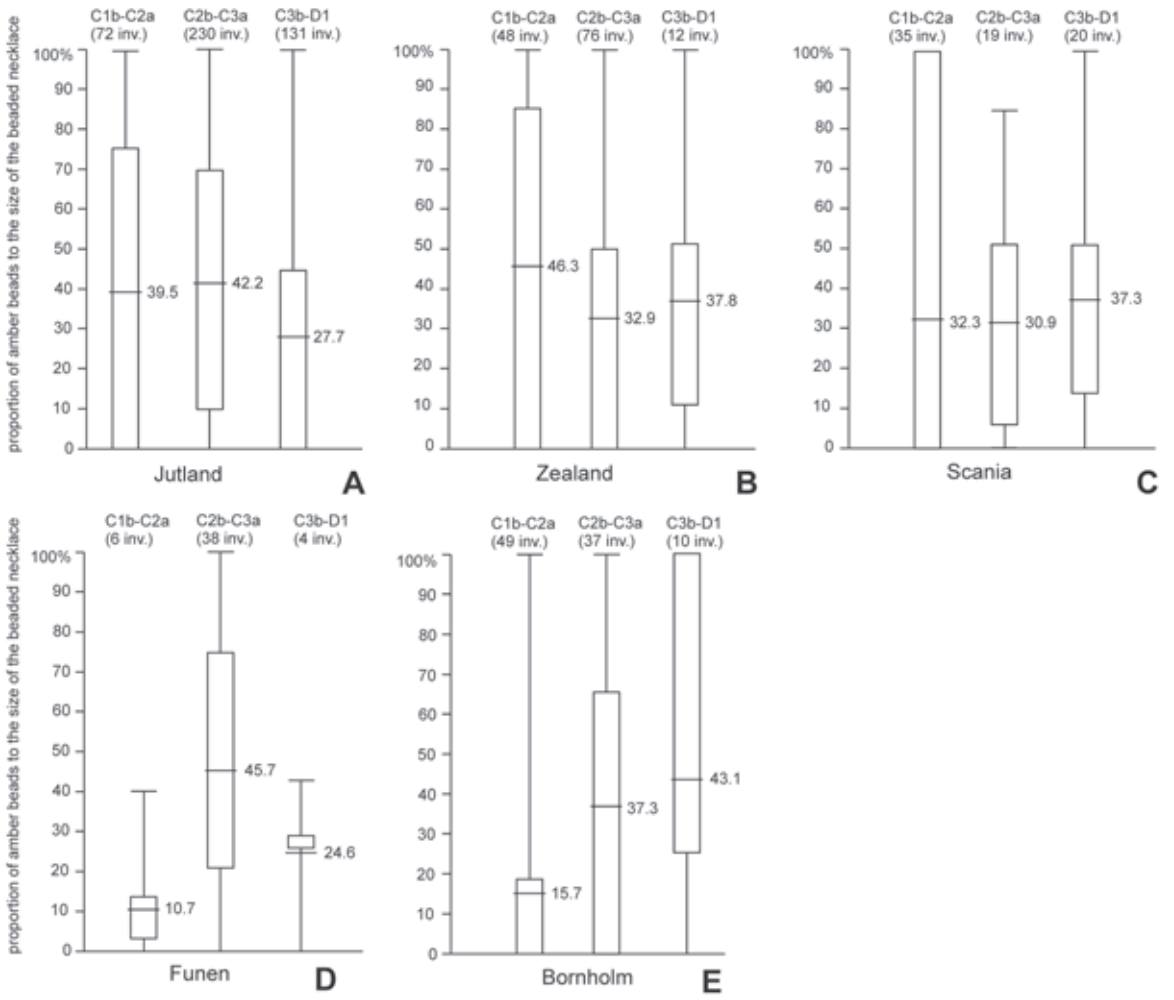


Figure 7. A–E – Percentages of amber beads in necklaces in inhumation graves in Jutland, Zealand, Scania, Funen, and Bornholm in phases C1b–C2a, C2b–C3a, and C3b–D1.

lowed for a socially broader incorporation of this foreign custom into local funerary rituals. Important factor may have been the role of water transport in south Scandinavian communities as a leading means of transportation and integral part of their lifestyle, which naturally affected the shape of the imagined afterlife. One can assume that the payment for crossing the river dividing the world of the living from the world of the dead, rooted in the classical world, could easily appeal to the minds of the people of the North.

Jutland amber as an alternative to amber from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea in the Late Roman Period

Turning back to the regional differences in artefact types placed in south Scandinavian graves as obols and the concentration of amber obols in Jutland it is hardly possible to avoid asking the question: why did this type of obol (i.e. object regarded as or symbolizing a medium of payment) appear precisely in Jutland? Can this be linked with some form of trade in locally harvested amber? In other words, was the North Sea amber a viable economic alternative to the amber from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea in the Late Roman Period? Unfortunately, currently available chemical methods cannot distinguish between these two amber sources because their genesis is very similar (Savkevich 1981; Beck 1982). Therefore, we have looked for the answer in indirect premises, which could potentially point to regional and social differences in the popularity of amber and thus bring us closer to the identification of places where the raw material was acquired. Our first step was to create a database of inventories of Late Roman and Early Migrations period inhumation graves containing beaded necklaces known from Zealand, Jutland, and Scania, the three regions in Scandinavia where amber obols have been found. The picture was later supplemented by-burials from Funen and Bornholm. This left us with a total of 787 assemblages.[5] Cremation graves were excluded from analysis because amber, being a resin, is most

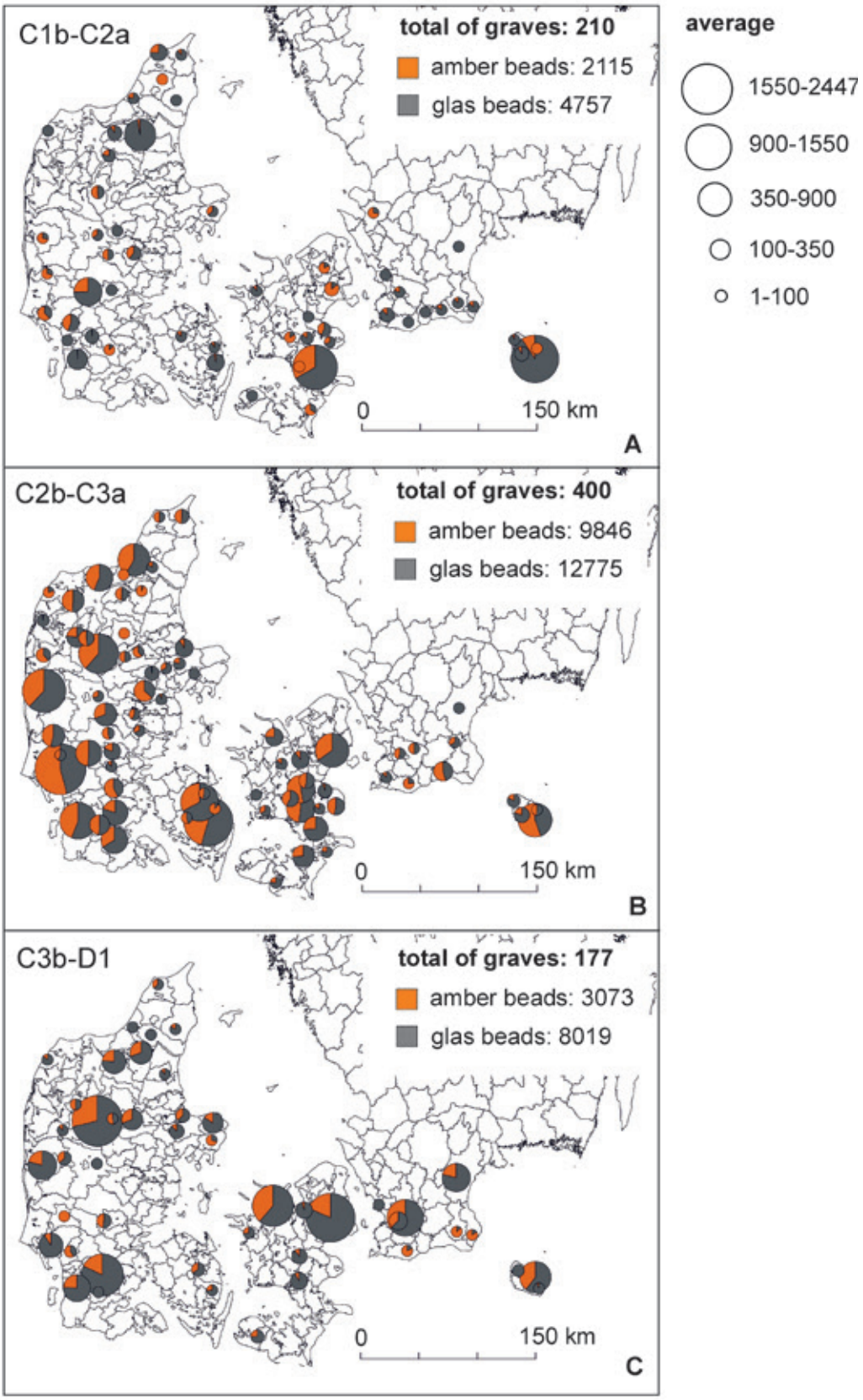


Figure 8. Percentages of amber beads in necklaces from phases C1b–C2a, C2b–C3a, and C3b–D1 (calculated within administrative regions of the herred level).

often completely burnt down in the fire of a funeral pyre and is usually not represented at all in such assemblages (Stjernquist 1993, 88). Thus, the database is not equally representative for all the regions. The highest numbers of assemblages come from Jutland and Zealand where inhumation was the prevalent burial rite. In Scania, inhumation burials with beaded necklaces make up slightly more than half of all inventories where beads were documented, and the same applies to Funen and Bornholm as well. In our database, we took into account the proportion of amber beads to glass ones in particular graves and the sizes of the necklaces. In the case of regions for which scales of grave inventory wealth are available, i.e. Jutland, Zealand, and Scania (Przybyła 2012; Przybyła 2015), the above information could then be compared with the wealth of entire inventories, chronologies of assemblages and their spatial distribution. The occurrence of amber beads in graves representing particular wealth categories was examined within broad chronological timeframes spanning phases C1b–D1 to ensure a statistically proper size of the sample. Particular grave categories were also analysed within narrower timespans, covering phases C1b–C2a, C2b–C3a, and C3b–D1 respectively. However, in many cases these narrow timespans did not provide enough data to make the sample statistically important, hence the results should be approached with proper caution.

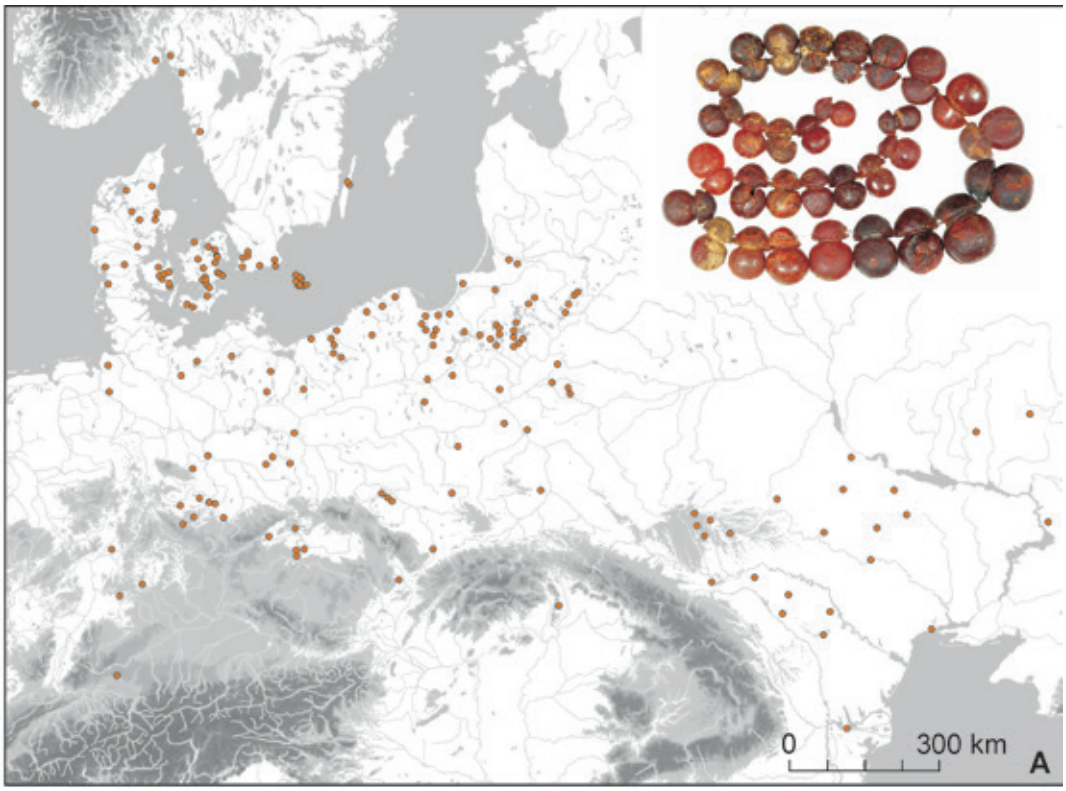
In general, in Jutland, Zealand, and Scania the number of amber beads in grave is higher for richly furnished inventories, which simply reflects the fact that such graves contained larger necklaces (Fig. 6A–C). But the analysis of a correlation between grave wealth value and the amber/glass beads ratio shows that there is no statistically important relationship between these two correlates. Nevertheless, by comparing the data for particular regions we can apparently identify certain, though not very clear, tendencies in this respect. If in Jutland the proportion between the number of amber beads and the size of the necklace remains quite similar in all wealth categories, then in Zealand and Scania one can notice slightly higher proportions of amber in necklaces from richer inventories; in Scania, this applies only to assemblages from phases C2b–C3a. In Zealand, the average number of amber beads per necklace is 12 times higher in wealth categories 1–6 than in the poorest assemblages, and in Scania 22 times higher. The same value for Jutland is only 5 times higher. This could suggest that amber as a raw material was relatively less expensive in Jutland, which in turn may point to the use of local raw material. However, it needs to be stressed that for Zealand and Scania the number of grave inventories belonging to wealth categories 1–6 is very small, and the analyses of wealth categories within narrower timespans often operated on small samples. Therefore, the above conclusion should be approached with due caution.

Some correlation can be noticed between the popularity of amber and the chronology of the analysed assemblages (Figure 7A–E). This tendency is most apparent in Jutland, where the number of amber beads in necklaces dated to phases C3b–D1 is lower than in previous periods. The drop in amber's popularity, or the rise in the popularity of glass beads, can also be seen in Zealand, where the tendency becomes noticeable already in phases C2b–C3a. An opposite trend can be observed in Scania, Funen, and Bornholm, although one should take into account that the datasets from these territories are very small.

The general tendencies described above can be verified based on detailed observations made for particular regions (Fig. 8). In this analysis as well, a general tendency appears towards a gradual drop in the share of amber in necklaces from Jutland and Zealand in later periods. However, a thorough examination of particular maps reveals certain differences from region to region in this respect. In the vicinity of Limfjord, which means in the area where amber could have possibly been gathered, glass beads occur more often than amber ones in necklaces from phases C1b–C2a (Fig. 8A). On the other hand, in the western part of southern and central Jutland, where amber also occurs quite abundantly on the North Sea shore, this raw material was hugely popular at this time. A similarly high share of amber beads in necklaces, reaching 65–70% and more, can also be seen in some parts of Zealand – near Copenhagen and in the sites situated along the Suså River. The picture is different in Funen, Bornholm, and Scania, where glass beads are clearly prevalent in necklaces. In the latter territory, the only exception is the area around Skälderviken Bay in western Scania, where amber prevails in necklaces.

During phases C2b–C3a the previous patterns change (Fig. 8B). What strikes one the most is the overall rise in the number of beads, which is a direct consequence of a higher number of sites dated to that period. The proportion of beads made of amber generally also rises in the regions where glass beads were previously predominant: Funen, Scania, and Bornholm (in some herreds the values are considerably higher than 50%). In Limsfjord region as well, amber beads become a frequent component of necklaces. The very high proportion of amber in necklaces continues in western Jutland, in particular in grave inventories from around Esbjerg. In the eastern part of central Jutland, where a number of new cemeteries were established during phases C2b–C3a, amber is relatively common as well. In Zealand, the percentage of amber beads remains very high in the sites on the Suså River, and is also very high in southern Zealand, on Stevns Peninsula, and near Copenhagen. In some other parts of Zealand (especially in the north and west), however, glass beads predominate.

Phases C3b–D1 saw a pronounced drop in the number of amber beads in necklaces at the expense of glass ones in southern Scandinavia (Fig. 8C). In this context, it is worth noting the few examples of different tendencies, noticeable in single herreds in southern Jutland, Djursland Peninsula, and southern Scania.



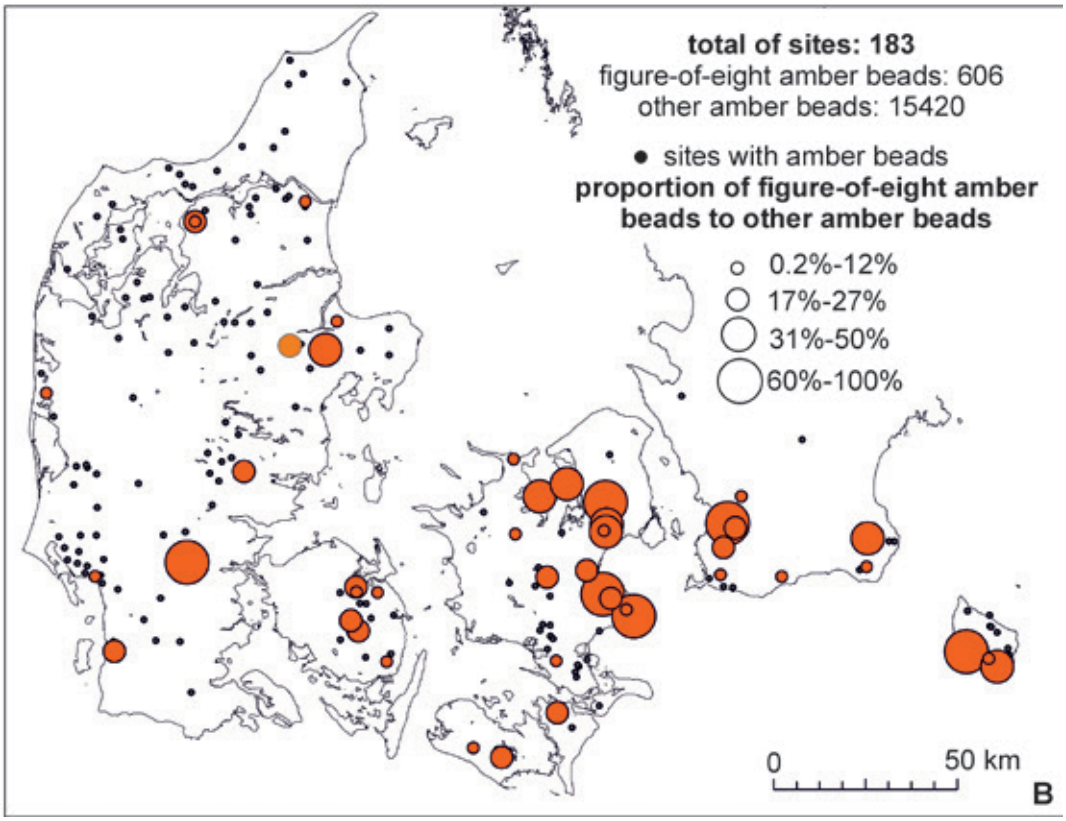


Figure 9. A – Amber figure-of-eight beads in Barbaricum; B – Proportion of amber figure-of-eight beads to other amber beads in cemeteries from southern Scandinavia (based on: Tempelmann-Mączyńska 1985; Straume 1987; Straume 1988; Lillehammer 1996; Stjernquist 1993; Lund Hansen 1995; Ethelberg et al. 2000; Nielsen 2006; Henriksen 2009; Boye 2009; Heidemann Lutz 2010; Larsson 2013; Björk 2015; Brink and Larsson 2017).

Recapitulating the above remarks one should emphasise the great importance of amber as a necklace component in southern Scandinavia in the Late Roman Period, which is in certain contrast to the picture observed in the Early Roman Period. The significant rise in the popularity of amber as a raw material for ornaments in the region must have naturally increased the demand for it there. The large share of amber in necklaces from the western part of southern and central Jutland in phases C1b–C2a may point to local acquisition and processing of this raw material. The same is suggested by the complete lack of correlation between the presence of amber and the richness of grave furniture in Jutland. The position of amber could have been different in Zealand or Scania where it was probably for the most part a foreign raw material. This can explain the concentration of amber artefacts in only some regions, as well as the poorly marked but nevertheless possibly important tendency towards a higher share of amber in graves belonging to higher wealth categories. The high proportion of amber in necklaces from some parts of Zealand and Scania could stem from the contact maintained by these regions either with Jutland (as additionally suggested by the burials with amber obols) or with people inhabiting the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea. The latter option is suggested by the analysis of the distribution of amber beads in the shape of figure of eight – a form most widespread in the territories to the south of the Baltic (Fig. 9A). Generally, one can see that in southern Scandinavia necklaces with figures-of-eight beads become less and less common the further west we go from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea (Fig.9B). In Jutland, we can mention only 10 such assemblages dated within phases C2–C3, containing between 1 and 6 figure-of-eight beads on average, and the highest number of such beads in a single grave was 14 (Hjemsted, Haderslev amt, gr. 316 – Ethelberg 1986, 171–175). From the same period in Funen we have 19 grave inventories, with a maximum of 19 beads of the type in question. In Zealand, there are 27 graves with figure-of-eight beads in phases C1b–C3. The largest collection included 49 beads (Skovgårde, Præstø amt, gr. 400 – Ethelberg et al. 2000, 301–318), and burials containing 10-30 pieces of this type are not uncommon. In the case of Bornholm, we have 32 such inventories datable to phases C1b–C3, and the highest number of beads in a grave is 61 (Heslegård, Bornholms amt, gr. 12 – Nielsen 2006; Heidemann Lutz 2010, 378; Knöfler 2011). From Scania, however, there are only 8 graves with the discussed artefacts, and the largest collection numbers 27 pieces (Kabbarp – Tillväxten Statens Historiska Museum… 1901, 99–101, Abb. 29–36). If we consider figure-of-eight beads and their distribution as a potential marker for the spread of south Baltic amber we have to conclude that this raw material reached Jutland only to a very limited extent. In light of the observed great popularity of amber in female costume in Jutland this would support the hypothesis positing local acquisition of amber there on an economically significant scale. More light on this issue could probably be shed by a detailed analysis of the types of amber beads and their proportions in necklaces in particular regions of southern Scandinavia. It is also worth noting that in the Late Roman Period amber in Jutland was not only a common and abundantly represented necklace component in female

Figure 10. Balteus clasp from grave 151 in Nørre Hedegård, Ålborg amt (Nordjyllands Historiske Museum, Photo: M. J. Przybyła).

graves but occurred also in male burials. Good examples are amber gaming pieces from grave C in Novrup VI, Ribe amt (Sydvestjyske Museer, ESM 2249) dated to phase C2, and a splendid balteus clasp (5.8 cm in diameter) from a similarly dated grave 151 in Nørre Hedegård, Ålborg amt (Nordjyllands Historiske Museum, ÅHM 3844x2465) (Fig.10). Both inventories – like discussed above grave 54 from Simris – included among other elements the weaponry representing Jørgen Ilkjær group 7 (1990).

Conclusions

The basic conclusions emerging from the analyses presented above can be described as follows. The range of the Charon's obol custom in Northern Europe in the Late Roman Period can apparently be extended to include Jutland as well. The broader analysis of the social context of obols in south Scandinavian graves points to an egalitarian nature of the custom. This suggests that the adaptation of the custom could have been facilitated by pre-existent beliefs. Also more clearly now one can point to regional differences in southern Scandinavia with respect to the obol type. The concentration of amber obols in Jutland, especially in the Esbjerg region, may speak for a considerable role of this raw material in local economies. The latter interpretation is based on the assumption that objects used as obols had a real or symbolic value as a medium of payment. This apparently great importance of amber in the region can be connected with its local acquisition and processing performed on an economically significant scale. The above observations can be corroborated by the tendencies observed with respect to size and composition of necklaces in Jutland, which possibly point to a temporary importance of yet another amber-bearing area, namely the Limfjord region.

Since spindle-shaped amber obols clearly concentrate in Jutland, isolated finds of such artefacts in single graves in regions such as Scania, Zealand, the triangle between the Elbe and Weser, and Gdańsk Pomerania can be interpreted as one reflection of contact with western Jutland, contact which could have been to some extent inspired by trade in amber. In the case of Zealand and the area between the Elbe and Weser Rivers we have grave inventories which contain, apart from amber obols, other artefacts linking with Jutland, which additionally strengthens the association between spindle-shaped amber obols and Jutland.

In the context of the discussion on the importance of Jutland amber in south Scandinavian trade it is worth returning to a hypothesis presented by Ulla Lund Hansen, about the role of the western trade route for importing amber to Roman provinces on the Rhine in the 3rd–4th century AD (Lund Hansen 1991). Ornaments made of amber became quite popular there in that time, which contrasts with the situation known from the earlier period. The phenomenon relates to the fact that amber-processing workshops near Aquileia – a north Italian Roman city linked with the trade in Baltic Sea amber via the provinces on the middle Danube – which were very active in the 1st and 2nd centuries, ceased to function. It is also connected with the development of amber workshops near the present-day city of Cologne in the second half of the 2nd and the 3rd century AD (Lund Hansen 1991, with older references). In this approach, the mentioned "western route" was associated mainly with the trade in amber from the southern shores of Baltic Sea carried out via southern Scandinavia, Zealand in particular. Assuming the above is correct and taking into account the observations presented in this paper one can argue that a significant role in this trade was played by the raw material acquired on the western and possibly also northern shores of Jutland.

(Translated by Piotr Godlewski)

1 This paper was possible thanks to the support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. We would like to express our gratitude to Morten Axboe, Tony Björk, Per Ethelberg, Bertil Helgesson and Kirill Myzgin for discussion and complementing our knowledge of the topic.

2 Here understood as phase C. Systems of classification of brooches, pins, bone combs, and weapons used in this paper come from the following publications: Almgren 1923; Matthes 1931; Mackeprang 1943; Thomas 1967; Ilkjær 1990; Rau 2010; Beckmann 1966; Ethelberg 2009b; Przybyła 2018b. The attribution of grave inventories discussed in the paper to particular phases follows the conclusions drawn from the analysis of chronology of brooches of the M.II and M.III types (Przybyła 2018a).

3 Pieces of unworked amber, although with no information about their position in graves, are also known from a few other graves in Jutland, namely from grave 4 in Brøns, Tønder amt (NM C 26056–62) dated to phases C1b–C2, from a grave from Damsgård, Thisted amt (THY 2958x15–17) dated to phase D1, and from graves QBE (ESM 1421x1421x1101–1128,1130) dated to phases C1b–C3, QBØ (ESM 1421x852,972,991–993,995–1007) dated to phase C2–C3, and QHN dated to phases C2b–C3a, all three from Præstestien, Ribe amt. All of them were female burials. In addition, a lump of unworked amber was found in male burial TR in Sejlflod, Ålborg amt, dated to phase D2 (Nielsen 2000a, 177–179; Nielsen 2000b, 149–150), and in a double burial of male and female at Nørre Hedegård, Ålborg amt, gr. A19/20 (Nielsen 2002).

4 One has to mention that obol function was also suggested in the case of the fragment of a glass bead found in the west part of the grave at Vester Galsted, Haderslev amt (Ethelberg 2015, 166–167). However, the skeleton was not preserved and for the time being there is no other example of such object occurring in obol function that could strengthen such interpretation.

5 In the case of Zealand, we used the list of inventories published by Lund Hansen (1995), supplemented by later publications: Ethelberg et al. 2000; Boye 2009; Iversen 2011; Borby Hansen 2011; Mailund Christensen 2011; Sørensen and Åge Tornbjerg 2008. The database for Scania was based on the following publications: Stjernquist 1955; Stjernquist 1993; Björk 2005; Björk 2015 and Brink and Larsson 2017; for Funen – Henriksen 2009; for Bornholm – Vedel 1886; Vedel 1897; Klindt-Jensen 1978; Klindt-Jensen 1957; Mackeprang 1943; Heidemann Lutz 2000; Heidemann Lutz 2010; Watt 1985; Nielsen 2006. The database for Jutland was developed based on a search carried out by one of the authors of this paper in museums in Jutland and in Nationalmuseet København. The search was carried out in 2012–2013 during a postdoctoral project supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

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