

Amber in the Bronze Age of Serbia: Old Finds and New Discoveries

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Abstract

Amber artefacts appear in the territory of Serbia in the Middle Bronze Age, later than the earliest finds of the Baltic amber in south Europe and the Mediterranean. The sites which yielded the amber products are neither numerous nor with even spatial distribution. The Middle Bronze Age finds are grouped inside borders of two geographical units of the central Balkans: the one in western Serbia, comprising the basins of the Drina and West Morava, and the other in the region of Kosovo and Metohija. In all of the cases, the amber finds have funerary context. In contrast, the only finds from the Late Bronze Age come from the Pannonian part of Serbia: the hoard from Vršac-Majdan and the first amber find from a settlement context in Banatski Dvor. Presence of amber at the Bronze Age sites in Serbia can testify to vivid social relations of the local communities with distant regions of northern Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as of existence of spatially and chronologically overlapping regional and micro-regional networks. Another direction for future studies can have focus on the role of amber in funerary practice.

Keywords: amber, Bronze Age, hoards, necropolises, tumuli, Serbia, settlements.

Rezumat

Artefactele de chihlimbar apar pe teritoriul Serbiei în epoca bronzului mijlociu, ceva mai târziu decât cele mai timpurii descoperiri ale chihlimbarului baltic, în sudul Europei și în regiunea Mării Mediterane. Siturile în care au fost descoperite produsele de chihlimbar nu sunt numeroase, ele fiind distribuite neuniform în spațiul cercetat. Descoperirile din epoca bronzului mijlociu sunt grupate în limitele a două unități geografice din zona centrală a Balcanilor: una din vestul Serbiei, cuprinzând bazinele Drina și Morava de Vest, și cealaltă în regiunea Kosovo și Metohija. În toate cazurile, chihlimbarul are un context funerar. În contrast, singurele descoperiri din epoca târzie a bronzului provin din partea panoniană a Serbiei: tezaurul de la Vršac-Majdan și primul chihlimbar dintr-o așezare din Banatski Dvor. Prezența chihlimbarului în siturile din epoca bronzului din Serbia poate să ateste relațiile comerciale ale comunităților locale cu regiunile îndepărtate din Europa de Nord și Marea Mediterană, precum și existența unor rețele regionale și microregionale, care se suprapun spațial și cronologic. O nouă direcție pentru viitoarele studii se poate concentra pe rolul chihlimbarului în practica funerară.

Cuvinte-cheie: chihlimbar, epoca bronzului, tezaure, necropole, tumuli, Serbia, așezări.

INTRODUCTION

Present study on the amber finds from the Bronze Age in the territory of Serbia was aimed for the review of achievements of the past decades in Serbian archaeology. Not only that the corpus of the material has been enlarged, but the direction towards its context analysis and interpretation has been changed to some extent. The territory itself has always been, as it is now, at the crossroads – in purely geographical, cultural and historical, as well in geo-political sense. Serbia is at the place where the Central Balkans meet Pannonia and this physical geographical division mirrors in archaeological testimonies from the deepest past.

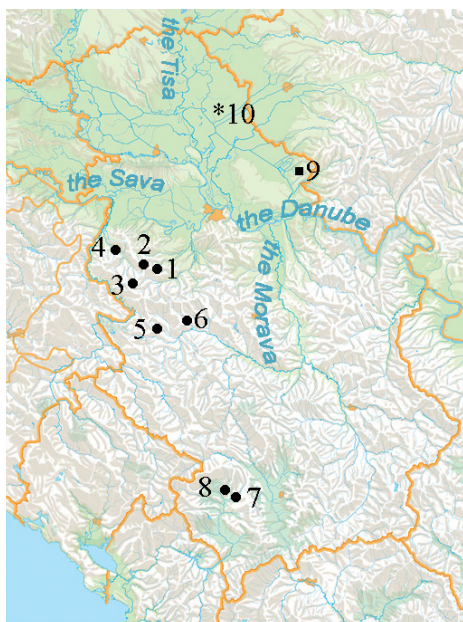


FIG. 1. Map of the Bronze Age amber finds in Serbia (dots - necropolises, asterisks - settlements, squares - hoards).

FIG. 1. Harta descoperirilor de chihlimbar din Epoca de Bronz din Serbia (puncte - necropole, asteriscuri - așezări, pătrate - tezaure).

1 - Belotić, Šumar; 2 - Bela Crkva, Cerik Bandera; 3 - Banjevac, Jovanin Breg; 4 - Brezjak, Paulje; 5 - Vranjani, Veliki Lug; 6 - Jančići, Ravnine; 7 - Iglarevo, Riđevo; 8 - Prčevo, Boka; 9 - Vršac, Majdan; 10 - Banatski Dvor.

Amber artefacts appear in the territory of Serbia in the Middle Bronze Age, later than the earliest finds of the Baltic amber in south Europe and the Mediterranean. Having taken into consideration the most recent radio-carbon data and re-evaluation of cultural attribution of the finds, it can be stated that the appearance of the first amber finds is even later than it was proposed (cf. Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 50). The sites which yielded the amber products are neither numerous nor with even spatial distribution (fig. 1). The Middle Bronze Age finds are grouped inside borders of two geographical units of the central Balkans: the one in western Serbia, comprising the basins of the Drina and West Morava (sites Belotić-Šumar, Bela Crkva-Cerik Bandera, Banjevac-Jovanin Breg, Brezjak-Paulje, Vranjani-Veliki Lug and Jančići-Ravnine) and the other in the region of Kosovo and Metohija (sites Iglarevo-Riđevo and Prčevo-Boka). In all of the cases, the amber finds have funerary context. In contrast, the only finds from the Late Bronze Age come from the Pannonian part of Serbia: the hoard from Vršac-Majdan and the first amber find from a settlement context in Banatski Dvor.

THE BRONZE AGE AMBER FROM FUNERARY CONTEXTS

West Serbian Group of the Middle Bronze Age in north- western Serbia

The region of western Serbia stands out from the rest because of its early excavated and early dated amber finds. In western Serbia, in the Rađevina region, to the north of the left bank of the Jadar, the right tributary of the Drina, in the villages of **Belotić** and **Bela Crkva**, a large number of prehistoric mounds was discovered. The mounds were explored from 1953 onwards. Graves of the two periods of the Bronze Age were recognised – the Early Bronze Age and the group Belotić - Bela Crkva, and the developed Middle Bronze Age and the so-called West Serbian variant of the Vatin culture, nowadays re-defined as the West Serbian group of the Middle Bronze Age (Dmitrović, Ljuština 2013; Дмитровић 2016; Ljuština, Dmitrović 2016) or the Brezjak group (Филиповић 2013). Both of the necropolises comprised tumuli with inhumed and cremated deceased, accompanied by jewellery and pottery. In the tumuli from the Middle Bronze Age both in Belotić and Bela Crkva amber jewellery was discovered: in two mounds in Belotić, at the site Šumar (fig. 2), and one in Bela Crkva, at the site Cerik Bandera (fig. 3).

Mound XI in Belotić was without any construction and had four graves. The grave 1 was the place of pyre (or just a fired surface), grave 2 double skeletal grave, grave 3 skeletal grave with remains of carbonized wood, pottery and a string of bronze ornamental coils and amber (a number of amorphous beads). Grave 4



FIG. 2. Amber from the site Šumar in Belotić (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 290, kat. 447).

FIG. 2. Chihlimbar din situl Šumar de la Belotić (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 290, kat. 447).



FIG. 3. Amber from the site Cerik Bandera in Bela Crkva, mound III, grave 1 (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 290, kat. 448).

FIG. 3. Chihlimbar din situl Cerik Bandera de la Bela Crkva, tumulul III, mormântul 1 (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 290, kat. 448).

comprised remains of a skull and parts of a string of bronze ornamental coils and amber (four beads). Mound VII in Belotić comprised a place of pyre and a grave with urn, with a pin of *Nagelkopfnadel* type, pottery and amber beads. A large amber bead was found close to the urn while the rest (14 amorphous beads) were found on



FIG. 4. Amber from the site Jovanin Breg in Banjevac (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 291, kat. 449).

FIG. 4. Chihlimbar din situl Jovanin Breg de la Banjevac (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 291, kat. 449).

the other side of the mound. Mound III in Bela Crkva comprised a heavily damaged skeletal grave (No 1), with bronze and amber jewellery (13 beads - fig. 3) around the neck. The beads were part of a string wrapped around the thorn of a bronze plaque/tutulus of *Stachelscheibe* type (Гарашанин 1979; Palavestra 1993, 139-140; Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52, 290; Булатовић, Филиповић, Глигорић 2017, 109-115).

The same region yielded another tumular site **Jovanin Breg** in **Banjevac**, with three registered mounds, out of which two were excavated by M. and D. Garašanin prior to 1980. Unfortunately, the results of the explorations were only partially published. One of the mounds was defined as cenotaph, and the other was chronologically positioned in the period of VrC-D (Булатовић, Филиповић, Глигорић 2017, 108-109). The excavated tumulus provided a significant number of

amber objects: a large damaged flat-spherical bead, perforated by vertical axis in the corner (fig. 4), as well as 53 entire and 62 damaged and fragmented irregular polygonal beads, all perforated by vertical axis (fig. 5) (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 291).

Stylistic-typological analysis of all of the grave units with amber from the mentioned sites led to their chronological attribution to the later phase of Middle Bronze Age (1500-1300 BC). Since the sites were excavated long ago, the state of publication, but also of documentation and the material itself in museums collections, is insufficient to debate the dates with more certainty.

Fortunately, more recent excavations at the site **Paulje** near the village of **Brezjak** near Loznica provided us with radio-carbon date to establish chronological attribution with more certainty. The necropolis comprised 30 mounds, out of which 15 have been systematically explored. In four excavated mounds (A, K, N and O) amber beads were found inside grave units, along with diverse archaeological material. Burial mounds from Paulje are typical calotte-shaped mounds, with maximal height of 2 m and 10-30 m in diameter. Most of the mound graves belonged to cremated deceased. In some of them remains from the pyre were placed in urns, while in some they were scattered in the central part of the mound. Excavation of the biggest mound in the necropolis revealed skeletal burials and stone lining of the tumulus, with earthen cover. In some of the explored tumuli, secondary burials from the Iron Age were registered, along with the primary Bronze Age graves. Complete absence or presence of very few objects of grave inventory in some of the mounds,



FIG. 5. Amber from the site Jovanin Breg in Banjevac (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 291, kat. 450).

FIG. 5. Chihlimbar din situl Jovanin Breg de la Banjevac (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 291, kat. 450).

as well as rich inventory in fewer mounds, speak in favour of social stratification inside the communities. Mound A was in northern part of the necropolis. The primary Bronze Age burials were in central part of the mound. It was a double grave with cremated remains (mandible, teeth and fragmented bones) of a 40 year old male and a 10 year old child. Next to the human remains, there were piled personal belongings and elements of attire: two pins, two bronze bracelets with very small diameter, six bronze buttons, six bronze earrings, an earring of thin bronze wire, some ornamental bronze coils and a button-shaped amber bead perforated by the vertical axis. There are two slanted perforations on the flattened base. The perforations merge into one on the conical side (fig. 6) (Мадас 1990; Палавестра,



FIG. 6. Amber from the site Paulje in Brezjak, mound A (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 309, kat. 474).

FIG. 6. Chihlimbar din situl Paulje de la Brezjak, tumulul A (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 309, kat. 474).



FIG. 7. Amber from the site Paulje in Brezjak, mound K (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 309, kat. 475).

FIG. 7. Chihlimbar din situl Paulje de la Brezjak, tumulul K (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 309, kat. 475).



FIG. 8. Amber from the site Paulje in Brezjak, mound N (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 476).

FIG. 8. Chihlimbar din situl Paulje de la Brezjak, tumulul N (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 476).



FIG. 9. Amber from the site Paulje in Brezjak, mound N (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 477).

FIG. 9. Chihlimbar din situl Paulje de la Brezjak, tumulul N (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 477).



FIG. 10. Amber from the site Paulje in Brezjak, mound N (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 478).

FIG. 10. Chihlimbar din situl Paulje de la Brezjak, tumulul N (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 310, kat. 478).

Крстић 2006, 309; Глигорић, Цанић-Тешановић 2010, 3-5).

Mound K was located in southern part of the Paulje necropolis, surrounded by five smaller mounds. The central grave comprised cremated human remains, brought from the place of pyre, which was outside the mound. The rich grave inventory consisted of personal belongings of the deceased: a torc, two pairs of bronze bracelets, a smaller bronze bracelet, a great number of lunular pendants different in shape and size, six amber beads (fig. 7), a small ceramic vessel with lid, a bracelet of spirally shaped bronze sheet, a bronze pin with conically profiled head and a necklace of coiled wire. To the north from the place of the central grave, at the same level, another big bronze pin was found. Anthropological analysis revealed that the grave belonged to a 5-10 year old child (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 309; Глигорић, Цанић-Тешановић 2010, 8-9).

Mound N in Paulje was formed after its central part was dug some 0.5 m below the surface, forming the place of pyre, where the deceased was cremated. The human remains were left to cool and then collected and put inside the urn. Subsequently the grave was formed some 2.5 m from the centre. Two smaller ceramic vessels were placed on the same level, to the east and south from the centre. In the eastern part of the mound, also on the same level, there were ten amber beads (figs. 8-10) and a glass bead scattered in a zone of some 1 square meter (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 3010; Глигорић, Цанић-Тешановић 2010, 10).

In spite of the fact that this important necropolis lacks the final publication, the most complete being the article in the monograph on the prehistory of the Jadar, Rađevina and Azbukovica regions (Булатовић, Филиповић, Глигорић 2017, 116-150), its contribution to the comprehension of the local Middle

Bronze Age is incomparable. An absolute date for the grave unit from the same burial horizon to which the graves with amber belong, was obtained by AMS (Accelerator mass spectrometry). The sample was taken from the wooden support on which the urn with the bones of the deceased and bronze jewellery was placed. The date obtained corresponds to the 14th century BC and confirms earlier proposed suppositions concerning the chronological determination of the necropolises from the region of Jadar, Podgorina and Lower Drina basin (Gligorić, Filipović, Bulatović 2016).

West Serbian Group of the Middle Bronze Age in West Morava Basin

Unfortunately, the other region of western Serbia and the West Serbian group of the Middle Bronze Age, West Morava basin, is still without solid confirmation of its chronological determination. On the mountain range of the Kablar, within the area of the village of **Jančići**, lies the site of **Ravnine**, where three barrows were previously registered. The investigations were undertaken in 1957 and belonged to the first field archaeological works organized by recently founded Museum in Čačak. Mound III had a specific earthen structure. It is characterised by the lack of central grave and the unique grave ritual. The following features were found inside the mound: three fired surfaces (No 2 being of particular interest), three urns and three empty graves with stone structure. Fired surface 2 was found in the southern part of the mound. There were two vertically placed stone slabs on the northern side. Some traces of burnt deceased and

several bronze jewellery items were found: a torc with hammered and coiled ends, a pair of the bracelet with open ends triangular in cross-section, eight fragments of hair rings made of bronze wire, five fragments of a saltaleon and a fragmented amber bead (fig. 11) (Дмитровић 2016, 84-88). Recent analyses confirmed the amber's Baltic provenance (information courtesy of K. Dmitrović).

The same region of the West Morava basin yielded another point of interest. The site of **Vranjani** is situated near Požega. Excavations of the mounds in Vranjani were conducted by M. Zotović in 1969. Two Bronze Age mound were excavated. Mound I comprised remains of incompletely cremated female deceased, on the surface of interweaved bands of wooden bark. Grave goods comprised a bronze torc, spectacle-shaped pendants, saltaleone, bracelets with motifs of swim bladder and an amber bead. There is no further information about the bead. However, this site as well as the whole region should be considered an integral part of a wider cultural formation, comprising the finds from the Drina basin (Косовић 1979; Palavestra 1993, 140).



FIG. 11. Amber from the site Ravnine in Jančići, mound III (documentation of the National Museum Čačak, courtesy of Katarina Dmitrović).

FIG. 11. Chihlimbar din situl Ravnine de la Jančići, tumulul III (material din Muzeul Național Čačak, curtoazie de Katarina Dmitrović).

The Bronze Age Amber in Kosovo and Metohija

Another zone of Serbia with the early amber finds is Kosovo and Metohija. The first point of great importance is **Iglarevo**. Iglarevo is situated in the Prekoruplje region, at the crossing of the Metohija plain and the Kosovo plateau. There were two necropolises: Iglarevo I, site Ridevo, with 39 graves, and Iglarevo II, site Kršine, with nine grave units. At the site **Ridevo** a necropolis with inhumed and cremated deceased, chronologically attributed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age was discovered. Systematic research of the site was conducted by K. Ljuci from 1986 to 1991. Excavations prior to K. Ljuci revealed some skeletal graves from the Bronze Age, one of them comprising a Mycenaean rapier. Cremated graves were with urns. The graves with inhumation could have stone construction – stone slabs around pebbled base. Two types of inhumation burials occur: the richer ones, dated to the 14th - 13th centuries BC, have pebbly base and stone construction, and as a rule contain inventory, sometimes rather opulent (bronze adornments, weapons, even a Mycenaean-type rapier); the poorer graves have neither of the two, and the dead were lying in contracted position. During the excavations by K. Ljuci in 1988 three flat graves were discovered. In one of them, possibly male, there was a rapier, too. In the other, female grave (grave 1), dated at the 14th century BC, bronze anklets of Juhor type were found, along with two bronze saltaleons, a double-spiral headed pin, a bronze bracelet and a string of amber beads. The necklace from grave 1 (fig. 12) consists of typologically heterogeneous material:

irregular rectangular, polygonal, prismatic, oval flat bi-conical, truncated, annular and typologically indeterminable amber beads, along with an amount of rather crumbled amber. Amber was found in one more grave from the necropolis. In one of children's graves (grave 4) there was a single amber bead of irregular rectangular type, centrally pierced along the shorter axis (Palavestra 1993, 141; Палавестра 1997, 16, 18; Луци 1998b, 505; Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 308).

At the site **Boka** in **Prčevo**, near Klina in Metohija, a necropolis with 19 mounds was discovered. It was explored by N. Tasić from the Institute for Balkan Studies from 1973 to 1975. The tumuli have stone calotte and earthen cover. Some of them comprised a single grave, while in some there were more than 20 burials. All of the graves were inhumations, frequently with grave constructions of stone slabs.



FIG. 12. Amber from the site Ridevo in Iglarevo (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 308, kat. 473).

FIG. 12. Chihlimbar din situl Ridevo de la Iglarevo (dură Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 308, kat. 473).

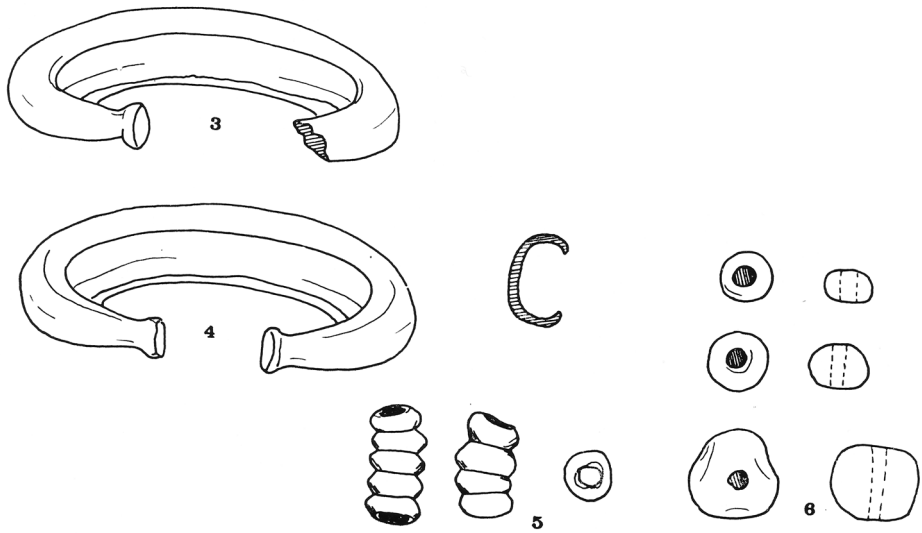


FIG. 13. Inventory of the grave 19 in mound XIV from the site Boka in Prčevo (after Тазић 1979, т. IV, 3-6).

FIG. 13. Inventarul mormântului 19 din tumulul nr. XIV din situl Boka de la Prčevo (după Тазић 1979, т. IV, 3-6).

It is interesting to mention disposition, with possible symbolic meaning, of the graves in the mound XIV, where higher were the graves with weapons, and below, in the inner part, were the graves without weapons, but with jewellery. Based on the more recent analyses of the material, the dating of the top, warriors' burial horizon to the 6th - 5th centuries BC has been inferred, while most of the lower, jewellery containing graves are likely to be earlier. The inventories of the graves 19 (fig. 13) and 23 in mound XIV point to the possibility of attributing the finds to the Bronze Age. These are a bronze buckle and clasps of thin sheet bronze as well as bracelets of sheet bronze with seal-shaped ends, and a number of amber beads. According to the evidence by Palavestra (1993), grave 19 comprised: 17 beads of type 8a, 22 beads of type 9 and one bead of type 30c. All these finds can be dated

into the period from the beginning of Reinecke BrC to BrD. It should be mentioned that in mound XIV six children's skeletons were discovered, which judging by the manner of burial could belong to the same period as the graves 19 and 23 (Тазић 1979; Palavestra 1993, 153-154; Палавестра 1997, 32; Љуци 1998а, 124-127; Тазић 1998, 558).

THE LATE BRONZE AGE AMBER FINDS. FROM SETTLEMENTS TO HOARDS AND VICE VERSA

As it has already been emphasized, in contrast to the situation from the Middle Bronze Age, the only finds from the Late Bronze Age come from the Pannonian part of Serbia: the hoard from Vršac-Majdan and the first amber find from a settlement context in Banatski Dvor. The first known

Late Bronze Age amber find is represented by 45 amber beads from the hoard **Majdan** near **Vršac**. It was discovered by chance in 1950. It contained bronze objects and a string of amber beads, which were placed inside a ceramic pot covered with a bronze bowl. The most numerous finds were bronze objects (110 complete and fragmented items). The amber from Majdan (fig. 14) revealed presence of five different types. Most numerous are bi-conical (20), then flat cylindrical (12), prismatic (9), elongated bi-conical (2) and amorphous (2). The beads are roughly shaped, opaque, greyish-green in colour, which is possibly the consequence of contact with oxidised bronze. Although there are objects in the hoard which can be dated at the Ha B phase, most of them connect the hoard to the Cincu-Suseni horizon of the Carpathian hoards, so it was chronologically positioned in the period 1100-1000 BC and connected, in cultural sense, with the Late Bronze Age of the Carpathian basin (Palavestra 1993, 140-141; Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52).

The first amber find from a settlement context

The first amber find from a settlement context came thanks to the protection excavations on the pipeline route Gospodinci – Banatski Dvor, which were executed in 2008 and 2009. The part of the excavation in Banat was conducted by D. Anđelić in 2008. The Late Bronze Age was represented by the sites No 21 and 22, situated 5km to the west from **Banatski Dvor**. The position of the settlement site is slightly elevated, on the eastern edge of the Novi Bečej – Zrenjanin loess terrace. The settlement itself was fortified by a



FIG. 14. Amber from the hoard from the site Majdan in Vršac (after Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 311, kat. 479).

FIG. 14. Chihlimbar din tezaurul descoperit în situl Majdan de la Vršac (după Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 311, kat. 479).

ditch. Remains of earthen ramparts or palisades were not recognised. Inside the settlement zone there were two smaller ditches, whose purpose remained unknown. A number of waste pits were excavated, as well as four shallow objects with sunken floors, rectangular in shape and of larger dimensions (4×4 m) presumably hut dwellings. Objects No 21 and 36 had pits of wooden roof supports. The waste pits and ditches contained a lot of fragments of house daub (Христов 2017, 7-8). Pottery from the site originated from closed units, pits, ditches and huts. The settlement pottery can be attributed to the Gava cultural complex according to its forms, manufacture and

decoration. Based on the pottery analysis, the settlement in Banatski Dvor was chronologically attributed to the period BrD - HaA1/A2. This makes the general frames to imagine the context from which a small globular amber bead, 0,5cm in diameter (Fig. 15) (Христов 2017, Т. 16/23) came. It was found in the object 38 – a larger conical pit with flat bottom (Христов 2017, 8, 12).

THE BRONZE AGE AMBER IN SERBIA: DISTRIBUTION, PROVENANCE AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The finds of the Bronze Age amber in Serbia are final products and have the form of beads. Their mainly came from funerary contexts – tumular necropolises, with exception of the flat necropolis in Iglarevo. So far, amber has not been found as unprocessed lumps of raw material, which is understandable having in mind extremely small number of settlement contexts. The number of artefacts does not reflect the actual presence and popularity of amber among the local Bronze Age communities (cf. Jaeger 2016, 208). It is to be expected that originally the objects were much greater in number.

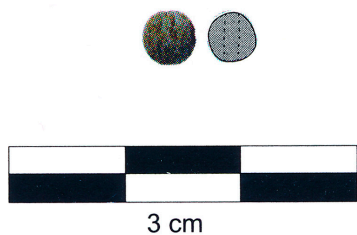


FIG. 15. Amber from the Bronze Age settlement in Banatski Dvor (after Христов 2017, Т. 16/23).

FIG. 15. Chihlimbar din situl Epocii de Bronz de la Banatski Dvor (după Христов 2017, Т. 16/23).

Having taken in consideration that the analyses of some amber beads, found in the Bronze Age graves, confirmed their Baltic provenance, it can be concluded that the main roads connecting the southern Pannonian and central Balkan regions with the amber roads of central and northern Europe were established already in the Bronze Age (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52).

The amber from the Bronze Age graves in the Drina and West Morava basins most probably came to the region from Pannonia, from where numerous cultural impulses of the Tumulus culture influenced the local communities (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52) now defined as the West Serbian group of the Middle Bronze Age. Recent studies recognised the Belegiš culture as the most important transmitter (Ljuština 2017). Reflection of events at the turn of the Middle to Late Bronze Age can be easily recognised in funerary practices, with amber as an important part of grave inventory. Amber is a common product in the Middle Bronze Age of central Europe, so the finds from the Drina and West Morava basins can be considered an extension, branch of the amber road, by which it reaches southern regions all the way to the Mycenaean centres, starting from central Europe and Pannonia (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52). What strikes as odd is lack of linking contemporary sites from the Pannonian parts of Serbia. One of possible factors which affected the number of discovered finds was certainly cremation, which was widely practiced in northern Serbia. The finds from Kosovo and Metohija, where in Iglarevo amber was discovered in the same layer with a sword of Mycenaean type, can testify to amber penetration southwards.

The Late Bronze Age amber finds are represented by amber beads from the hoard Majdan near Vršac. The amber arrived there by the eastern branch of the amber road, since the confirmation can be found in similar amber finds from Romania (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 52). The same can be assumed for the find from the settlement site in Banatski Dvor. Such sites can be expected to provide not only testimonies of usage of amber artefacts in embellishment of attire, but also of existence of places for distribution and even of workshops of local or travelling artisans.

CONCLUSION

The Bronze Age amber in Serbia is an important phenomenon in meeting and imbuing of different cultures. It can testify to vivid social relations of the local communities with distant regions of northern Europe and the Mediterranean. Still, the results of studies devoted to amber in other regions of Europe, some of them neighbouring to Serbia, indicated that in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC the material was not subject to long-distance exchange exclusively. On the contrary, in many cases archaeological context of the amber finds testifies to the existence of spatially and chronologically overlapping regional networks, in which amber travelled over limited distances,

both in geographical and cultural sense (Палавестра, Крстић 2006, 68). These exotic goods act as indicators of trade and exchange and *ipso facto* complexity of the cultural milieu, but in our case they provided us with just a glimpse into the dynamic world of the second half of the 2nd millennium BC. This approach in further studies of the Bronze Age amber in Serbia announces changed perspectives in comprehension of various aspects of lives, starting from development of communication systems, trade, arts and crafts, to distribution of prestigious goods and character of micro-regional relations.

Another direction for future studies can be found in the analysis of function of these subtle elements of attire, today defined as exotic and certainly loaded with meaning, in the life and concept of afterlife of the Bronze Age populations. These “tears of Phaëton’s mourning sisters” decorated the attire of the individuals, possibly socially prominent, but certainly belonging to connected cultures and cultural groups. The role of amber in funerary practice gives an additional puzzling dimension. The old finds can have potential in solving the riddle, but our eyes are in search of some new discoveries which will have the power to consolidate our present knowledge but also to widen and even significantly change our perspectives.

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natalia sua octogesima celebrantis

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