

Amber exchange in the Late Bronze Age Levant in Cross-cultural Perspective

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[Baltic amber reached the Mycenaean and Levantine kings by means of a “prestige circuit” of royal gift-exchanges extending across the Mediterranean area. Amber was valued for its magical properties, which were believed to guarantee victory, fertility, and fortune. It was used for its healing and therapeutic powers, and served as an ingredient in incense, unguents, and perfumes. Jewelry made of ambler could signal allegiance to another person, provide guidance, serve a talismanic function, or ward away danger. A more complex analysis of ancient texts and archaeological finds in the framework of a cross-cultural perspective may reveal the significance of possessing (wearing), giving (gift-giving), and offering (funerary and votive amulets) raw or worked amber in the Late Bronze Age Levant.]

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1. *The Etymology of Amber*

Amber is a wholly organic material derived from the resin of extinct species of trees¹. Because it is fossilized tree resin, amber may sometimes contain insects, twigs, bark, small vertebrates, seeds, feathers, leaves, and bubbles. Although not mineralized, it is often classified as a gemstone of organic origin. Various cultures have referred to it by many names: ‘sea gold’, ‘electron’, ‘hardened honey’, ‘tiger’s soul’, ‘the gold of the North’, and ‘tears of the gods’. Amber is known to mineralogists as succinite (from Lat. *succinum*) or ‘gum-stone’.

The Greek name for amber, *elektron*, was connected to the sun god Helios, whose titles included ‘Awakener’ or *ēlektōr*, meaning ‘beaming Sun’². According to the myth, when Phaëton, son of Helios, was killed, his mourning sisters became poplars, and their teardrops became *elektron*³.

The Ancient Greek word *elektron* also signified electrum, a medium of exchange consisting of rare metal bullion that was used in the Mediterranean world before coinage. The word ‘electrum’ itself is a Latinized form of the Greek name. A metallic substance consisting of gold alloyed with silver, electrum is

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1. D.A. Grimaldi, *Amber, Window to the Past*, New York 1996, p. 12.

2. Homer, *Iliad*, Oxford 1920, 6.513, 19.398; C.W. King, *The Natural History of Gems or Decorative Stones*, London 1867, p. 315. A feminine form of the word was later used as a name for the moon.

3. M.R. Collings, *GemLore: An introduction to Precious and Semi-Precious Stones*, Rockville 2009, p. 20.

pale yellow or yellowish-white and is also known as ‘white gold’ or ‘pale gold’. The same word was also used for amber, probably because of the pale yellow color of certain varieties. Hughes-Brock⁴ argued that *elektron* was originally used for the resin and then transferred to the metal because the two materials shared certain optical properties.

It is from the electrostatic properties of amber that the modern English words ‘electricity’ and ‘electron’ derive. Amber becomes electrostatically charged when rubbed with wool and can attract small particles. The word ‘*electricity*’ (Latin *electricus*, ‘amber-like’) was invented by William Gilbert, physician at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, to describe this property in his 1600 book *On the Magnet, Magnetic Bodies and That Great Magnet the Earth*⁵. It was George Johnstone Stoney, an Irish physicist and Fellow of the Royal Society, who in 1891 coined the English term ‘electron’ from the Greek word for amber⁶. Stoney deserves the credit for first applying the ancient word *elektron* ‘to a hypothetical small unit of electrical charge’⁷.

The modern name ‘amber’, adopted in English in the 14th century, comes from Arabic ‘*anbar*, meaning ‘ambergris’ (*ambre gris* or ‘grey amber’), the waxy, aromatic substance created in the intestines of sperm whales⁸ and used in making perfumes. There are many varieties of amber; some occur very rarely in nature. Amber beads are mainly categorized according to their color, transparency, texture or grains, and place of origin. Amber occurs in a range of different colors: the usual yellow-orange (amber color), pale lemon-yellow, brown, and black. Less common colors include red (cherry amber), green, and blue⁹.

Ultimately, the term ‘amber’ may derive from the Greek word *ambrotos* meaning ‘giving immortality’, referring either to ‘ambrosia’, the mythological drink of immortality, made with honey and/or the hallucinogenic mushroom *Amanita muscaria*, or to a kind of ointment.

2. Main Sources of Amber

Since ancient times, the Baltic Sea area has been a source of amber. Early Stone Age people used amber, which has been found in Neolithic burial sites. Amber is found all over the world: in both North and South America, Sicily, Romania, Lebanon, Myanmar (Burma), and New Zealand.

Amber from the coast of the Baltic Sea, called succinite, is the best-known variety and comes from pine tree resin (*Pinus succinifera*). It has a very wide distribution, extending from northern Europe to the Urals¹⁰. Up to a million pounds of amber a year was dug in the eastern Baltic, at the Samland peninsula (near Palmnicken, Kaliningrad, Russia), in the early part of the twentieth century¹¹.

4. H. Hughes-Brock, “Amber in the Aegean in the Late Bronze Age: Some Problems and Perspectives”, in C.W. Beck and J. Bouzek (eds.), *Amber in Archaeology: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Amber in Archaeology, Liblice, 1990*, Prague 1993, p. 224.

5. J.L. Heilbron, *Electricity in the 17th and 18th Centuries: A Study of Early Modern Physics*, Berkeley 1979, p. 169.

6. S.W. Aber, *Welcome to the World of Amber*, Emporia 2007.

7. P. Wayman, “Stoney’s Electron”, *Europhysics News* 28, 5-6, 1998, 159-160.

8. A. Lucas and J.R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industry: Precious and Semi-Precious Stones*, London 1962, pp. 191-192, 392-394.

9. B. Saldukiene, “Amber”, in S. Suziedelis (ed.), *Encyclopedia Lituanica*, I, Boston 1970, pp. 85-87.

10. J.S. Mills and R. White, *The Organic Chemistry of Museum Objects*, Oxford 1994, p. 110.

11. C.W. Beck and S. Shennan, *Amber in Prehistoric Britain*, Oxford 1991, pp. 16-17; M. Serpico and R. White, “Resins, Amber and Bitumen”, in P.T. Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, Cambridge 2000, p. 451.

Today, Baltic amber is found in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, and Russia, and occasionally washes up on the shores of the Baltic Sea as far away as Denmark, Norway, and England¹². Other amber sources include Myanmar, Lebanon, Sicily, Romania, Germany, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Canada. About 90% of the world's extractable amber is still located in the Kaliningrad Oblast ('amber region') of Russia on the Baltic Sea¹³.

3. Main Routes of the Amber Trade

The so-called 'Amber Road' was an ancient trade route for the transfer of amber, from Europe to Asia and back, and from northern Europe to the Mediterranean Sea¹⁴. Amber was transported from the North Sea and Baltic Sea coasts overland by way of the Vistula and Dnieper rivers to Italy, Greece, the Black Sea, and Egypt¹⁵.

During the Bronze Age, the 'routes' of amber reached the Adriatic Sea, starting from the Northern European coastline. At the beginning of the Bronze Age, the routes crossed the Alps near the Resia and Brenner passes, but then, during the Late Bronze, a new eastern line branched out from the Vistula River to the Alpine passes and, via the Isonzo River, reached the northern area of the Adriatic Gulf. At this point the route forked: one of the branches headed for the delta of the Po River (the marketplace for exotic objects), and the other made for the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and reached the Mediterranean, where the Mycenaean culture was flourishing¹⁶. The presence of Baltic amber in Greece and the Levant is not necessarily an indicator of intercultural contact, but it does attest to some sort of exchange system operating in the Mediterranean area¹⁷. Baltic amber reached the Mycenaean kings by means of a 'prestige circuit' of royal gift-exchanges stretching across the Mediterranean region.

4. Amber's Properties and its Uses

4.1. Magical properties

In antiquity, amber was valued not only for its attractive color and electrostatic energy but also for its magical properties, including the ability to guarantee victory, fertility, and fortune¹⁸.

Amber played an important role in numerous religious beliefs. Researchers consider amber objects found during the excavation of early sites to have been of significance in various cults. The solar cult was linked to fertility. Among the attributes of this cult were flat amber discs decorated with dots applied in the shape of a cross. Amulets in the shape of small axe-heads (occasionally double-headed miniatures), which were worn to ward off danger, are thought to have been associated with the battle-axe cult. Zoomorphic figurines probably served as protective amulets that safeguarded their wearers against any dangers they might encounter while hunting. Anthropomorphic female figurines were representations of a

12. G.O. Poinar, *Life in Amber*, Stanford 1992, pp. 16-17.

13. D.A. Grimaldi, *Amber*, pp. 148-159.

14. A. Sherratt, "Electric Gold: Re-opening the Amber Route", *Antiquity* 69, 1995, 200-203.

15. C.W. Beck, "Criteria for Amber Trade: The Evidence in the Eastern European Neolithic", *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 200-209.

16. N.N. Catacchio, "Amber and the Adriatic Sea: Relationships between the Two Sea-shores in Late Prehistoric Time", in A. Uglešić (ed.), *Abstracts of the 13th Annual Meeting of European Association of the Archaeologists, Croatia, Zadar, 18-23 September, 2007*, Zadar 2007, p. 28.

17. C. Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilization. The Cyclades and the Aegean in the 3rd Millennium B.C.*, London 1972, pp. 467-468.

18. G.N. Gestoso Singer, "Amber in the Ancient Near East", *i-Medjat* 2, 2008, 17.

‘mother-goddess’ and symbols used in fertility cults. Male figurines and phalluses had some association with the ancestor cult or were used as representative symbols of gods and heroes.

Amber amulets have also been found in ancient graves, where they were placed in order to protect the dead in the afterlife. The Egyptians believed that amber secured the mummy against destruction and decay. It was not unusual for amulets made of amber stones to be found in tombs because they protected the deceased on their journey through the afterlife. An Egyptian magical text states: “*The infant is protected by the gods, the child’s name, the milk he sucks, the clothes he wears, the age in which he lives, the amulets made for him and placed around his neck*”¹⁹.

In several ancient rituals, amber was used as a kind of incense. Thus, in ancient India and Egypt, amber was burned along with non-fossil tree resins, such as frankincense, myrrh, and copal, to dispel evil spirits and to purify temples and palaces. Aromatic resins played a prominent and already well-known role in the magic, religion, and medicine of both cultures. In ancient Egypt, incense burning signified mainly a manifestation of the presence of the gods and served as a pleasing gift to them. The word ‘perfume’ comes from the Latin *per fumus*, which means ‘through/by smoke’, and ‘incense’ derives from the Latin *incendere*, ‘to set on fire’²⁰. Thus, the idea behind these practices was ‘to make divine’ through offering the smoke of incense or aromatic perfumes and ointments. Ancient Egyptian culture epitomized the function of perfume and incense as a symbol of authority, power, and divine sanction. The fragrance obtained from the burnt resins was seen as the divine presence. Resins were believed to have sprung as tears from the eyes of the gods. Accordingly, in Egypt, amber was known as ‘the tears of the eye of Ra, the sun-god’.

For the Mycenaean period, J. Bouzek²¹ ‘rightly insists first on the quasi-magical properties of amber, not just the prestige’, as Sherratt notes²². Compare, however, the more cautious opinion of Hughes-Brock²³: ‘Most amber is in ordinary bead form; since it is consistently found alongside standard beads of other materials, we cannot prove that the Mycenaeans thought of it as having any special amuletic value’.

Ancient Greeks and Romans believed in the magic powers of amber, because its electrostatic energy had the power to draw all manner of misfortune away from people.

Lithuanian tribes in former times employed amber to drive away evil spirits. Newborn babies were fumigated with amber incense to help them grow faster. For new couples, it was a symbol of eternal happiness. For those heading to war, amber helped them to return victorious²⁴.

Today, Zuni Indians, South Americans, Europeans, Chinese, and Japanese use amber talismans and amulets for protection. It is believed that an amber stone is an excellent way to attract good luck. Carry one in your pocket, drop one in your purse, or wear one on a chain around your neck – it is the perfect all-around good luck charm. When a piece of amber is heated, it emits a gentle resin scent, making people feel better and strengthening their belief in the healing power of the magic stone.

19. F. Lexa, *La magie dans l'égypte antique, de l'Ancien Empire jusqu'à l'époque copte, II, Paris 1925, pp. 32-33.*

20. R. Tatomir, “To cause ‘to make divine’ through smoke: Ancient Egyptian Incense and Perfume. An Inter- and Transdisciplinary Re-evaluation of Aromatic Biotic Materials Used by the Ancient Egyptians”, in A. Panaite, C. Capita and R. Cirjan (eds.), *Moesica et Christiana. Studies in Honour of Prof. Alexandru Barnea on his 70th Anniversary*, Bucharest 2015, pp. 683-684, 694.

21. “The Shifts of the Amber Route”, in Beck and Bouzek, *Amber in Archaeology*, p. 141.

22. *Antiquity* 69, 1995, 200-203.

23. H. Hughes-Brock, “Amber and the Mycenaeans”, *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 259.

24. Saldukiene, *Amber*, pp. 85-87.

4.2. Medicinal properties

Amber has been used for its healing and therapeutic powers. The earliest accounts of amber's medicinal properties are found in the works of Hippocrates and Pliny the Elder.

In ancient Rome, Baltic amber was used as medicine against different diseases. Calistratus, a celebrated physician of those times, wrote that amber protects from madness; powder of amber mixed with honey cures throat, ear, and eye diseases, asthma, gout, and the black plague; and amber taken with water cures stomach illnesses. He states that a short string of amber beads worn around the neck brought relief to the wearer from head, neck, and throat complaints. Wearing amber bracelets was beneficial against rheumatism, arthritis, and fatigue. All manner of potions containing amber were used to cure asthma, bronchitis, bowel and bladder disorders, and heart problems.

Pliny the Younger noted that Roman peasant women wore amber medallions not only as adornments, but also as a remedy for swollen glands or a sore throat and palate. The Romans used amber in a number of different objects, including coins and *situlae* (a small bucket – *secio* in Istro-Venetian – half-conical shaped, narrower at the bottom and supplied with a handle)²⁵.

Amber was burned as a fumigant to drive off worldly nuisances such as mosquitoes. Sailors burned it on ships to drive away sea serpents and the dangers of the deep.

In the Middle Ages, Baltic amber beads were worn for the treatment of jaundice. It was believed that the magic force of this yellow stone could absorb the unhealthy yellowness of the skin.

In Asian countries amber syrup, a mixture of succinic acid and opium, was used as a tranquilizer and antispasmodic. In ancient Chinese medicine, amber was used regularly for healing and health enhancement, a practice that is still current today. Benefits include detoxification, increased blood circulation, and improved heart, liver, kidney, and intestinal function²⁶.

Today, we can find amber in some anti-rheumatic ointments, in bracelets to ease rheumatic pains, or in beads of a collar worn to help in cases of thyroid illnesses. Current medical practitioners would certainly disagree about its curative qualities. Nevertheless, several communities in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic believe that amber helps draw out negative energy from the body, then allows the body to heal itself by taking that negative energy and transmuting it into a positive energy that purifies the body, soul, and spirit.

4.3. Cosmetic uses

Flowers, fruits, scented plants, spices, gums, and resins were used to make perfumes, unguents, and oils. In Egypt, composite scented materials used as cosmetics, unguents, and ointments were made mostly from imported resins mixed with oil or fat. The main ingredients were cinnamon, cassia, myrrh, frankincense, cardamom, and various other resins. Other plant ingredients quoted in medical papyri (such as Papyrus Ebers and Papyrus Harris) and classical authors (such as Theophrastus, Pliny, Galen, and Dioscorides) include iris, henna, juniper, lily, marjoram, mint, myrtle, sweet flag, *cyperus* grass, mastic, and pistacia resin. Widely manufactured in Egypt, perfume and cosmetics were also produced in Mesopotamia, Crete, and mainland Greece, and imported pottery vessels that contained perfumes did reach Egypt from the Aegean²⁷.

If amber is heated under the right conditions it yields oil of amber. In antiquity, 'amber' perfumes were created using combinations of labdanum, benzoin resin, copal (itself a type of tree resin used in

25. L. Bonfante, "Amber, Women, and Situla Art", *JBS* 16/ 3, 1985, 276-292.

26. R.K. Li, "An Interview with Qigong Great, Master Randy K. Li", *Kansas City Chinese Journal*, March 29th, 2001.

27. M. Serpico and R. White, *Resins*, p. 461; Tatimir, *Ancient Egyptian Incense*, pp. 686-687.

incense manufacture), and vanilla. In the Middle Ages, the terms *Oleum succini* (amber oil), *Balsamum succini* (amber balsam), and *Extractum succini* (amber extract) appear in the recipes of the alchemists of those times.

Amber is the only fossil resin containing 3 to 8% succinic acid, which has a strong therapeutic effect on the human body. Modern scientists create cell-regenerating face creams with succinic acid. In South America, it is believed that by soaking one or more amber stones in a glass of water overnight, and then using that water to wash her face, a woman can administer a perfect skin treatment to enhance her beauty.

4.4. Jewelry

In addition to its alleged or actual healing powers, amber serves a number of other useful purposes. Ninety percent of all extracted amber is of poorer quality and can be used only as an ingredient in other products, such as varnish, amber oil, and distilled acids. Craftsmen mold the remaining ten percent into jewelry and ornaments²⁸. Amber is easy to carve and was often used in its natural state for jewelry, beads, amulets, and small vessels.

Whether in its raw state or carved into various shapes to form pendants, pins, beads, or amulets and sewn onto clothing, amber was highly prized by the people of the ancient Mediterranean and northern Europe. The archaeological and literary evidence shows that amber was used to adorn weapons, musical instruments, spindles, decorative boxes, and even furniture²⁹.

Jewelry is one of the most powerful vehicles through which humans express beliefs, values, and social identity. When made by artisans of the highest skill, lifelike images can carry magical and dynamic religious properties and can be highly charged ritual objects in their own right. Tiny carved amber images buried with people considered to be members of religious or political elites may well have played such a role³⁰.

5. Amber in the Late Bronze Age Levant

The source of amber found in the Mediterranean area in ancient contexts can be determined by means of infrared spectroscopy. Most of the amber found in Mycenaean Greece, Italy, and the Levant comes from the Baltic Sea. No deposits of amber within Egypt are known³¹.

In archaeological contexts, amber occurs in the form of beads, amulets, ornaments, jewelry, and rectangular plaques. It was an object of trade and barter in the Baltic and Mediterranean areas³². Amber jewelry is abundant in Bronze Age Aegean contexts, although it also occurs infrequently in Bronze Age eastern Mediterranean contexts beyond the Aegean, including seventeen amber scarabs in Egypt, two beads from Assur, and six beads from Enkomi (Cyprus)³³. According to Harding, the earliest amber in the

28. G.N. Gestoso Singer, *i-Medjat* 2, 2008, 17.

29. F. Causey, "Jewelry: Never Just Jewelry", in *Amber and the Ancient World. Ancient Carved Ambers in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Los Angeles 2011, p. 89; L.C. Pieraccini, "Book Review: Amber and the Ancient World, by Faya Causey, Los Angeles 2011", *Etruscan Studies* 16/1, 2013, 146.

30. F. Causey, *Jewelry*, p. 17.

31. M. Serpico and R. White, *Resins*, p. 430.

32. J.M. Todd, "Baltic Amber in the Ancient Near East: A Preliminary Investigation", *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 292-301; M. Heltzer, "On the Origin of the Near Eastern Archaeological Amber", in K. Van Lerberghe and G. Voet (eds.), *Languages and Cultures in Contact at the Crossroads of Civilizations in the Syro-Mesopotamian Realm. 42th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale held at the University of Leuven in July 1995*, Leuven 1999, pp. 169-176.

33. Ch. Bachhuber, "Aegean Interest on the Uluburun Ship", *AJA* 110/3, 2006, 352, n. 90.

Near East may date from ca. 1800 BCE (the two beads at Assur) or ca. 2400 BCE (a pendant at Tell Asmar/Eshnunna)³⁴. Today, it is believed that the pendant is made of a hardened resin (copal) that originated in East Africa (Mozambique, Zanzibar or Madagascar)³⁵. In Israel amber makes its first appearance at Tell Abu-Hawam³⁶.

For the Egyptians amber was ‘the tears of the eye of Ra, the sun god’. The eye of Ra is most often connected with protection, divine justice, punishment, and vengeance. Amber was also associated with the lioness goddess Sekhmet, daughter of Ra and one of his eyes. Small pieces of amber have been discovered inserted beneath the skin covering the hands of Egyptian mummies, in order to protect the dead in the afterlife³⁷. Also, the bright reddish-yellow color and sparkling translucent appearance of fresh resin and amber reminded the ancient Egyptians of the sun. Amber was found in tombs in different shapes, as discs, tears/drops, or cones/obelisks, reflecting a genuine connection with solar symbolism³⁸. Finally, according to Papyrus Salt, the primordial gods wept in order to fertilize the soil so that it would produce myrrh and frankincense for making incense, necessary for the rituals related to the renovation of life and power in the cosmic cycle³⁹.

Perrot and Chipiez⁴⁰ were the first to state that amber did not occur in ancient Egypt. Most of the ancient Egyptian samples that were analyzed proved to be resin⁴¹. Perrot and Chipiez also affirm that the use of proper amber in Egypt did not antedate the Roman Period.

According to Pliny, amber was also obtained from (or via) Egypt and Nubia⁴². Pliny reports that *sacal/sakal* (Eg. *škl* or *škr*) was the name for amber in ancient Egypt. In his *Naturalis historia*, he states that amber was created by the rays of the setting sun which, hitting the earth, produced a sticky efflux⁴³. Nevertheless, the Egyptian texts themselves do not provide clear evidence about the origin of the word *škl*, which in a medical papyrus designates an ingredient mixed with honey to make an ointment for skin blemishes; here *škl* certainly indicates a kind of resin, and not the stony amber⁴⁴.

Raven⁴⁵ sees a marked correspondence between *škl* and Sumerian SAG.KAL, a term known from the Amarna letters as the designation of a semi-precious stone (*sankallu*)⁴⁶ sent from Mitanni. According to the Amarna letters, the king of Mitanni sent to Egypt: “*I maninnu-necklace, cut: 43 [genuine lapis lazuli*

34. A. Harding and H. Hughes-Brock, “Amber in the Mycenaean World”, *BSA* 69, 1974, 146, 169-170. ‘Amber’ is listed among the materials used for beads at Bouqras (Syria) in the Neolithic period, but this remains an isolated early occurrence. Cf. P. Moorey, *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries*, Winona Lake 1999, p. 79. I am grateful to the reviewer and the editor for this reference.

35. C. Meyer, J.M. Todd and C.W. Beck, “From Zanzibar to Zagros: A copal pendant of Eshnunna”, *JNES* 50, 1991, 289-298.

36. J. Balensi, M.D. Herrera and M. Artzy, “Abu Hawam, Tell”, in E. Stern, A. Lewinson Gilboa and J. Aviram (eds.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, I, Jerusalem 1993, p. 13; M. Heltzer, *Near Eastern Archaeological Amber*, p. 169. For Aphek, cf. J.M. Todd, *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 292.

37. *Ibid.*, 292 ff.

38. M.J. Raven, “Resin in Egyptian Magic and Symbolism”, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 16.

39. Papyrus Salt 825, II, 1-5, in F. Daumas, “Quelques notes sur l’ambre jaune dans l’ancien égypte”, *Cd’é* 46, 1971, 56.

40. G. Perrot and C. Chipiez, *Histoire de l’art dans l’antiquité I: L’Égypte*, Paris 1882, p. 840.

41. E.g., M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 8.

42. F. Daumas, *Ambre*, pp. 51-54.

43. Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XXXVII § 36, in F. Daumas, *Ambre*, pp. 51-52; M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 16.

44. Papyrus London 15.11, in W. Wreszinski, *Der Londoner Medizirische Papyrus (Brit.Mus. Nr. 10059) und der Papyrus Hearst in Transkription, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Leipzig 1912, p. 162, N° 56.

45. *OMRO* 70, 1990, 9, n. 23.

46. NA₄.SAG.KAL/sankallu/sagkallu, in CAD S: 25a.

stones], *x khiliba-stones*; [the centerpiece] *a sankallu-stone mounted on gold*"; "*1 maninnu-necklace, cut: 17 genuine lapis lazuli stones, 16 sankallu-stones, 35 (pieces of) gold, the center piece a sankallu-stone mounted on gold*"; "[...] *sankallu-stones, 16 carnelian stones (...) mounted on gold*"; "*5 pomegranates of sankallu-stone*"; and "*16 NA₄.SAG.KAL-beads*"⁴⁷.

A second term for which the translation 'amber' has been proposed is the Akkadian word *abašmû*, mentioned in the Amarna letters⁴⁸. A letter sent by Tushratta of Mitanni to the Pharaoh includes an immense list of gifts – the 'dowry' of Tadukhepa, the daughter of Tushratta – that contains prestige objects of gold, silver, and semi-precious stones. *Abašmu*-stone is listed in this letter as a kind of stone along with other known varieties of precious or semi-precious stones (such as lapis lazuli and carnelian)⁴⁹. Heltzer⁵⁰ affirms that in ancient Mesopotamia, the Akkadian word *elmešu* (Hebrew *hašmal*) designated amber. The term *elmešu* is found in the Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh (VI, 11), as well as in Neo-Babylonian Akkadian texts⁵¹. In Modern Hebrew, *hašmal* means 'electricity'⁵². In Estonian, *helses* (Livonian *elmaz*) today means 'bead', but originally the term designated 'amber'. On the Estonian isle Saaremaa (Ösel) in the Kihelkonna area, sometimes the waves wash ashore small pieces of amber, called by the local population 'the elmes (beads) of the sea'⁵³.

Finally, a third Egyptian term for amber has been proposed, but the association of *shrt* ("that which satisfies/makes content/makes peaceful")⁵⁴ with amber is erroneous, since the first one referred to a kind of resin used to make unguents for toes and eye-ointments, medicines for heart problems, and resin 'heart' scarabs with the text of the Book of the Dead Spell 29B, called 'The spell of the heart of *seheret*'⁵⁵ because of the formula for a heart-amulet of *seheret*-stone.

Lucas⁵⁶ suggested that a range of ancient Egyptian amulets, beads, and other items of jewelry, dating as early as the Predynastic period, were made from worked resin and not amber⁵⁷. According to Raven⁵⁸, resin beads (discs, balls, barrels, cylinders, and pendants) have been found at Badari, Mostagedda, Mahasna, Armant, and in Nubia. The only specimens properly analyzed – some beads from Armant (in Upper Egypt) – seem to contain genuine amber⁵⁹. But Lucas⁶⁰ doubted that these beads were truly amber.

47. EA 25 I: 47, 51, 65-66; EA 25 II: 3-4; W.L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, Baltimore and London 1992, pp. 73-74; S. Hood, "Amber in Egypt" in C.W. Beck and J. Bouzek, *Amber in Archaeology*, p. 232; A. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence. A New Edition of the Cuneiform Letters from the Site of El-Amarna based on Collations of all Extant Tablets*, Leiden 2015, pp. 248-249; *sankallu*-stone is 'a type of precious stone' in *ibid.*, 1295; 1359.

48. EA 25 II: 47; J.R. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals*, Berlin 1961, p. 17; S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 232; W.L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, p. 76; A. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence*, pp. 256-257, 1275.

49. EA 25 II: 47; cf. "*1 ointment receptacle, its rettu of abašmû-stone*" in Moran, *The Amarna Letters*, p. 76; "*1 ointment spoon; its 'scoop' of abašmû-stone*" in A. Rainey, *The El-Amarna Correspondence*, pp. 256-257; *abašmû* is "a greenish colored precious stone" in *ibid.*, 1275.

50. *Near Eastern Archaeological Amber*, pp. 170, 174.

51. CAD, E, 107-108.

52. J.M. Todd, *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 298.

53. U. Masing, "Kas Elmešu = Helmes?" (Is Elmešu-Helmes?), *ESA* 23, 1977, 28; M. Heltzer, *Near Eastern Archaeological Amber*, p. 173.

54. *Wb.* IV, 207-208; cf. causative *hrw*, "to be content/peaceful/quiet", in *ibid.*, 496-497.

55. M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 9, nn. 36-41; 17, nn. 167-168.

56. *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, p. 387.

57. M. Serpico and R. White, *Resins*, p. 451.

58. *OMRO* 70, 1990, 11-12.

59. S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 230, n. 5.

60. *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, p. 388.

Resin was used in the manufacture of items of jewelry and amulets, most of which are believed erroneously to be amber.

Amber beads were found in the tomb of Teti (ca. 2345-2333 BCE, 6th Dynasty), at Saqqara. Maspero⁶¹ relates, ‘Beads of amber are still found near Abydos in the tombs of the oldest necropolis, and we may well ask how many hands they had passed through before reaching the banks of the Nile from the shores of the Baltic. I have picked up in the tombs of the 6th Dynasty at Kom-es-Sultan, and in the part of the necropolis of Abydos containing the tombs of the 11th and 12th Dynasties, a number of amber beads, most of which were very small. Mariette, who had found some on the same site, and who had placed them in the Boulaq Museum, mistook them for corroded yellow or brown glass beads. The electric properties which they still possess have established their identity’.

Nevertheless, Lucas analyzed beads found in graves of the 5th Dynasty and stated that they were made of resin, and not of amber. Also, in 1891, Olshausen analyzed a bead from a destroyed tomb at Saqqara dated to the 11th and 12th Dynasties and came to the same conclusion. Then, in 1935, a similar test quoted by LaBaume gave the same result: the bead was resin. The piece had a density of 1.238 (maximum for amber is 1.100), and yielded no succinic acid⁶².

The only Egyptian specimens recorded as real amber are one scarab, dated to the Late Middle Kingdom or early 18th Dynasty, in the British Museum (No. 17718)⁶³; two undated scarabs of amber in the Petrie Museum⁶⁴, and a large scarab in the pectoral of Hatiay (18th Dynasty)⁶⁵.

Amber is attested with a high degree of probability in the New Kingdom, from the period of the 18th Dynasty (1550–1295 BCE) onward, but only in exceptional circumstances and always in conjunction with other precious materials, such as rock crystal, gold, lapis lazuli, or faience. The most common employment of amber would have been in the manufacture of small items, such as amulets, beads, or other types of jewelry. These items may have been carved in Egypt from raw material or imported as finished goods⁶⁶.

The recognized use of amber in Crete and Greece from the Middle Bronze Age onwards⁶⁷ lent credibility to the theory that ‘retinite’ (amber occurring in coal seams) may have at least occasionally reached Egypt as a result of trade or gift-exchange⁶⁸. Retinite is a name applied to resins from beds of brown coal that are near amber in appearance but contain low levels of succinic acid.

During the reign of Thutmose III (ca. 1500 BCE), tribute scenes in the tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100) recorded a delivery from “*The Keftiu* (Minoans, the men of Crete) *and the isles in the midst of the Great Green (sea)* (probably the Cycladic islands of the Aegean)” of “*a great heap of electrum* (Eg. *d’mw*, ‘fine gold’), *which is measured by the hekat*⁶⁹, *making 36.692 deben* (ca. 3424 kg)”⁷⁰. We believe that this

61. G. Maspero, *History of Egypt, Chaldaea, Syria, Babylonia, and Assyria*, II, London 1903-1906, II.

62. A. Harding *et al.*, *BSA* 69, 1974, 146: nn. 5-6.

63. H. R. Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs, etc., in the British Museum*, I, *Royal Scarabs*, London 1913, p. xxix.

64. These scarabs were protective amulets placed inside the corpse and called ‘heart scarabs’, indicating that ‘the heart of Isis is given to the deceased’ in W.M.F. Petrie, *Amulets*, London 1914, p. 23, pl. VII, N° 89 w, x; *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names*, London 1917, p. 9; M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 13, nn. 98-99. One of the two scarabs might date back to the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, as claimed by Prof. Geoffrey Martin in S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 230.

65. Or from the 21st Dynasty, in A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, p. 387.

66. M. Serpico and R. White, *Resins*, p. 430.

67. Hughes-Brock, *Amber in the Aegean*, pp. 223-224.

68. S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 233; Serpico and White, *Resins*, p. 451.

69. A corn measure of 4.54 liters, in *Wb.* III, 174, 13.

70. The “Reception of Foreign Tribute”, in J.H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt. The Eighteenth Dynasty*, Chicago 1906, II, § 761; the “weighing scene”, in K.R. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien*, Berlin 1849 (repr. 1972), III, 39 d.

passage may describe a load of electrum from distant lands, delivered by Aegean envoys. The appearance of *Keftiu* (a term that may refer to Cretans/Minoans) in Egyptian tomb-paintings of the first half of the 15th century BCE would appear to indicate that some diplomatic trading missions from Crete made the direct voyage to Egypt before returning anti-clockwise up the Levantine coast to Cilicia or Cyprus and Rhodes⁷¹. In the Tomb of Rekhmire, one of the scenes of tribute from foreign emissaries depicts *Keftiu* men with silver and gold jugs, vases, and rhyta; gold, silver, and tin ingots; and collars, apparently of ‘amber’ beads (spherical and oblate in shape, usually sent from the Aegean area)⁷². Also, although the record of the Twelfth Campaign of Year 37 of Thutmose III is mostly lost, in column 85 we can read part of the list of tribute from the northern countries – in this case, probably from the land of Nukhashe (in Syria) – which included “*Škr-mineral* (Eg. *škr* = *šakal*, Sum. SAG-KAL, Pliny’s *sacal/sakal*, probably amber), *hematite* (*didi*), *green porphyry* (*ibhty*), and *eye-paint* (...), *wild game*, *fire sticks* (...)”⁷³. Although amber is not a mineral, the Egyptians listed it together with minerals (gold, electrum, and lead) and/or semi-precious/precious stones. Also, it was recorded and “*measured by the hekat like sacks of grain*”, just like the electrum described in the tomb of Rekhmire⁷⁴.

M. Malaise⁷⁵ was the first to draw attention to the appearance of four kinds of resin (or ‘amber’) heart scarabs, most of which bear the text of Book of the Dead spell 29B⁷⁶.

Only one of these scarabs is labeled ‘amber’. The amber heart scarab of Thuya (Tjuyu/Thuyu), the mother of Queen Tiye, wife of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, contains a phoenix figure and a magical inscription, and was used as an amulet for protection⁷⁷.

The New Kingdom evidence for amber is almost entirely restricted to finds from the tomb of King Tutankhamun (ca. 1333-1324 BCE) (KV 62). Again, however, Lucas’s analyses of several objects suggest that they are in fact ‘resin’ and not amber⁷⁸. An inventory of these objects was first drawn up by Lucas, who listed a necklace of sixty dark red resin beads⁷⁹; one finger ring with the mummy; two large scarabs with the mummy; a necklace of alternating resin (or amber) and lapis lazuli beads; a pair of earrings with alternating resin (or amber) and gold beads; a broken object, gold mounted, perhaps an earring; a fragmentary cylindrical bead; a plain rounded hair ring; a double finger ring with cartouches (with the royal name) on the bezel; a pair of knuckle-bones; and the knob of a box. Resin was used to manufacture some beads in the straps of a pectoral as well as the knob of a wooden box. Also, the tomb contained numerous lumps, balls, and scraps of resin for use as incense or glue, or for mummification purposes,

71. S. Wachsmann, *Aegeans in the Theban Tombs*, Leuven 1987, p. 36; A. Sherratt and S. Sherratt, “From Luxuries to Commodities: The Nature of Mediterranean Bronze Age Trading Systems”, in N.H. Gale (ed.), *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean*, Jonsered 1991, p. 370.

72. S. Graff, “Depictions of Foreign Emissaries in the Theban Tombs”, in J. Aruz, K. Benzel and J.M. Evans (eds.), *Beyond Babylon. Art, Trade, Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.*, New York 2008, pp. 260-261, fig. 85.

73. *Urk.*, IV, 715. cf. D.B. Redford, *The Wars in Syria and Palestine of Thutmose III*, Leiden and Boston 2003, pp. 87, 234.

74. *Urk.*, IV, 367, 15; G.N. Gestoso, “The Obelisks of Hatshepsut: Legitimacy and Propaganda”, in *GM* 207, 2005, 45.

75. *Les scarabées de coeur dans l’Égypte ancienne*, Brussels 1978, p. 47, n. 16.

76. Spell 29 is a formula for preventing the removal of a man’s heart in the underworld. Two other versions of this formula are known as 29A, which only appears on one New Kingdom papyrus, and 29B, a formula for a heart-amulet of *seheret*-stone, also from New Kingdom sources.

77. Cairo Egyptian Museum CG51166, from Tomb KV 46, in T.M. Davies *et al.*, *The Tomb of Iouiya and Touiyou*, London 1907, p. 33; cf. Amber heart scarab, in M. Luban, “The Amber Scarab of Thuya”, *EEF Bulletin Board*, Dec 1st, 2000.

78. A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, p. 388; Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 230.

79. Actually, today, there are only fifty-five beads of dark reddish brown color, and of a squat biconical shape, as in S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, p. 231.

while several vessels still preserved remains of resinous or gum-like products⁸⁰. Niwinski⁸¹ discusses Egyptian terms for resins while arguing against identifying objects as amber without scientific analysis.

The breast ornament of Tutankhamun contains large beads apparently made of amber⁸². Hood⁸³ argues that a number of ‘resin’ objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun, including two heart (possibly) scarabs and the necklace, which he identifies as being from the Tumulus culture of central/northern Europe, are actually amber. Sherratt⁸⁴ confirms (and refines) Hood’s⁸⁵ stylistic attribution, and he compares Tutankhamun’s necklace, which he associates with the late Tumulus culture of central Europe (Reinecke Br C), to a necklace from Barrow 2, Grave 13, at Schwarza, Thuringia (Germany). The chief source for amber for the Tumulus Culture beads was the Eastern Baltic, the area of the Samland peninsula. But, how did the necklace (or the amber beads it contains) reach Egypt? Hood⁸⁶ affirms that it came from the area of the Tumulus Culture by the simplest and most direct route – to the head of the Adriatic and thence by sea to Greece. From Greece it might have reached Egypt directly by sea or indirectly via Syria. Alternatively, the amber might have been sent to Egypt as gifts from rulers to the north in Ugarit or Mitanni, or perhaps it was brought directly from Greece by a diplomatic mission or by Aegean merchants. Recent studies indicate that an indirect route via Syria is the most appropriate interpretation, in light of the quantity of amber biconical beads found along with Mycenaean pottery in tombs at Ras Shamra (Ugarit, on the coast of Syria)⁸⁷, and the amber lion head vessel and beads found during the last excavations at Qatna (in Syria).

Also, Hood⁸⁸ confirms that the two amber heart scarabs found in Tutankhamun’s tomb had been placed over the body of the king; one of them depicts a Bennu bird, often associated by the Egyptians with the heart and linked with the sun-god in Egypt. The Bennu bird is represented as a heron, which is one of the first birds to rise in the morning – an interesting fact in view of the connection of amber with cults of the sun in early times.

Mukherjee *et al.*⁸⁹ affirm that the best-known Egyptian pieces are the amber bead necklace and various other amber/resin jewelry items found in the tomb of Tutankhamun⁹⁰ although, like the majority of such finds, they have not been chemically characterized, reflecting the challenging nature of the analysis of precious fossil resin⁹¹. A Baltic amber source is often assumed, but Lebanese amber, which is mainly Lower Cretaceous in age, is also a possibility; it occurs mostly in Lebanon, but also in Syria (Bloudan area), Israel (Kiryat Shmona), and Jordan (Wadi Zerqa)⁹².

80. M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 13.

81. A. Niwinski, “Amber in Ancient Egypt”, in B. Kosmowska-Ceranowicz and H. Paner (eds.), *Investigations into Amber, Gdańsk 1999*, pp. 115-119; M. Cultraro, “L’ambre nel mondo mediterraneo: l’Egeo e le aree di contatto”, in *Ambre: trasparenze dall’antico*, Milan 2007, pp. 56–59.

82. C.N. Reeves, *The Complete Tutankhamun: The King, the Tomb, the Royal Treasure*, London 1990; M. Serpico and R. White, *Resins*, pp. 451-454.

83. *Amber in Egypt*, pp. 230-232.

84. *Antiquity* 69, 1995, 203.

85. *Amber in Egypt*, p. 231.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

87. C.F.A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica*, I, Paris 1939, pp. 99-100, fig. 95.

88. *Amber in Egypt*, p. 231.

89. A.J. Mukherjee *et al.*, “The Qatna Lion: Scientific Confirmation of Baltic Amber in Late Bronze Age Syria”, *Antiquity* 82, 2008, 49.

90. S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, pp. 230-235.

91. J.S. Mills and R. White, *The Organic Chemistry*, pp. 95-128.

92. A.J. Mukherjee *et al.*, *Antiquity* 82, 2008, 50.

For the Third Intermediate Period, one amber scarab has been found on a priest's mummy from the Deir el-Bahari cachette, and 15 irregular pebbles of a semi-translucent material that looks like proper amber were found in burials at Saqqara (21st-22nd Dynasties)⁹³. At Saqqara, in Lower Egypt, were found 6 necklaces of amber beads, according to Hood⁹⁴ – or resin beads, according to M. Goneim⁹⁵ – in graves (probably of northern mercenaries) assigned to the 19th Dynasty.

Under the Roman administration of Egypt amber suddenly became more available, as indicated by the finds from the burials at Tanis, Saft el-Henneh, Tell el-Yahudiyeh, Saqqara, and Qau⁹⁶.

According to Greek mythology, amber formed from the tears of a nymph as they dropped into the water, or from the tears that Apollo shed for his son Aesculapius. Heinrich Schliemann found amber beads in Troy, and in cupola tombs of Mycenaean culture built on Crete from ca. 1600 BCE. On the Greek mainland, amber is found at the very end of the Middle Helladic period. Hughes-Brock⁹⁷ emphasizes that in Mycenaean Greece (13th century BCE), specialized craftsmen (*re-di-na-to-mo*, 'resin-cutter') worked amber during the Late Helladic period. Imports to the Late Helladic period (LH I) mainland are restricted almost exclusively to the Mycenae shaft graves. Vermeule's inventory of exotic items in the shaft graves includes 'ostrich eggs from Nubia sent through Egypt and Crete, lapis lazuli from Mesopotamia, alabaster and faience from Crete, raw ivory from Syria, silver from Anatolia, and amber from Prussia brought down the Adriatic or out of Odessa across the north Aegean'⁹⁸. The elite of Mycenae had a predilection for amber. The shaft grave offerings include amber beads from the Baltic region⁹⁹. Mycenae was therefore in possession of a valuable commodity that was obtained through overland trade. Nevertheless, J. Maran¹⁰⁰ affirms that amber items found in several Early Mycenaean graves were not just prestige objects or jewelry; indeed, 'the main motive for equipping warriors with amber whether as a necklace, a shoulder belt, a sword bead or another form of a talisman, consisted in the wish to ensure its bearer the protection and assistance of supernatural powers'. Elaborating an idea of Susan Sherratt, Maran¹⁰¹ argues that by appropriating objects from 'all corners of the world', those who buried their dead in the shaft graves placed themselves in the wider cosmos, constructing what H. Whittaker¹⁰² called the 'Mycenaean warrior elite identity'.

Thousands of beads of glass, agate, carnelian, quartz, faience, ostrich eggshell, and amber were found at Uluburun (shipwreck, late 14th century BCE), near Kaş, on the south coast of Turkey¹⁰³. Several types of glass and faience beads were among the manufactured goods. Spherical glass and faience beads (ca.

93. M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 14, n. 117.

94. *Amber in Egypt*, p. 233.

95. *Excavations at Saqqara. Horus Sekhem-Khet: The Unfinished Step Pyramid at Saqqara*, Cairo 1957, pp. 6, 27-28, pl. LXXI.

96. M.J. Raven, *OMRO* 70, 1990, 15, nn. 128-132.

97. H. Hughes-Brock, *JBS* 16/3, 1985, 257-267.

98. E. Vermeule, *Greece in the Aegean Bronze Age*, Chicago 1964, p. 89.

99. Ch. Bachhuber, *Aspects of Late Helladic Sea Trade*, Texas 2004, pp. 5, 14; C. Renfrew, *The Emergence of Civilization*, pp. 467-468.

100. "Bright as the Sun: The Appropriation of Amber Objects in Mycenaean Greece", in H.P. Hahn and H. Weiss (eds.), *Mobility, Meaning, and the Transformations of Things*, Oxford 2013, 158.

101. *Bright as the Sun*, p. 159.

102. "Exotica in Early Mycenaean Burials as Evidence for the Self-representation of the Elite", in A. Vianello (ed.), *Exotica in the Prehistoric Mediterranean*, Oxford 2011, p. 144.

103. G.F. Bass, "Evidence of Trade from Bronze Age Shipwrecks", in N.H. Gale (ed.), *Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean*, Jonsesed 1991, pp. 69-82; C. Pulak, "The Bronze Age Shipwreck at Uluburun, Turkey: 1985 Campaign", *AJA* 92, 1988, 1-37.

70,000) were found among the copper ingots, suggesting that they were carried in perishable containers, such as cloth or leather bags, which have since disintegrated. Thousands of smaller beads (0.6-0.8 cm, 8,000 beads spherical and oblate in shape), including glass, faience, amber, rock crystal, agate, carnelian, bone, and ostrich eggshell, were found inside a Canaanite jar (KW 8) (32 cm; capacity 26,000 beads), indicating that they were intended for export and were carried as raw cargo. Many other types of faience and glass beads, as well as beads of agate, other stones, amber, and ostrich eggshell, may have been used for the personal adornment of those aboard the ship¹⁰⁴. More than forty beads of Baltic amber have been recovered from the Uluburun shipwreck¹⁰⁵. The amber beads can be interpreted within a context of ‘gift-exchange’ between royal elites, or of trade, or as the personal belongings of Mycenaean envoys onboard¹⁰⁶. The large cargo of the Uluburun ship indicates the concentrations of valuable items that moved by sea, and the complex interdependence of elites in different areas served by maritime trade¹⁰⁷.

In Syria, the last excavations at Qatna (Tell Mishrife) revealed that amber was imported during the Late Bronze Age and used for making the prestige artifacts found in a royal tomb of ca. 1340 BCE. The tomb contained 90 beads and a unique vessel in the form of a lion’s head, likely fashioned in Syria from raw amber imported from the Baltic via the Aegean¹⁰⁸. In Syria, amber beads have only been discovered in small numbers in private graves at Alalakh, Mari, and at the royal palace of Ugarit, where 14 beads were found together with ‘Mycenaean objects’¹⁰⁹. Except for the latter, these have neither been chemically analyzed nor discussed in detail, making their identification uncertain. According to Mukherjee *et al.*¹¹⁰ a reputed amber bead necklace and other alleged amber objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun¹¹¹, roughly contemporary with the latest phase of use of the Royal Tomb at Qatna, may hint at the high value that was attributed to amber in Egypt. Also, depictions of lion head vessels in Egyptian wall-paintings in the 18th Dynasty tombs of Useramun, Mencheperasonb, and Rekhmire in Thebes are similar to the Qatna piece. These vessels are shown among objects characteristic of Syrian and Aegean origin and are painted in yellow, indicating – as noted by Wachsmann¹¹² – that they were made of gold. Another similar vessel can be seen in a relief from Karnak depicting booty dedicated to Amun by Thutmose III after his Syrian campaigns. Although these depictions connect lion head vessels with both Syria and the Aegean, the style of the amber lion from Qatna suggests Syrian craftsmanship. Thus, Baltic amber was imported as a large raw piece and then carved by Syrian artisans. The Baltic amber reached Syria from the Aegean either through trade or as a result of gift-exchange between ruling elites¹¹³.

104. C. Pulak, “The Uluburun Shipwreck and Late Bronze Age Trade”, in J. Aruz, K. Benzel and J.M. Evans (eds.), *Beyond Babylon. Art, Trade, Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.*, New York 2008, p. 296.

105. C. Pulak, “The Uluburun Shipwreck: An Overview”, *IJNA* 27, 1998, 218; C. Bachhuber, *Late Helladic Sea Trade*, p. 204, table 9.

106. C. Pulak, “Who Were the Mycenaean aboard the Uluburun Ship?” *Aegaeum* 25, 2005, 295-312.

107. A. Sherratt and S. Sherratt, *From Luxuries to Commodities*, p. 373.

108. A.J. Mukherjee *et al.*, *Antiquity* 82, 2008, 52, fig. 2; M. Al-Maqdissi *et al.*, “Das königliche Hypogaeum von Qatna”, *MDOG* 135, 2003, 189–218.

109. A. Caubet, “The International Style: A Point of View from the Levant and Syria”, in E.H. Cline and D. Harris – Cline (eds.), *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium*, Liège 1998, p. 106.

110. *Antiquity* 82, 315 (2008) 55-56.

111. S. Hood, *Amber in Egypt*, pp. 230-232.

112. *Aegeans*, pp. 58-59, pl. LIII: 22.

113. A.J. Mukherjee *et al.*, *Antiquity* 82, 2008, 57.

6. Amber in cross-cultural perspective in the Eastern Mediterranean

In antiquity, as now, ‘jewelry was never just jewelry’¹¹⁴. Today, jewelers, artisans, and merchants make or sell religious symbols, good-luck charms, evil eyes, birthstones, mourning pins, and wedding rings. Jewelry can signal allegiance to another person, provide guidance, serve a talismanic function, or ward away danger. Today, in the West, most jewelry is made for the living; in other parts of the world, objects of adornment may be particular to the rituals of death and intended as permanent accompaniments for the deceased’s remains. Much jewelry, especially if figured, belongs to a phenomenology of images, and it functions in ritual ways. It is part of a social flow of information and can establish, modify, and comment on major social categories, such as age, sex, and status, since it has value, carries meaning, and suggests communication within groups, regions, and larger geographical areas¹¹⁵.

The symbolic role and the mysterious origin of amber added radiance to and increased the prestige of items made with or decorated by amber. Baltic amber was called the ‘Gold of the North’, and Egyptians described it as the ‘tears of the eye of Ra’ (the sun god). In Ancient Greek, the word *elektron* had two meanings: amber and electrum. It is known that gold and amber were solar substances, charged with cosmic power, throughout the antique world. Amber amulets worn by women may have conferred fertility, while amber weapons could be seen as symbols of power, immortality, and virility.

Most previous research focuses on the function of amber objects as jewelry – exotic or prestige items, worn by members of elites – and thus gives a misleading account of the role of amber in Central Europe and the Mediterranean basin. A complex analysis of ancient texts and archaeological finds in the framework of cross-cultural discourse may elicit the meaning behind possessing (wearing), giving (gift-giving), and offering (funerary and votive amulets) raw or worked amber in antiquity. Through their actions and discourse, people constantly shape and change the meaning of an object¹¹⁶. In the end, we just have to interpret, according to each discourse and culture, the legacy of our ancestors and rediscover their messages through a ‘magic’ stone –which in this case was not a stone, but a fossilized tree resin that just looks like a golden gem– reflecting the sun rays or its tears.

114. Causey, *Jewelry*, p. 15.

115. Causey, *Jewelry*, pp. 15-20.

116. J. Maran, *Bright as the Sun*, p. 161.