

Evaluation report on the doctoral thesis of **Mateusz Cwaliński** entitled  
***Circum-Adriatic Branch of the Amber Route in the Bronze Age***

(Supervisor: Professor Janusz Czebreszuk, PhD)

Member of the dissertation evaluation committee/Reviewer: Assoc. prof. Martina Blečić  
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At the regular session of the Scientific Council of the Discipline of Archeology held on 05/01/2021 at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, I was appointed to the committee for the evaluation of the dissertation of Mateusz Cwaliński MA entitled *Circum-Adriatic Branch of the Amber Route in the Bronze Age*.

The original contributions of Mateusz Cwaliński's dissertation, entitled *Circum-Adriatic Branch of the Amber Route in the Bronze Age*, relate primarily to the scientific field of archaeology, i.e. prehistoric archaeology and archaeological science. This is clearly visible in the submitted PhD thesis which is an important contribution to the development of archaeology and research on this topic in general.

The dissertation presents a comprehensive analysis of a specific Bronze Age archaeological material in a vast area ranging from Italy and the Alps in the west to south-eastern Europe, focusing on archaeological finds interpreted as results of cultural transmission in trans-Adriatic contacts. The primary material discussed in the thesis is material culture made of amber, i.e. fossil resin of different origins, which for the first time in history was globally distributed throughout Europe precisely during the Bronze Age. It is therefore preserved in various museums on both sides of the Adriatic, as one of the important indicators of the status and prestige of prehistoric communities and their individuals at that time. Relatively

good publication of the material by scholars in the area of south-eastern Europe (e.g. A. Palavestra, M. Blečić Kavur) and, to a considerable extent, in the territory of Italy (e.g. N. Negroni Catachio, M. Cultraro, P. Bellintani, G. Recchia), has made it possible to take a holistic approach to determine the authenticity, significance, status and impact of this type of very specific material culture in general. In doing so, the author has drawn on a wealth of contemporary literature (e.g. J. Czebreszuk, T. Earle, H. P. Hahn, R. Jung, C. Knappett, K. Kristiansen, R. Oka, M. Pacciarelli etc.), which, based on existing material as well as test models and from different perspectives, has sought to interpret amber – from its provenance to spatial distribution, chronology, meaning and symbolic status in the transfers and transmissions that took place in the discussed area and in different periods during the "long" Bronze Age. In fact, in this regard are important closed archaeological contexts, especially hoards and funerary practices, since they reveal much about the economy of individual communities, social structures, lineages, identity, kinship and other indicators of status and/or rank, which was again and again emphasised with amber. However, whether funerary practices and particular material culture can give an accurate picture of a society, its stratification and all its complexity, has long been one of the central themes in contemporary archaeological discussions (e.g. R. Joyce, J. Robb, M. Parker Pearson, J. Chapman).

The title *Circum-Adriatic Branch of the Amber Route in the Bronze Age* corresponds with detailed objectives, methodology and argumentation presented in the doctoral thesis. It demonstrates the geographical delimitation of the research area, which covers a vast territory from the Alps, Italy and Sicily to the eastern Adriatic coast, southern Pannonia to the western and central Balkans. It features a comprehensive and most precise presentation and analysis of the selected archaeological material. The dissertation is composed in a way that it logically builds up the argumentation – at the beginning the basic concepts of trade and economy, used in the discussion are introduced, followed by the presentation of meaning and character of amber in archaeology and the wider perspective of history of research focusing especially on the long-distance trade with amber. The text continues with

a detailed archaeological presentation of amber finds within the discussed regions in the Bronze Age – including the presentations of contexts of discovery, chronology and cultural attribution of known amber finds. The main contributions of the dissertation are a proposed typological division of amber finds and a detailed analysis of the material culture in typological-stylistic, chronological, contextual and status-symbolic aspects. The discussion concludes with interpretations in a macro perspective discussing amber in the Bronze Age from Northern Europe to the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. The work of Mateusz Cwaliński is certainly a modern and systematic study of amber artefacts in this vast and very important area during the Bronze Age. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, combining research approaches derived from archaeology, economic history, chemistry, anthropology, etc., this thesis presents an original contribution to our understanding of amber in archaeology and the Bronze Age in universal.

The dissertation consists of several substantive sections. The Introduction, explaining the theoretical background, used methodology, aims and perspectives of the work and the amber as a raw material in archaeological science. The importance of amber and the history of research (pp. 7-69), is followed by the definition and presentation of characteristics of the field of research included in to the present PhD study. It features topographical information, distribution maps, chronological and cultural presentation of sites in each geographical region, presentation of the provenance of amber itself from the contexts collected, and an assessment of the spatial and temporal dynamics of the flow of amber into the Adriatic periphery (pp. 70-260). This is followed by the core of the dissertation with a detailed analysis of amber objects in a syntax following from typology to networks (pp. 261-426) consisting form a series of more extensive and related chapters. The next chapters discussing the material and symbolic status of amber in Bronze Age communities of the Adriatic periphery (pp. 427-498) and an interpretation of amber in the macro perspective of the area and its broader relationship to neighbouring regions (pp. 499-549). The dissertation concludes with a general Recapitulation (pp. 550-555) and Bibliography (pp. 556-619). The number of graphic appendices is impressive – it presents 156 images



illustrating the described material and its spatial distribution. It therefore transparently and argumentatively well supported documents the occurrence of selected items on the territory between Italy, from the Alps to Sicily, and the Adriatic, the western and central Balkans, eastwards as far as Aegean and the Mediterranean.

The final goal of the thesis is the reconstruction of networks, distribution and connections that can be traced in the case of amber objects, and consequently the interpretation of their material and symbolic status in the societies of such a heterogeneous (geographically and culturally) territory. It is analysed in detail in the three concluding chapters, where the possible origins of the material and the status and role of amber in these societies are discussed on several levels – from the perspective of history of archaeology and specialist research on amber, and from the standpoint of new perspectives and possibilities, which the author presents in a very convincing and well-argued manner. Particularly important is the extensive analytical section on the issues of the many possibilities of mobility and the dynamics of amber circulation, which is identified as one of the most important conditions for wider interaction. Undoubtedly, and on the basis of contemporary archaeological interpretative studies, the systematic analysis and discussion show that amber, in its various stylistic, i.e. morphological-typological forms, and cultural contexts, played, like other objects of status, luxury and prestige (precious metals, glass, bone, etc.), a key role in the establishment of new norms and practices of extremely heterogeneous, at the same time highly interconnected, social structures.

As the prehistory of the wider Adriatic basin has been the focus of intensive research over the last 150 years, Mateusz Cwaliński was well supported to provide an overview of the context and chronology of the individual amber objects. Another major contribution of his work is the direct access to both available sources for the discussion – to the archaeological material itself and to the literature. Of major importance is his detailed knowledge of the literature published in Italian and in Slavic languages – an additional value rarely present in numerous archaeological discussions.

On this basis, he was able to present a detailed account of a wide range of archaeological materials – metal, glass, bone and ceramic items, which, in the Bronze Age, shaped from generation to generation the characteristics of costume, fashion, tradition and culture in the broadest sense of the word. Here, the focus is on 9 typological groups of amber beads/pearls presented and discussed in specific, absolutely dated archaeological contexts and spatial dynamics, i.e. their distribution, which reflects the identity of this area. Not only amber beads and amber ornaments, but also other decorative items such as some pins, bracelets, and other jewellery and costume items made of bronze, precious metals, glass or bone create both an image of a costume and an indication of the different wealth and status conditions of the individuals. With a sound background of prior studies, the candidate was able to tackle a challenging task – for some of the items under consideration; the distributions presented clearly show that they are imports that came to these Adriatic communities.

After a long period of identifying archaeological artefacts and classifying them into specific periods, since the 1970s researchers have devoted themselves to an all-around investigation of the social conditions of even the “silent” Bronze Age communities in Europe. New theoretical directions and approaches have been used to place the role of previously somewhat neglected social groups such as women and children in a new archaeological-anthropological context (e.g. M. L. Stig Sørensen, B. Arnold, K. Rebay-Salisbury). At the theoretical level, the present dissertation is based on a methodology that allows for an interdisciplinary and integrated study of the material culture targeted, in order to shed the best possible light on the role of the magical and “God-given” amber in prehistoric society, in a period that is already quite well known, both through material and literary works, in the eastern periphery of the Mediterranean.

The thesis uses standard archaeological methods suitable for the identification, classification and interpretation of material culture, modern technologies for the analysis of amber and its possible different interpretive models. In this sense, the third chapter

entitled *From typology to networks: amber finds analysis*, is the most important because it is also the most comprehensive part of the scientific work and presents a systematic typological and cultural-chronological classification and detailed interpretation of the processed archaeological material. Thus, by combining the traditional tools of the archaeological discipline with a modern methodological and theoretical approach to the use, distribution, status and symbol of amber, and analyses of gender and mobility archaeology, Mateusz Cwaliński has succeeded in producing work in the spirit of the times, in which Central European archaeology is increasingly focusing on the contextual analysis of the archaeological record. Accordingly, the literature also includes both relevant and state-of-the-art literature on the Bronze Age between Italy and the Central Balkans, as well as on the theory of archaeology, anthropology and archaeological science. With its clarity and abundance, it demonstrates the quality of the candidate's scholarly discussion of the problem and the area.

In the Conclusion of the thesis, there are several important new information for understanding the heterogeneous prehistoric European and Mediterranean communities of the time. At this point, however, it is necessary to highlight the pioneering work of Aleksandar Palavestra, who has also repeatedly tackled the interpretation of West-Central Balkan communities, in particular the grave inventories and their significance in the interpretation of amber objects. It was these that led Mateusz Cwaliński to be able to raise a wide range of questions and present answers on status and age differences, on traces of different forms of dynamics and business of the time. In cases of numerous jewellery items, focusing on their form and production, he was able to determine their areas of origin and the fashion trends of the wider area. This is what makes the conclusions of this dissertation a particularly valuable contribution to the further analysis and valorisation of one of the most important raw materials of the Bronze Age, whose data, archaeological items and their contexts have not been exhausted even 150 years after their discoveries. The dissertation also represents an innovative contribution to the application of modern theories to the analysis of prehistoric archaeology in the area of South-Eastern Europe.



The scientific contribution of the thesis is certainly a trans-regional perspective on the contextual view of amber trade/distribution and various amber items (mainly attire and jewellery) in the wider region of the Adriatic area. The extensive interdisciplinary analysis of the finds, the proposed models of the distribution of artefacts and the derived connections are a modern and important contribution of the thesis by Mateusz Cwaliński to archaeological knowledge in the region and in Europe. It is the first such comprehensive study for the period of the "First Golden Age of Europe".

The doctoral dissertation is written in the prescribed format and an excellent English language. By using specialised terminology, supplemented by the search for appropriate translations of the terms, it thus integrates and complements the specialist terminology within the discipline of archaeology in general. At the same time, the author has created another essential result and that is the unification, i.e. the integration of the different terminological and linguistic fields of this heterogeneous area in a universal English language, which will undoubtedly facilitate the understanding of the subject and the field in the future scientific discourse. Finally, the dissertation undoubtedly represents a new milestone in understanding both the millennial history of amber, as an exotic and luxurious material characteristic not only in the space limited in the present dissertation. It is addressing its meaning and interpretation in the whole of Europe, when for the first time in the history of humankind this vast area was globally and transparently connected and culturally and ideologically unique in all its many diversities.

Based on the manuscript of the submitted doctoral dissertation and the positive evaluation written above, I propose that the Scientific Council of the Discipline of Archeology at the University of Adam Mickiewicz, Poznań, following the procedures of postgraduate studies, allow Mateusz Cwaliński to publicly defend his doctoral dissertation *Circum-Adriatic Branch of the Amber Route in the Bronze Age*, and thus to obtain the degree of Doctor of Science. It is a work of scientific excellence, which, for the reasons and arguments given above, should be awarded the highest possible grade and a distinction.

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