



International Amber Association

Baltic Amber



BURSZTYN BAŁTYCKI, SUCCINUM, ELEKTRON, AMBER, BERNSTEIN, AMBRA,
JANTAR, RAV, GINTARAS, НАЛЕКТРОН, ЯНТАРЬ, ÁMBAR, AMBRE, BÄRNSTEN,
КЕНРІВАР, БУРШТИН, BOROSTYÁN, SUKSENO, ÁMBAR, MERIPINKA, СІНІЛІМВАР,
ЇИЛИВАР, КЕХРІМПАРІ, コハク, 琥珀, 호박

According to ancient Greek myth, amber was the tears shed into the River Eridanus by the Heliades grieving after the death of their brother Phaëthon, who was thrown into the river by an angry Zeus after the boy's joyride across the sky on his father's golden chariot. The Chinese believed that amber was the soul of a tiger which had died and passed into the earth transforming into pieces of amber. Amber was supposed to give its wearer access to the tiger's courage. Amber was a stone sacred to the Viking goddess Freya. When she could not find her husband Odin, she wept. When her tears fell on rock, they turned to gold. When they fell into the sea, they turned into amber. For Native Americans, the Slavic people of Northern Europe, and in Neolithic times, amber was a sacred symbol of the sun. To early Christians, amber signified the presence of the Lord.



**Jewellery by Paweł Kaczyński
Grand Prix Mercurius Gedanensis, Amberif 2008**

"There came a man, to my father's house with a necklace of gold, and with amber beads was it strung between. This the maidens in the hall and my honoured mother were handling, and were gazing on it, and were offering him their price."

Homer, *Odyssey*, 8th century BC



Medallion with a depiction of the adoration of the Shepherds in relief,

Christoph Maucher Gdańsk, ca.1690.

From the collection of the Amber Museum in Gdańsk



Thor's hammer,

Gdańská 10th-12th century, from the collection of Archeological Museum in Gdańsk



Amber ring from a workshop in Aquileia,

Roman period, 1st century AD from the collection of Archeological Museum in Sopron, Hungary



Neolithic solar amulet,

Vistula Spit, ca. 2500-2200 BC from the collection of Malbork Castle Museum

Baltic amber owes its exceptional charm to its fascinating history spanning the period from the times when it was sticky resin dripping in the Tertiary forest at least 40 million years ago to the point when it was found as a small solid nugget on the Baltic beach.

Ambler-yielding forests grew in the area of what is now northern Europe. Bulky pieces of Baltic amber that weigh even more than 3 kg, as well as beautiful drops which sometimes are so small as if they wanted to convince one that they really are the tears of mythological Heliades are evidence that Tertiary trees were large and produced great amounts of resin. They were coniferous trees from the family Pinaceae, resembling such species as today's *Cedrus* (cedar from the Atlas Mountains) and *Larix* (larch).



Inclusion: a feather from the collection of Amber Museum in Gdańsk

Baltic amber has been believed to have medicinal and therapeutic powers since time immemorial. The first records of its beneficial properties can be found in descriptions by Pliny the Elder and Hippocrates. The light and warm gemstone gives off a pleasant scent when warmed in the hands and a resinous smell when burnt; it picks up static when rubbed and attracts shreds of paper. For centuries amber was deemed to be one of the most important medicaments.



Amber Tincture

Today we know that Baltic amber contains from 3 to 8% amber acid. Scientific tests have proven its beneficial effect on living organisms. Amber is electronegative; therefore, when it comes in contact with the body, it ionises it in a beneficial way, improving the body's energy and electrolyte balance. Amber has anti-bacterial and antiseptic properties; an amber tincture serves to strengthen the body's natural immunity, helps to mitigate cold symptoms, fever as well as rheumatic and muscle pain. Amber teething rings and necklaces are given to infants to ease their pain. Amber and its derivatives are among the ingredients used in some contemporary medicines and cosmetics.

Dictionaries of folk names given to these varieties quote about 100 names describing transparent, translucent and opaque amber with a multitude of hues of yellow, red, brown, beige and white, as well as bluish and greenish tints, which sometimes create unique mosaics. There are clear pieces and pieces filled with minute particles of vegetable substance that make delicate filigree patterns one would not be able to repeat, all of which fill amber lovers with wonder.



**Bracelet "Astronomical objects" by Andrzej Adamski,
Main Prize in The Jewel of Polish Jewellery 2009**

The most extensive deposits of Baltic amber in Eocene blue earth occur in the Sambian Peninsula and by the Bay of Gdańsk. As no other kind of amber in the world, Baltic amber is marked by a great wealth of varieties, resulting from its diverse internal structure, inclusions and degree of weathering.



Amber Fisher on a Baltic coast in Gdańsk, Poland

Natural Baltic amber, mixed variety



Apart from Baltic amber (succinite), there are over 100 other kinds of fossil resins in the world. The oldest ones are found in rocks dating back to the Triassic Period (230 million years ago), while insects which lived at the times of the dinosaurs can be found in Cretaceous resins from ca. 120 million years ago.



Modified Baltic Amber (cognac colour with scales)

In jewellery not only the natural beauty of amber is used. Just like some other coloured stones, amber is sometimes subject to thermal processing. In stoves and autoclaves contemporary jewellers can obtain transparency, cognac colour and air bubbles so-called “scales”.

The Classification of Baltic Amber (succinite) Gemstones

The International Amber Association has developed the following classification of amber gemstones, which it uses in relation to the companies it recommends.

Natural Baltic amber (Succinite) – gemstone which has undergone mechanical treatment only (for instance: grinding, cutting, turning or polishing) without any change to its natural properties.

Modified Baltic amber (Succinite) – gemstone subjected only to thermal or high-pressure treatment, which changed its physical properties, including the degree of transparency and colour, or **shaped** under similar conditions out of one nugget, previously cut to the required size.

Reconstructed (pressed) Baltic amber (Succinite) – gemstone made of Baltic amber pieces pressed in high temperature and under high pressure without additional components.

Bonded Baltic amber (Succinite) (doublet, triplet) – gemstone consisting of two or more parts of natural, modified or reconstructed Baltic amber bonded together with the use of the smallest possible amount of a binding agent necessary to join the pieces.

International jewellery and gemmology organisations recommend providing customers with exhaustive information on the gemstone modifications applied.

The classification of Baltic amber gemstones was adopted by the Board of the International Amber Association on December 2011, 1999, as amended. Last amended on December 02, 2011, unified text.

Apart from Baltic amber, we can find other fossil resins in jewellery and objects d'art, including rumenite, symetite, burmite, Dominican and Mexican amber. Even though all of them are amber, they should be clearly labelled because they differ significantly in age, properties, hardness and their usefulness for jewellery. It has become established to designate amber based on its country or region of origin.

Contemporary resins, called sub-fossil resins or copal, are anywhere from several hundred thousand to a few million years old and are still too young to be called amber. In geological terms, a million years is but a fleeting moment and so the inclusions contained in these young resins are species of contemporary plants and animals. Sculptures and jewellery made from these sub-fossil resins quickly lose their smooth surfaces, and if not clearly marked as such, are marketed as Baltic amber fakes.



Ring by Monika Reptowska, Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk

The Map of Ancient Amber Routes



----- The route of Roman amber traders in 63 AD

----- Ancient trade in Neolithic Age continued in next centuries

Baltic amber has been used as material for ornaments already since Palaeolithic times. It appeared in ancient Mediterranean cultures from Mycenae to Egypt, the lands of the Etruscan Civilisation and Phoenician cities, in time reaching almost all the corners of the globe.



**Artefact probably from a workshop in Aquileia,
Roman period 2nd century AD (National Museum in Krakow)**

Amber was a gemstone especially valued in Ancient Greece and Rome, and in Arabian countries, which is proven by many written records and archaeological finds. Amber was known in many Asian cultures. Within a few thousand years it became a legendary and most popular amulet and decorative stone.

Baltic amber is not only a jewellery stone, but also a witness of life dating back to at least 40 million years ago. Inclusions in the form of small animals and fragments of plants are an excellent research material for palaeontologists and the subject of interest of hobbyists and collectors. Some inclusions, which have retained their three-dimensional form, can be examined as carefully as contemporary living specimens.

**„Oh, little fly, if only you could talk,
how different our knowledge of the past would be.”**

Immanuel Kant, 18th century AD



**Beetle (6 mm) from the family of Longhorn beetles
(Cerambycidae)**

Today, just like ages ago, amber is one of the most highly valued and fashionable ornamental stones in the world. Artistic amber works used to decorate royal chambers. Impressive cabinets, chests, chandeliers and reliquaries made in Gdańsk would be sent abroad as gifts to the courts of magnates and wealthy nobility.



**Cabinet, J.G. Zarenbach, Gdańsk 1724,
from the collection of Amber Museum in Gdańsk**



**Millenium Amber Faberge Egg - Victor Mayer GmbH & Co.
from the collection of Amber Museum in Gdańsk**

Today, the unparalleled variety and beauty of amber colours and its beneficial influence on our health and well-being makes amber jewellery more and more often worn with casual clothes, while its more luxury and extravagant versions are used as ornaments for special occasions.



**Jewellery by Marek Mikicki Design,
Grand Prix Mercurius Gedanensis, Amberif 2009**

Many outstanding designers work in amber. It is also a favourite material for artists creating unique works of art. Amber is set in gold and silver, often in combination with other precious stones including diamonds.

Unfortunately, the rising prices and popularity of amber goods stimulate the production of fake amber, which is continuously improved and manufactured in ever-increasing quantities. Only infrared absorption spectroscopy may reliably check whether a given piece of Baltic amber is real. Therefore, customers may be sure they are buying genuine amber goods only when shopping at recognised companies which bear the appropriate certificates. The International Amber Association, based in Gdańsk, the World Capital of Amber, grants such certificates to companies of unblemished reputation, which use the classification developed by the Association and cover their production with expert supervision.



Certificate of a Company Recommended by IAA



International Amber Association

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Amber Museum in Gdańsk www.mhmg.pl

Museum of Amber Inclusions in University of Gdansk www.muzeum.gda.pl

Gdansk International Fair www.mtgsa.com.pl

Polish Jewellery www.pb.info.pl

Archeological Museum in Gdańsk www.archeologia.pl

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