

The qualities of the amber

When a tree is wounded, resin will seep from the wound: a thick, sticky substance which will protect the tree. Over a period of at least 20 million years resin will turn into amber under certain circumstances during a process which will change the sap and reduce the oil content.

The physical and chemical properties differ from piece to piece – even inside one and the same piece. Unlike most precious stones it does not consist of crystals, but it has an amorphous (shapeless) construction like e.g. glass. Chemically amber consists of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and sulphur, which causes the yellow colour. Other colours normally originate from organic pollution.

Amber is called a semiprecious stone

Geologists define stones as loose rock fragments. This definition does not conform to amber.

Precious stones: Stones of organic or inorganic origin, which can be used for jewellery. Stones with a hardness of 8 or more (according to Moh's scale), e.g. diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires are precious stones, while other stones with a lower degree of hardness are considered semiprecious stones.

Still, amber is considered to be a precious stone – or at least a semiprecious stone. Most precious stones are of inorganic origin. Only amber, mother-of-pearl, pearls, coral, ivory, jet (a kind of carbon jet), tortoiseshells and ivory are of organic origin.

Amber in the Baltic area

The coastlines of Denmark, the North Sea coasts of Germany and the southern Baltic constitute the land of amber, and the sea is its treasury.

In the Baltic countries there are large layers of amber. However, on the beaches of Germany, Poland, Scania and the other beaches of Denmark you can find amber. Smaller deposits are found in Halland and Blekinge, but the real coast of amber is that of Samland (a peninsula at Kaliningrad) and the surrounding seas, Kurisches Haff and Frisches Haff.

Amber on the island of Møn

Amber is unpredictable. We have not yet come to understand the forces of nature which transport and lay open amber. Until recently it looked as if no amber was left on Møn. The situation has changed, however, and amber seems on its way back. Some people believe that the construction of the new bridge crossing the Sound is to blame for these changes.

Moreover, if the wind is south-westerly turning to westerly, the conditions of finding amber are especially favourable on South Møn.

Amber on the island of Femern

On the island of Femern it has become rare to find amber. There are, however, good chances of finding some on the northern and eastern coasts of Femern and in the area at the slopes of Katharinenhof.



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Worldwide, amber has been found in about 200 places. It is of various quality, origin and age as well as of composition and property.

The oldest amber is about 231 million years old and has been found in Austria and Bavaria. The Baltic amber – **succinit** – was made by Tertiary trees about 30-50 million years ago. At that time Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea were part of a mountainous continent where deciduous and coniferous trees grew.

Cretaceous amber, created 145-65 million years ago, is also known from the cliff of Møn. The oldest findings in Denmark are those on the island of Bornholm, which are considered to be 170 million years old.

Succinit is especially deposited in "blue earth" where it is won from open beds and mines. The largest piece of amber weighs 9.750 kilos and was found in 1860 near Szczecin in Poland.

The amber is won in areas bordering on the south-easterly Baltic Sea. The same type of amber is found on the beach of Southern Scania and along most of the Danish coasts – especially along the western coast of Jutland, however. The amber found in other well-known areas like Bitterfeld in Germany, in Poland and Ukraine as well as the amber found at the English and Dutch coasts is succinit, too.

Visit the exhibition "Amber - the baltic gold", which is a cooperation between the following partners and shown both on the the isles of Møn and Fehmarn.

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AMBER

- the baltic gold





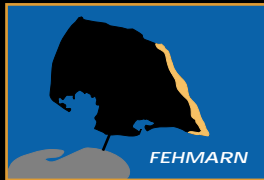
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MØN



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LATE GLACIAL (The Palaeolithic) The Hunter Stone Age	THE EARLY STONE AGE (The Mesolithic) The Agricultural Stone Age	THE BRONZE AGE	THE IRON AGE	THE VIKING PERIOD	THE MIDDLEAGES	HISTORICAL TIMES
9000 – 4000 B.C.	4000 – 1800 B.C.	1800 – 500 B.C.	500 B.C. – 750 A.D.	750 – 1050 A.D.	1050 – 1500 A.D.	1500 – until today
The amber of the Hunter Stone Age was made into pendants or small figures, and it is exclusively found in the Maglemose Civilisation (8800-6800 B.C.).	The amber of this period indicates cultural contacts across the Baltic and has no doubt been an important article of commerce.	The In other respects rich, Nordic Bronze Age is, strange as it may seem, remarkably poor in amber. Did they export all amber to e.g. the East Mediterranean?	Now, amber was not exclusively an article of commerce with the Roman Empire; it also was part of local jewellery processing.	At the beginning of the Viking Period we meet the Northern amber grinder in his workshop. Through the following centuries we can see the small, but refined works formed by his hand.	In the 13th century the German Order of Chivalry got a monopoly of the collection and the trade in amber. It was a capital defence to break this law. The monopoly was administrated by the German Hanse.	After the Reformation the amber grinders were hired by the princes. Frederik of Prussia had an entire room covered with amber to give it to Peter, the Czar of Russia.

A large number of things symbolize Denmark and being Danish. Amber is one of them. Amber is no exceptionally Danish phenomenon, however, it is found in several places around the world, and the amber found at the Danish coasts is found in much larger quantities at the east coast of the Baltic States - the former Prussia. Nevertheless you should consider amber to be of special importance to Denmark, as it has been important to our development all through the history of civilization.

The culture history of the amber.

The gold of the North, the gold of the sea, stiffened light, fossilized honey and the tears of Freja are only a few of the many poetic and imaginative names attached to amber. Freja, the goddess, and her part in the naming can be traced to the Old Norse myth: the penitent and crying Freja is looking for her husband, to whom she has been unfaithful. The tears falling on the ground turned into gold, and the tears falling into the sea turned into amber.

Even in Antiquity, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Plinius the Elder (23-79 A.C.) and Tacitus (55-120 A.C.) assumed that amber came from the trees. Olaus Magnus (1490-1557), the Swedish priest, was of the same opinion. He considers it a fact that the resin from the fir and pine trees turn into hard stone-like objects after having spent a long time in the sea. Agricola, the German mineralogist (1490-1555), rejected the antique theories, however, saying, "Amber is in the sea, and no trees grow in the sea".

During the next centuries many different theories about the origin of amber were introduced. But it was not until 1811 that the truth was proved by a scientist in Gdansk.

In Sweden amber is called *bärnsten*. Bärn is derived from the Low German words *bernen* or *bornen*, which mean burn or shine. Earlier words were *gles*, *glis*, *glys* or *glas*. The word is in the Danish place name Glesborg and has its origin in the German *glessum* and the Latin *glesum*, which means amber. Moreover amber means brown or chestnut. The word is part of the Jutland place names Raved and Ravsted and some Scanian.

In Greek amber is called *electron* (from *elector* = luminous) which leads us to the word electricity. Thales, the philosopher, demonstrated electricity by rubbing a piece of amber against a piece of fabric, after which it was able to attract light objects.

Another Greek word for amber was *harpaks* meaning something like a miser or an affected person. The original Roman word for amber was *succinium*. In French – very much like in English - amber is called *ambre*.

The name of the immortality drink consumed by the Greek gods was ambrosia and was related to *ambra*. The large number of amber finds from Antiquity in the form of charms may demonstrate that amber was considered more than just a piece of jewellery, maybe a sign of immortality – a ticket to "life" in the land of the dead.

