Mobility, Meaning and the Transformations of Things

edited by

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Contents

Preface

Movements of things mark the relevance of material culture in shaping identities and negotiating cultural relations. Things move close to people, they recede or they create connections between people. With every shift, they change their role and meaning. People expend a great deal of energy and resources to bring things closer to them, but also to get rid of them. In some contexts, the value of an object is determined by the journey it has made before coming within one's reach. This book addresses a wide range of movements of things and the corresponding shifts in their valuation. It intends thereby to overcome the perception of objects as static and unchanging. It focuses on how the objects change through movements in time, space or social spheres.

Combining approaches from archaeology and social anthropology, this book amasses evidence of the variability of things in relation to their mobility. Avoiding the pitfalls of overemphasizing the agency of things, the different contributions reflect on the adequate metaphor to capture the transformations of things though their mobility, as well as the transformation of people through the acquisition and appropriation of things. All of the contributions share the assumption that a closer examination of the shifts of meanings, time and materiality, grants a deeper understanding of objects themselves.

The contributions to this book are based on presentations and discussions at a conference, held in October 2011, entitled 'Itineraries of the Material: Shifting Contexts of Value and Things in Time and Space' at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. The event was part of the scientific program of the Research Training Group 'Value and Equivalence' (GRK 1576). The publication of this book and the conference proceedings were supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). We would like to express our gratitude to Robert Parkin and Björn Schipper for helping with the editing process. We also want to thank the anonymous referees whose close readings and trenchant advice have contributed substantially to the quality of the texts in this volume. Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to all of the contributors to this publication.

The conference and this book bring together some accomplished and experienced researchers in the field of material culture and object biographies with the doctoral students of the Research Training Group that organized the event. We are pleased to have found common ground for a fruitful discussion, and to have established a high standard for communicating the range of studies and perspectives. The book presents the most compelling insights achieved through the conference, and we expect it to be an important contribution to the study of material culture.

Hans Peter Hahn
Hadas Weiss

Chapter 11

Bright as the sun: The appropriation of amber objects in Mycenaean Greece

Joseph Maran

Introduction

The archaeological treatment of intersocietal exchange has suffered from the diffusionist legacy of directing attention to the reconstruction of abstract flows of cultural traits, while neglecting changes in meaning brought about by the agency of the social actors who integrated such traits into local contexts (Spittler 2002; Hahn 2004, 213–225; 2008, 195–200; 2012, 29–38). As a consequence, research has condemned objects of foreign derivation to remain foreign, irrespective of the meaning attached to them in a new cultural environment. It is only recently that awareness has increased in archaeology of the need to study the re-contextualization of foreign cultural traits through acts of appropriation (cf. Cline 2005). This focus, however, requires a methodological approach that combines the macro-contextual framework of the social imaginaries of a society with a micro-contextual analysis using find associations to infer past patterns of practice (Maran 2011, 283–284; 2012a, 62–64). This has to go along with a shift of perspective towards what Bruno Latour (1986, 266–269; 1993 [1991], 10–11) has called *translation*, that is, negotiation of the meanings of cultural traits received from the outside through their integration into social practice and discourses within constantly re-assembled networks comprising human and non-human actants. Due to this fluidity of meaning, generalizing designations as *exotic* or *prestige* objects should be avoided because they suggest a semantic stability which cannot be taken for granted.

Of all foreign substances appearing in Mycenaean Greece, amber is distinctive not only because of its arrival from extremely distant lands, but also because of its extraordinary inherent properties (Ganzelewski 1996; Barfod 1996, 453). Amber has a special shine and is translucent, it has a much warmer feel than other stones, it floats on water, it can be burned, giving off an aromatic scent, and when it is rubbed with cloth it becomes electrostatically charged, which is why, in the early modern period, *electricity* was named after *elektron*, the Greek word for amber. The root of this word must have referred to the capacity of an object to shine (Geerlings 1996, 395), which partially accounts for the strange fact that in Classical Greece it was used for amber as well as a specific kind of gold (Geerlings 1996; see also Hughes-Brock 1985, 260; 1993, 223–224; Bouzek 1993, 141; Whittaker 2011, 142–143).

Amber in Early Mycenaean Greece: Distribution, origin and chronological interrelations

In Greece, amber objects first make their appearance in the seventeenth or sixteenth centuries BCE at the very beginning of the Mycenaean period. While from find contexts dating to MH III only a single amber object is known, namely a bead from Shaft Grave Iota of Grave Circle B (Mylonas 1972/1973, 112; for a chronological assessment of the grave context with further literature, see Maran 2004, 48 with footnote 3), the LH I phase has yielded around 1,560 amber objects and the ensuing LH IIA sub-phase around 630 (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 147–149). These seemingly impressive figures need to be qualified, though: first, because we are dealing with rather small items, mostly beads; and secondly, because the distribution in Greece is highly uneven. In LH I almost all of the numerous amber objects derive from a few of the richest shaft graves of Mycenae, while of the 630 objects dating to LH IIA around 500 alone were found in Tholos Tomb A of Kakovatos in the Western Peloponnese.

Based on the results of scientific analyses, Heinrich Schliemann already had to assume that the amber objects in the shaft graves consist of Baltic amber (Helm 1886; for a critical assessment of Otto Helm's results, see Beck 1966, 191–197). Only much later did it become evident that the amber objects had not reached Greece from the Baltic, but, mostly as finished products, from the area of the Wessex culture of southern England. The crucial evidence for this is provided by rectangular amber spacer plates with a particular complex-bored pattern (Sandars 1959, 293) that only appear in funerary contexts in three regions of Europe, namely the Wessex culture, the Tumulus Burial culture in Central Europe and the Early Mycenaean culture in the Peloponnese (Milojčić 1955; Hachmann 1957; Gerloff 1975, 215–222; 1993, 74–80; 2010, 628–630; du Gardin 2003; Verschueren 2009/2010, 24–25, 124–125). The transmission of amber objects from the Wessex culture to Greece during the LH I phase predates the earliest appearance of components of amber necklaces, including spacer plates, in graves of the Tumulus Burial culture. Thus, in the latter culture the first grave contexts with such objects date to the Reinecke Bz B2 sub-phase, which cannot have started earlier than roughly 1500 BCE.[1] Prior to that, occasional finds of probable Wessex origin in settlements like Koblach-Kadel, Zürich-Mozartstraße and the Padnal[2] attest to a circulation of amber objects during the advanced stage of the younger Early Bronze Age (Reinecke Bz A2c) and the incipient Middle Bronze Age (Reinecke Bz B1). At that time, however, such amber components do not yet seem to have been deposited in graves. It is this period of transition between the central European Early and Middle Bronze Age, in which the main transfer of Wessex amber components to Early Mycenaean Greece seems to have taken place (Gerloff 1993; 2010, 628; Maran 2004, 51 with footnote 8; Stahl 2006, 140–148; for the absolute dating of the Wessex culture, see Needham *et al*. 2010).

There is an amazing similarity between the shaft grave period and the Wessex culture not only in the amber items as such and their close association with gold (Whittaker 2011), but also in the social contexts of the appearance of amber jewellery. As Steven Shennan (1982, 38; 1993, 59–61) has pointed out, while in the Early Bronze Age in the British Isles amber is by no means confined to elite tombs, special forms like crescentic amber necklaces with spacer plates and trapezoid end-pieces remain restricted to the

richest Wessex burials (see also Beck and Shennan 1991, 77–98, 133–137). This exactly corresponds to the find situation of amber jewellery with spacer plates in the Early Mycenaean Peloponnese, thus emphasizing that in both regions such special amber objects were confined to the very small group of the most richly furnished burials. If, for instance, the shaft graves of Mycenae had not yet been discovered, we would know next to nothing of the existence of such foreign objects in the LH I phase (Maran 2004, 55).

The routes of transmission of the amber objects between southern England and the Peloponnese are still very difficult to trace. The exchange was probably carried out over several land routes along the river systems of Western or Central Europe. Various routes then branched off towards the Central Alps, as attested by the sites already mentioned like Koblach-Kadel, Zürich-Mozartstraße and the Padnal, with early occurrences of amber objects in contexts predating the time of their first appearance in graves of the Tumulus Burial culture. From there one route went along the Tyrrhenian coast of Italy until it reached trade settlements with strong ties to Early Mycenaean Greece situated on small islands like Vivara in the Gulf of Naples.[3] Deciding on the mechanism of transmission depends on the range and volume of goods and materials exchanged between the distant partners. If the long-distance exchange concerned only the amber, all objects of that material found in Early Mycenaean Greece could have easily been transferred in a single journey (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 159; Harding 1984, 80). However, I find this unlikely and fully agree with James Muhly (1973, 249–253, 275–335) that amber is likely to have reached Greece as a concomitant of the trade in tin with the North, just as, in the middle of the third millennium BCE, Mesopotamia received lapis lazuli from Afghanistan through exchange networks that were established above all to obtain tin from Central Asian sources (Maran 2004, 58). By the shaft grave period bronze had finally prevailed over copper, but since sources of tin existed only in Wessex and Brittany, the Erzgebirge of Central Europe or in Central Asia, Mycenaean bronze-working was, one way or another, dependent on tin from distant regions. For this reason, as Muhly (1973, 287, 343–350) already stated, Atlantic Europe remains a likely supply region for the tin used in Early Mycenaean Greece (see also Gerloff 1993, 85–86; 2010, 633; Hughes-Brock 1998, 254–255; Bachhuber 2003, 15–17; Ruppenstein 2010, 649). It seems doubtful whether a flourishing bronze industry could have relied on tin from occasional long-distance visits. Therefore, the amber objects probably arrived in Greece in the course of regular long-distance trade carried out by specialists (Maran 2004, 58).

Let me be clear here that I am not reviving the old idea of Mycenaean merchants travelling to southern England and bringing back tin and amber. On the contrary, I am suggesting indirect exchange made possible through the existence of a chain of interlocking networks, in which the direct Mycenaean presence need not have extended further than the Central Mediterranean. Furthermore, it is probable that exchange partners in the vast expanse between Atlantic Europe and Greece were not guided by the same motives and attitudes, so that a combination of different ways of exchange is likely (Maran 2004, 58–60). Still, the rarity of indications of the circulation of special amber objects in Western and Central Europe at the time of the shaft graves of Mycenae remains just as enigmatic as the marked concentration at both end-points of the distribution: Wessex and Mycenae. This means that, whatever the exact exchange mechanisms were, one thing seems certain: the trade must have been directional to

some degree in order to ensure that specific objects reached the aspiring Mycenaean elite in considerable numbers (Harding 1984, 82; Beck and Shennan 1991, 135; Maran 2004, 58).

Early Mycenaean amber: The unaddressed issue of appropriation

Hitherto, discussions of Early Mycenaean amber objects have revolved mainly around issues such as their morphological differentiation, chronological attributions and routes of dispersal, while the forms of appropriation have not yet been sufficiently investigated. Since the amber components were shown to be conceived for use as necklaces, somehow research seems to have assumed that they were necessarily worn as such. When in 1988, on the occasion of a major exhibition, amber jewellery from Shaft Grave Omicron was arranged as a crescentic Wessex necklace, it seemed like the final proof of an exact correspondence in the way such jewellery was worn in the two distant areas (Demakopoulou 1988, 256 no. 280; Hughes-Brock 1993, 219; Gerloff 2010, 628; but see the cautionary remarks by Hughes-Brock 2005, 301). Indeed, it is likely that crescentic amber necklaces of this particular type had reached the Peloponnese by the beginning of the Mycenaean period. The still valid argument for this interpretation, first presented by Rolf Hachmann (1957, 10–11), is that it is only in Wessex and the Peloponnese that we encounter, in addition to the rectangular spacers, trapezoid plates with converging perforations needed as end-pieces in such crescentic necklaces (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 161–162; du Gardin 2003; Verschueren 2009/2010, 32, 60). But research has made the mistake of equating the arrival of the foreign form of the crescentic amber necklace with an unaltered manner of usage, thereby disregarding the indications of pronounced differences between Mycenae and Wessex in how these objects were perceived and worn. Not only are some of the shapes of Early Mycenaean amber objects unknown in Wessex and other regions of Europe (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 155), but, in contrast to the British Isles, prior to the Mycenaean period there also existed no local tradition of wearing crescentic necklaces in Greece (Maran 2004, 54). Even in Early Mycenaean Greece amber end-pieces are extremely rare, and of the two such objects each from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A (Müller 1909, 280–281; Beck *et al.* 1970, 18; Verschueren 2009/2010, 32, 60, 125) and Pylos, Tholos Tomb IV (Blegen *et al*. 1973, 128; Beck and Beck 1995, 124–125; Verschueren 2009/2010, 60), only the examples from Pylos – one entirely preserved, the other fragmentary – could theoretically have constituted a pair of end-pieces of equal size and with the same number of converging perforations required for them to form parts of one and the same crescentic necklace. Finally, while in the Wessex culture crescentic amber necklaces seem to be found exclusively in assemblages attributed to female burials (Gerloff 1975, 198–203; 2010, 628; Hughes-Brock 1998, 254; 2005, 306), in Greece components of such necklaces appear with female individuals as well as in some of the richest warrior burials of the shaft grave period (Karo 1930a, 179–180, 183; Mylonas 1972/1973, 350; Matthäus 1980, 20; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 176–190; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 50). Until now, the appearance of components of necklaces of amber and semi-precious stones in Early Mycenaean warrior burials has been explained either by pointing to the function of enhancing the

prestige of the person, or by referring to the desire of the warriors to adorn themselves (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 185; 1987, 200; 1988, 164–165). In my opinion, however, such explanations fall short of grasping the whole meaning of the presence of amber objects in Early Mycenaean Greece. I argue that the differences between the Peloponnese and Wessex in the forms of amber objects and the contexts of their appearance reflect a much more creative engagement of Mycenaean Greeks with such foreign materials and objects than has hitherto been realized.

In the following, a contextual analysis will be offered for the small number of LH I and IIA grave assemblages on which any investigation of the crucial problem of how amber was worn and perceived in Early Mycenaean Greece must be based

The contexts of Early Mycenaean amber: Necklaces and cases of unclear usage

Regarding the use of amber objects in Early Mycenaean female burials, Shaft Grave Omicron, dating to LH I (Maran 2004, 48 with footnote 3) and excavated in 1953 by Ioannis Papadimitriou and Georgios E. Mylonas, has yielded the most important clues. The amber objects, consisting of 119 beads, at least three spacer plates (Beck *et al*. 1971, 382–384; Harding und Hughes-Brock 1974, 164) and possibly a D-shaped end-piece (Milojčić 1955, 318, fig. 1:4; Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 164; Maran 2004, 54 with footnote 17), accompanied the last interment in the grave, a skeleton lying on its back and deposited in a north-south direction, with the head pointing towards south. The arms of the skeleton were arranged in circular position in relation to the spine, with the underarms of the skeleton bent and directed towards the pelvis (Mylonas 1972/1973, 188). The excavators make slightly different statements regarding the find situation of the amber components. In contrast to Papadimitriou (1953, 236), who stated immediately after the excavation that they were found at the arms and hip of the skeleton, Mylonas writes in the final publication that the amber components were found together with semi-precious stones on the breast of the skeleton, with the amber beads reaching down to the hip. According to Mylonas (1972/1973, 189, 350), the beads of amber and semi-precious stones had belonged to different necklaces, but he does not say what led him to this assessment.[4] Hence, a combination of amber with other stones in one and the same necklace should be definitely considered a possibility.[5] The two descriptions agree that the amber objects were not concentrated on one part of the body, but were found dispersed from the upper body to the hip. Provided that this find situation accurately reflects the original arrangement (for a caveat, see Maran 2004, 52), the amber components seem to have been worn as a long necklace.[6]

To my knowledge, the only unequivocal example of amber components being used as necklaces in Early Mycenaean male grave assemblages comes from the unfortunately still unpublished Tholos Tomb 2 of Myrsinochori-Routsi dating to LH II. According to the description of Spyridon Marinatos (1956, 203–206) two individuals who were identified by their weapons as males were furnished with amber necklaces. The tomb yielded at least seven interments, of which one was encountered on the tomb floor, while the remains of the others were divided between two pits. The skeleton lying in

an extended position on the floor was the last interment in the Tholos Tomb. It wore a *voluminous* amber necklace of around 50 amber beads around its neck, and on its right side lay ten swords and knives. In the uppermost part of Pit 2 a skeleton was found of which only the upper body was well preserved. Its neck and breast were covered by an amber necklace of 54 beads (Marinatos 1956, 205; Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 166), and in addition the burial was accompanied by a mirror and two daggers richly decorated with gold and silver inlays. No spacer plates or end-pieces seem to have been among the furnishings of these two burials,[7] which suggests that the amber components are unlikely to have been worn as crescentic necklaces (Maran 2004, 53 with footnote 13).

In turning to grave assemblages of male type in the shaft graves of Mycenae, regrettably Schliemann only specified the find position of amber objects in two cases. The first is a group of more than 400 amber beads found next to the skull of the skeleton in the centre of the three interments with their heads oriented towards the East in Shaft Grave IV of the LH I phase (Schliemann 1878, 283). The usual interpretation that this was a necklace deposited next to the head of the deceased (ibid., 245) is far from certain because the deposition by the body rather than on it could also indicate that it was part of a piece of equipment with a different function, possibly a belt (see below). Roughly the same number of amber components was found, again in Shaft Grave IV, with one of the burials with the head pointing towards north, but Schliemann (1878, 283) does not provide any information on their position in relation to the skeleton. It is also unclear how the at least four or five spacer plates in Shaft Grave IV were divided between these two amber concentrations (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 162).

The only other case in which Schliemann left some information on find circumstances is a single amber bead in Shaft Grave V, to the interpretation of which I shall return later.

The contexts of Early Mycenaean amber: The Kakovatos shoulder belt and other objects not worn as necklaces

Of special interest for the meaning attributed to amber in the Early Mycenaean period are the roughly 500 amber objects from Tholos Tomb A of Kakovatos, already mentioned, which are also likely to come from a male burial. Unfortunately, the tomb was encountered in a looted state, with the sole grave shaft empty (Dörpfeld 1908, 306) and the remains of grave furnishings found scattered in a 10–15 cm thick layer above the floor of the chamber. According to the assessment of Sklavounos, a professor of anatomy, cited by Kurt Müller (1909, 325), the human bones from that tomb belonged to only one individual, a young adult about 30 years of age. In spite of the high number of objects and especially decorated palatial jars deriving from the tomb (Kalogeropoulos 1998, 128–135), the range of attested items does not give any reason to doubt that the tomb only held one burial,[8] while the two fragments of a richly decorated blade, probably of a sword, together with more than 40 flint arrowheads and one made of bronze, as well as numerous boar's tusks from a helmet (Müller 1909, 291–293), point to the deceased having been male (Nikolentzos 2003, 628). As Müller (1909, 279–281) had

already emphasized, Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A is the Mycenaean amber assemblage not only with the largest beads and spacer plates, but also with by far the greatest wealth of shapes, some of them unknown outside this particular context. Until now, the Kakovatos amber objects have been unanimously interpreted by research as evidence for the occurrence of necklaces as a grave good. That these objects have never been comprehensively published in drawings or photographs is particularly unfortunate in light of the fact that, for unknown reasons, Müller seems to have failed to mention or probably even inspect some of the objects, which evidently were not made available to Anthony Harding and Helen Hughes-Brock either in the course of their ground-breaking study on amber in the Mycenaean world. That these unpublished objects must exist is borne out by the most detailed available description provided in 1970 by Curt W. Beck, Constance A. Fellows and Audrey B. Adams (Beck *et al*. 1970), who mention, in addition to the well-known and particularly large examples of a spacer plate and a trapezoid end-piece (Müller 1909, 280–281, figs 3–4), at least five other smaller rectangular spacer plates and an additional trapezoid end-piece of smaller size and with fewer perforations than the example first published by Müller (Beck *et al*. 1970, 18; Verschueren 2009/2010, 125).

Concerning the crucial question of the reconstruction of the original shape and nature of the items, to which the amber components from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A have belonged, the find circumstances evidently do not provide any information. In addition, the components are so varied and numerous that, although I do not think this is the case, they could have derived from different parts of the equipment of the deceased, and some of them may indeed have been worn around the neck. Nevertheless, to give up on the question of reconstruction in the face of such uncertainties would be mistaken. Instead, all the available information on material, manufacture and morphology has to be used to be able to integrate as many amber components as possible into a coherent set of interrelated parts. Such a procedure, which in this contribution is for the first time attempted for the Kakovatos amber objects shows that some of the objects exhibit morphological traits and signs of manipulation in the course of secondary usage that are not consistent with reconstruction as a necklace and rather point to a different functional context to which originally all the amber items found in the tomb may have belonged.

First, as Hachmann (1957, 10–11) already noted, the published amber spacer plate and the trapezoid end-piece, which both stand out due to their size, show signs of having been reworked by drilling an additional transverse hole into the flat surface (see also Sandars 1959; Woodward 2002, 1046). No such secondary perforations are mentioned by Beck *et al*. (1970) for the unpublished end-piece and spacer plates from the same context. An interpretation of the transverse boring as a means of transforming the two amber plates into pendants (Sandars 1959, 293; Schon 2009, 223) is not particularly convincing because it would not be clear why such a simple form of reuse would necessitate the risk of drilling an additional hole and possibly breaking a valuable object, instead of using the already existing borings to string the plate as a pendant on to the necklace.[9] In contrast to previous research, I would like to propose that, in their final usage, these two particularly large re-worked amber components were not threaded on to a necklace, but rather were attached to something else. The transverse holes were probably drilled in order to use the two plates as intermediate pieces at the transition between a strap

Figure 11.1. Ring-shaped suspension devices of sheet gold from a Mycenaean sword scabbard found in Shaft Grave Lambda at Mycenae (after Mylonas 1972/1973, pl. 125:β).

and the multiple strings holding amber beads. Second, the two trapezoid amber plates differ significantly in size and number of perforations. Hence, they could not have served as end-pieces of the same necklace (Beck *et al*. 1970, 18) which means that also in Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A there is no evidence for a crescentic amber necklace as a grave offering. Third, the different sized ring-shaped amber objects, of which three are said to be entirely preserved[10] and at least five were encountered in a fragmentary state (Müller 1909, 279; Beck *et al*. 1970, 9–11; Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 162), have been interpreted until now as decorative pendants of necklaces (Beck *et al*. 1970, 8–11; Harding and Hughes-Brock 1970, 155). While I know of no parallels for such decorative pendants in Mycenaean Greece, these amber rings bear the greatest resemblance to the golden ring-shaped suspension devices of Mycenaean sword scabbards from the shaft graves of Mycenae (Fig. 11.1; Mylonas 1972/1973, 142–143, pl. 125:β; Karo 1930a, pl. 45). The importance of ring-shaped suspension or connection devices in Early Mycenaean weaponry is also emphasized by the design of the so-called *Gamaschenhalter* (Fig. 11.5; Mylonas 1972/1973, 330–331, pls. 59:α2, 102:α1–2; Karo 1930a, pls. 67–68) from the shaft

graves of Mycenae that Laffineur (1996) interpreted as parts of the scabbard or straps of a sword suspension. These similarities provide an important clue to the use of these most unusual amber components from Kakovatos. Fourth, while almost all of the objects from Kakovatos analysed by Curt W. Beck's group proved to consist of Baltic amber, the ring-shaped pieces gave infrared spectra typical of Baltic amber, as well as of a fossil resin of clearly non-Baltic origin, probably Schraufite either from the Bukovina region of the northeastern Carpathian Mountains or from Lebanon (Beck *et al*. 1970, 9–12; Beck 1986, 59). These analytical results point to local manufacture in Greece[11] by using raw pieces of fossil resins of different origin and adding the ring-shaped objects to components received as finished products like the beads, spacer plates and end-pieces. Fifth, the also unique tongue-shaped amber object with multiple perforations (Müller 1909, pl. 15:21), for which hitherto no convincing explanation has been put forward,[12] should be interpreted as a reinforcement for the end of a strap.

Based on these observations, I would like to suggest that at Kakovatos one or several Wessex crescentic amber necklaces were broken up in order to be rearranged for a different purpose. The components, some of which were reworked, were combined with locally made pieces and attached to a leather band to form an impressive shoulder belt with the largest ring-shaped object serving as a buckle and the smaller ones as devices on which weapons and other items were suspended (Fig. 11.2). It was Schliemann (1878, 322) himself who postulated the existence of such shoulder belts with devices for suspending weapons and other items in the shaft grave assemblages. Indeed, we know of the existence of luxurious sword belts or baldrics both from finds of long gold stripes from Schliemann's shaft graves (Schliemann 1878, 281–282; Karo 1930a, 213; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 136–137; Buchholz 1980, 239–240; Steinhübl 2011, 298) and from images like the shell relief from the Knossos throne room (Fig. 11.3; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 136, pl. 69:16), as well as the fighting scene on the famous gold cushion from Shaft Grave III (Fig. 11.4; Karo 1930a, pl. 24:35; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 136–137). The curious curving double row of small dots connecting a sword scabbard with the upper body of the attacking warrior in that scene may even allude to a shoulder belt comprising beads. How many of the amber objects from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A should be attributed to the belt remains unclear, and therefore the proposed reconstruction must be taken as an approximation. Due to the reworking of the two large amber plates and the combination with other local forms of spacers, namely of the triple circle and the figure of eight types (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 155) – one of which also exhibits a secondary drilled hole (Müller 1909, 280, pl. 15:20) – it seems likely that in the middle part of the belt (Fig. 11.2B) at least the smaller beads and some of the medium-sized beads were threaded on multiple strands and probably combined with the smaller spacer plates, which are not shown on the reconstruction because they are still unpublished. The reconstruction also assumes that the largest amber beads were sewn on the leather strap (Fig. 11.2A).[13] Indeed, since the parts of the leather strap forming the ends of the belt may have been considerably longer than shown in the reconstruction, there may also have been enough space to attach some or even all of the decorated bone discs from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A to the same belt (Müller 1909, 282–287). Although the discs, whose function is unclear, do not seem to have a fastening device, in some cases a red colouring was observed on their back, which may derive from a substance used

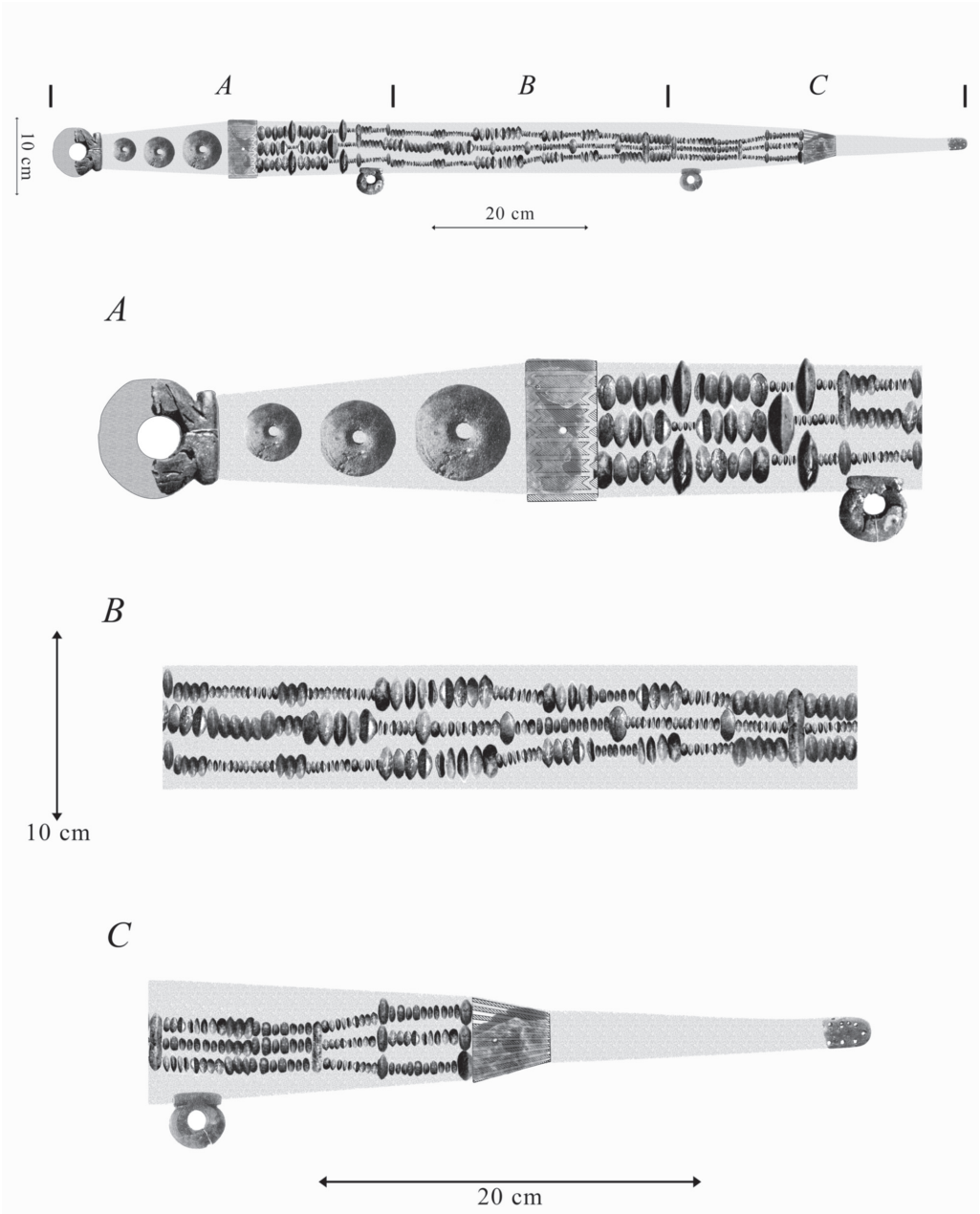

Figure 11.2. Reconstruction of the amber objects from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A as a shoulder belt (digital reconstruction by M. Kostoula based on a draft drawing by J. Maran; rearranged after Müller 1909, figs 3–4, pl. 15; Harding 1984, fig. 15; Demakopoulou 1988, 258 no. 283).

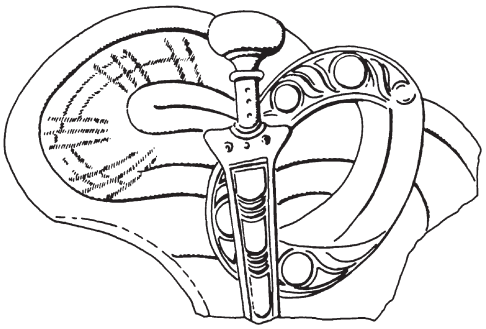

Figure 11.3. Miniature shell relief of a sword belt from the Knossos throne room (after Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, pl. 69:16).

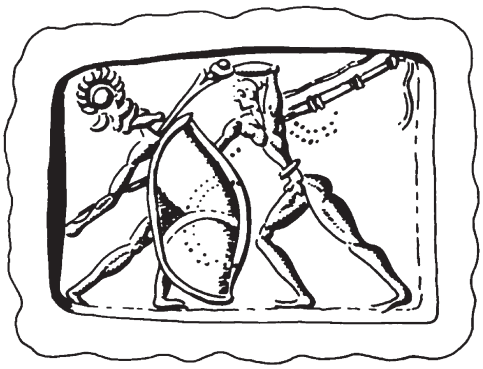

Figure 11.4. Drawing of a fighting scene on a gold cushion from Shaft Grave III at Mycenae (after Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, pl. 69:12).

Figure 11.5. Assemblage of swords, a golden Gamaschenhalter, other gold objects and an amber bead in Shaft Grave V at Mycenae (after Schliemann 1878, 347 no. 460).

to glue the discs on to the leather strip (Müller 1909, 283).[14]

To understand the reasons why of all substances amber was chosen to become a frequent part of the equipment of Early Mycenaean warriors, an observation of Heinrich Schliemann (1878, 347 no. 460) concerning the find assemblage in Shaft Grave V of Mycenae, also of LH I date, is of relevance (Fig. 11.5). He was so surprised to encounter a single large amber bead next to two swords that he declared the bead to have been displaced (ibid., 349).[15] In contrast, I have argued that the find association makes sense when we assume the amber object to have served as a sword bead, a magically protective device known from Early Medieval swords (Maran 2004, 59). A possible analogy for this find assemblage in Shaft Grave V may be represented by the rare cases of the appearance of seemingly unworked small lumps of amber attested in Early Mycenaean elite graves of Messenia that were interpreted by the excavators as talismans (Blegen *et al*. 1973, 129, 143, 162, figs 227:5, 231:7; Hughes-Brock 1985, 260). In a secondary deposition of grave goods in Pit 3 of the so-called Grave Circle of Pylos, two such amber lumps were

associated with few large amber beads, one amethyst bead, an amber spacer plate, swords and other items (Blegen *et al*. 1973, 143). Although the objects were not found in their primary depositional context, the small number of amber components, together with the association with swords and lumps of probably un-worked amber, again point to amber being used in a different way than as a necklace.

In my opinion, the main motif 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 (Bouzek 1993, 141; Maran 2004, 60). For this reason, a classification of the amber as *jewellery* is misleading, since in the emic perspective the desired effects of amber were rather supposed to resemble a weapon.

The manifold ways of appropriating amber objects in Early Mycenaean Greece: Between adornment and weapon

In summary, the contextual analysis of the appearance of amber objects in Early Mycenaean graves points to a striking variation in how the various components were selected, combined and deposited, thereby contradicting the hitherto predominant notion of a uniform use of such objects as necklaces. In combination with an assessment of their morphological peculiarities, as well as of the manipulations of the amber objects in the course of secondary usage, this leads me to the conclusion that, while some of the amber components were indeed worn as necklaces by men and women, in not a single case are their find circumstances and/or morphological features consistent with reconstruction as a crescentic necklace. In addition, the find situation in Shaft Grave Omicron may exemplify a combination of amber beads with other such materials in the same necklace, which would not come as a surprise in light of the evidence for necklaces made up of different materials in Late Minoan Crete (Effinger 1996, 77–78). Most importantly, some of the male grave assemblages discussed here provide evidence for uses of amber objects in completely different functional contexts than as necklaces, namely as protective devices that were perceived to be charged with supernatural power. Due to the quantity and variety of its amber components, the Kakovatos shoulder belt forms an outstanding work of craftsmanship marking the culmination of the association of amber with the Early Mycenaean warrior elite. While currently the Kakovatos belt seems to constitute a unique and isolated example, the uncertain function of the concentrations of about 400 amber objects, each with two burials of Shaft Grave IV, which almost equal the Kakovatos finds in number, needs to be borne in mind. Although the lack of pieces suitable for suspension in this grave context precludes an unequivocal interpretation as belts, the amber beads and spacer plates could have been sewn on a leather strap which was fastened and worn differently than the one from Kakovatos.

I regard this combination of three closely interrelated factors as crucial for the ascription of a supernatural meaning to amber in Early Mycenaean Greece: The first factor was rooted in the extraordinary properties of amber I have mentioned, which predestined it to be identified as a material with supernatural effects (Hughes-

Brock 1985, 260; Woodward 2002, 1046). The second factor was an already existing acquaintance with systems of the ascription of certain effects to stone materials, which had a long tradition in the ancient Near East and Egypt (Schuster-Brandis 2008) and represent an excellent example of the significance of the perceived agency of non-human actants. It is likely that the influx of objects made of amber, which had been unknown until the beginning of the Mycenaean period, led to an enrichment of these already pre-existing discourses about the efficacy of stones. The highly directional exchange and the choice of exactly those amber objects that were of special significance for the Wessex elite even make it seem possible that, as in the *kula ring* (Campbell 1983, 236–244; Firth 1983, 96; Appadurai 1986, 18–21), specific object biographies revealing their origins, effects and previous owners were transmitted together with the amber necklaces. These biographies are likely to have been modified more or less extensively in the course of the long-distance exchange until they reached the Peloponnese, where they were merged with and adapted to local oral traditions (Hughes-Brock 1993, 224). The third factor was linked to peculiarities in the construction of a religiously based identity by the Early Mycenaean elite (Whittaker 2011, 144–145). It is precisely those shaft graves that have yielded amber objects that also contain an unusual concentration of foreign items, mostly of a religious character, deriving from Crete, but also from Anatolia, Eastern Europe and the West (Heitz 1998, 40–46; 2008, 21–31). Elaborating on an idea of Sue Sherratt, I have argued that, by appropriating special objects from, so to speak, *all corners of the world*, those who buried their dead in the shaft graves placed themselves in the wider cosmos, at the centre of which they probably imagined they stood (Maran 2011, 289). This also explains why amber, as Helène Whittaker (2011, 144) has correctly observed, gained such importance in the construction of the Mycenaean warrior elite identity.

Amber at the end of the Mycenaean period: The Tiryns sun wheels

Strikingly, in Greece after the Early Mycenaean period special amber items like the spacer plates and end-pieces disappear from the archaeological record (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1993, 147–152; Harding 1984, 82; Hughes-Brock 1985, 259), while, according to Janusz Czebreszuk (2011, 66–68, 108–123), during LH IIIA and IIIB amber objects in general may have been more common than was hitherto thought. Towards the end of the Mycenaean period we encounter beads of the so-called *Tiryns type*, a new kind of amber object, whose routes of transmission and social contexts of appearance, however, seem to have differed from the situation during Early Mycenaean times (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974, 155–156; Harding 1984, 82–87; Hughes-Brock 1985, 261; Bouzek 1997, 122; Cultraro 2006). The association of amber beads with LH IIIC warrior burials, if it exists at all (Cultraro 2006, 1544–1550), is much more tentative than in Early Mycenaean times. Such objects are not exclusively found in richly furnished graves, nor are they restricted to only a few sites. Nevertheless, we have one remarkable example of the association of amber with supernatural powers as late as the end of the Mycenaean period.

In the so-called *Tiryns Treasure* found in 1915 in the southeastern Lower Town of

Tiryns and dated to the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries BCE (Arvanitopoulos 1915; Karo 1930b; Maran 2006), there appear two unique wheels of woven and wound gold wire with bronze spokes bearing the eponymous amber beads of the *type Tiryns* (Karo 1930b, 127, Beilage XXXA, XXXI; Harding 1984, 82–85, fig. 22). As Reinhard Jung (2007, 234–240, with further literature) has demonstrated, the two wheels were made in the image of the astral symbol of the wheel cross that often appears on contemporary Italian sheet-gold objects (see also already Bouzek 1997, 122). The similarity even extends to the beads on the spokes, which probably correspond to the dots on the wheel cross of the sheet-gold objects (Jung 2007, 234). This, in turn, points to the beads' symbolic rather than merely decorative significance. A linkage to distant areas is also provided by the particular style of gold wirework of the wheels, which finds its closest parallels in a group of golden objects from the Urnfield culture of Bohemia (Marinatos 1960; Bouzek 1985, 172–173; 1997, 122; Plesl 1993; Jung 2007, 234 with footnote 101). Still, the wheels seem to have been made in Tiryns because additional gold wire and amber beads for at least a third wheel were also part of the treasure (Karo 1930b, 128; Jung 2007, 236 with footnote 115), and, moreover, a comparable small basket of albeit much simpler bronze wirework was found in nearby Midea (Ostenso 1998, 158, pl. 112:M8).

The combination of the form with the shining materials of gold and amber suggests the wheels should be interpreted as images of the sun (Hughes-Brock 1993, 221; Dickinson 1994, 255; 2006, 205; Bouzek 1997, 122; Jung 2007, 240), which makes it particularly noteworthy that in the centre of the *sky* above the cult scene on the famous gold signet ring from the same treasure there appears an astral symbol resembling the design of the wheels (Maran 2012b, 124). As I have shown elsewhere, this may not be the only semantic linkage of the image on the signet ring and actual objects of the treasure, since the highly unusual large bronze chalice, in which the signet ring and other jewellery were deposited, bears a resemblance to the chalice held by the goddess (ibid., 123–124). We therefore have to confront the possibility of an *interactive* relationship of objects and images in ritual communication practices, thus connecting realms that are usually treated separately in archaeological research. This means that the perceived meaning of the scenes was integrated into discourses explaining the special significance of certain objects. This contributed significantly to the possibility of providing objects with *biographies*, linking them with religious or mythical beings and displaying such objects on certain occasions. In turn, the ability to *prove* the supernatural character of objects by referring to an image may have facilitated the appropriation of the Central Mediterranean version of the wheel cross, inasmuch as the reference to earlier local forms of religious iconography served to *naturalize* the symbol.

The Tiryns wheels represent ritual objects that were made locally by combining certain foreign traits of material, form and technique. This may be an indication of the producer herself or himself being a person of foreign descent, who may have been regarded as having special religious knowledge. In ritual action the wheels were probably perceived as being charged with celestial energy, while at the same creating a semantic linkage to distant lands through which the ritual community was placed in the wider framework of the cosmos. The wheels also already exemplify the emic perception of amber and gold as twin solar materials (Hughes-Brock 1993, 224; Bouzek 1993, 141), which must lie at the heart of the curious semantic ambivalence of the term *elektron* in classical Greek antiquity.

Amber in Mycenaean Greece: From diffusion to translation

The appearance of amber objects in Mycenaean Greece clearly shows that, in order to understand the appropriation of foreign objects, archaeology has to replace the customary model of diffusion with one of *translation*. As Latour (1986, 266–269) has remarked, the notion of diffusion assigns a decisive role to the initial force triggering the movement of an object, while the people further along the chain are only able to transmit or reject this initial energy. Accordingly in this perspective, the original meaning of an object is accurately transmitted, and the spreading of the object does not need to be explained since, as long as there is no obstacle, it will move in a certain direction. In *translation*, on the contrary, the initial force does not predetermine later steps because agency is attributed to the people in the chain, who, through their actions and discourses, constantly shape and change the meaning of the object. Therefore, in Latour's words: "Instead of the *transmission* of the same token […] you get, in the second model, the continuous *transformation* of the token" (Latour 1986, 268, italics in the original text).

Until now, when dealing with amber objects in Bronze Age Europe, research has followed the model of diffusion, thereby explicitly or implicitly suggesting a uniformity of use in the different regions where such objects have been uncovered. As demonstrated here, a shift to the model of *translation* reveals marked peculiarities in the meanings ascribed to amber objects in the course of Mycenaean culture. Most importantly, by assigning amber objects to the realm of *jewellery*, research has failed to capture the role of objects made of this particular material in the construction of the Early Mycenaean warrior elite identity and of the emic perception of such objects as devices empowering and protecting their bearers. The particular linkage of amber with members of the warrior elite, which finds its most astonishing reflection in the Kakovatos shoulder belt, seems not to have outlasted the Early Mycenaean period. While the perception of amber in Mycenaean palatial times is currently impossible to specify, for the post-palatial period the Tiryns sun wheels indicate a cosmological significance for amber that, in this clarity, is just as much unmatched in the earlier phases of Mycenaean culture as the combination of amber with gold as twin solar materials in objects that were not worn on the body of persons, but rather were integrated as religious paraphernalia in ceremonies.

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Notes

1 Du Gardin (2003, 196) postulated a development of amber spacer plates with a complex-bored pattern within the central European Early Bronze Age Únětice culture. This assumption, however, is not supported by actual finds of such spacer plates in Únětice contexts, but rests solely on an extremely late dating of the crescentic necklaces of the Wessex culture to the time of the Tumulus Burial culture, which is contradicted by both archaeological synchronisms (Gerloff 1993; 2010) and radiocarbon dates (Needham *et al*. 2010).

2 Barfield (1991), Gerloff (1993, 85), (2010, 624–629), Maran (2004, 56). Among the central European objects cited by Gerloff, the amber spacer plate and beads from a probable hoard found on the Padnal near Savognin (Graubünden, Switzerland) should probably be disregarded for questions related to the trade during the time of the shaft graves of Mycenae, since the hoard may date to an advanced stage of the Tumulus Burial culture (Rageth 1976, 172–174). For a comprehensive discussion of the find circumstances and dating of the amber objects from Koblach-Kadel, Zürich-Mozartstraße and the Padnal, see Stahl (2006, 140, 147–148.); for the piece from Koblach-Kadel in particular, whose attribution to a context of the late central European Early Bronze Age is well-founded see Hughes-Brock (2005, 303), Maran (2004, 56 with footnote 28). For other signs of Early Bronze Age contacts between Britain and Central Europe, see O'Connor (2010, 597–599).

3 Graziadio (1998, 63–64), (2000, 252–259), Maran (2004, 55–56). Although he did not know about the trade settlements in the area of the Gulf of Naples, Marinatos (1962, 166) already emphasized the importance of the Tyrrhenian side of Italy for the long-distance transfer of amber objects in Early Mycenaean times by pointing to Lipari as an important connecting link. The route of the transmission of amber objects through the Adriatic Sea preferred by other authors (cf. Dickinson 1994, 249; Ruppenstein 2010, 650) seems to me less likely because there are no similar sites with LH I pottery along the coasts of the Adriatic (cf. Jung 2010, 661–665). For the role of Kakovatos in the long-distance trade, see Vermeule (1972, 131), Nikolentzos (2003), Eder (2011, 107–110).

4 Dietz (1991, 130, fig. 44) mentioned only the amber beads found at the hip, which he interprets as belonging to a belt (see also Hughes-Brock 2005, 301), but he disregards the beads found on the upper body that would not be consistent with a belt-like reconstruction.

5 As for the question of whether in Mycenaean times different materials were combined or worn *purely* in the same necklace, it could be that the modern aesthetics of wearing jewellery are unknowingly influencing research. While at the time of the excavation and publication of Grave Circle B it was usual to wear female necklaces consisting of only one material (cf. pearls, turquoise, carnelian, amber etc.), thereby possibly guiding scholarly interpretation, the willingness in more recent research to accept the integration of different materials in one and the same necklace may be just as much a reflection of contemporary fashions for wearing such jewellery as a colourful combination of various materials.

6 The interpretation that these finds were of a long necklace was doubted by Hughes-Brock (1993, 219 with footnote 2). For a rebuttal of her arguments, see Maran (2004, 52 with footnote 11). Hughes-Brock (2005, 301) now accepts that the beads in Shaft Grave Omicron may have been strung as a very long necklace.

7 Marinatos (1962, 167) and Beck and Beck (1995, 122–125) only mention beads as components of the necklaces.

8 Due to the large number and variety of finds from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A, Dickinson (1977, 93) doubted the attribution to only one burial (see also Kalogeropoulos 1998, 128–129). However, the shaft of the Tholos Tomb of Vapheio also held a bewildering variety and number of different objects, though Kilian-Dirlmeier (1986) has convincingly supported the original view of the excavator, Christos Tsountas, of the existence of only one interment. What is especially striking in the case of Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A is the absence of grave goods that would be clearly consistent with an assemblage of female type, as well as the fact that, with the exception of the palatial jars and amber objects – which, however, all may have belonged to one and the same part of the equipment – the categories of items represented do not seem to repeat themselves. Boyd (2002, 190) has cited the early destruction of Tholos Tombs A and B by an earthquake as a possible reason for the lack of signs of the frequent reuse of the tombs.

9 The famous reconstruction of the amber necklace from Asenkoven Grave E (Bavaria) can be used as

an example of how spacer plates can be reused as pendants without drilling any additional holes, see Hachmann (1957, 17, fig. 5), Harding (1984, 77–78, fig. 18).

10 These are probably to be identified with the three ring-shaped components that are illustrated by photographs in publications. The first such object is large with a maximum width of 64 mm according to Müller (1909, 279) or 61.5 mm according to Beck *et al*. (1970, 9–11). The differences in measurement may be attributed to the fact that at the time of the original publication the object was still complete, while it later broke into separate pieces, so that in the studies undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s only the upper half was available for inspection and measurement (Beck *et al*. 1970, 9–11; Harding 1984, fig. 15 [upper left corner]). The two smaller ring-shaped objects have maximum diameters of 30 mm and 36 mm respectively and are illustrated in Müller (1909, pl. 15:22) and Demakopoulou (1988, 258 no. 283). The latter photograph, in which three objects from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A are combined with an amber bead of the *type Tiryns* from the chamber tomb necropolis of Tiryns, has unfortunately encouraged the mistaken impression that the objects all come from Kakovatos (Nikolentzos 2003).

11 Beck *et al*. (1970, 12), Harding and Hughes-Brock (1974, 155) and Nikolentzos (2003, 623, footnote 11) have referred in passing to the existence of comparable ring pendants from Early Bronze Age Eastern Europe. It is unfortunate that they have not specified what objects they had in mind because I do not know of any good comparisons for the Kakovatos ring-shaped objects.

12 Müller (1909, 280) thought that the object may have served to hold the fringes of a broad tassel.

13 That the largest amber beads from Kakovatos Tholos Tomb A were strung on a necklace was doubted by Müller (1909, 279).

14 Mylonas (1966, 425–426) interpreted brown stains on the back of gold petals from the shaft graves "and the brownish matter often seen in inlaid work" (ibid., 426) as traces of a substance used for gluing. I would like to thank Kalliope Nikita (Nottingham) for drawing my attention to this reference.

15 This remark of Schliemann's lends additional credibility to his observation.

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