

Danish Bronze Age glass beads traced to Egypt

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Analyses of glass beads found in Denmark give us new knowledge of Bronze Age trade routes.

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An international collaboration between Moesgaard Museum in Aarhus, the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, and Institut de Recherche sur les Archéomatériaux (IRAMAT) at Orléans, France, has resulted in a sensational discovery about the trade routes between Denmark and the ancient civilisations in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the Bronze Age 3,400 years ago. The discovery also gives us new knowledge about the sun cult in the Nordic Bronze Age.

Archaeologists Jeanette Varberg from Moesgaard Museum and Flemming Kaul from the National Museum, and Bernard Gratuze, director of IRAMAT, analysed the composition of some blue glass beads found on buried Bronze Age women in Denmark.

The analyses revealed that the glass originate from the same glass workshops in Egypt that supplied the glass that the Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamun took with him to his grave in 1323 BC.

The study was recently published in [SKALK](#).

Globalisation in the Bronze Age

Twenty-three glass beads from Denmark were analysed using plasma-spectrometry. Without destroying the fragile beads, this technique makes it possible to compare the chemical composition of trace elements in the beads with reference material from Amarna in Egypt and Nippur in Mesopotamia, about 50 km south east of Baghdad in Iraq. The comparison showed that the chemical composition of the two sets of trace elements match.

The researchers' first object for comparison was a bead from a wealthy woman's grave at Ølby, about 40 km south of Copenhagen. The woman had been buried in a more extravagant fashion, lying in a hollowed-out oak trunk and wearing a beautiful belt disc, a smart string skirt with tinkling, shining small bronzes tubes, and an overarm bracelet made of amber beads, and a single blue glass bead.

The glass bead turned out to be Egyptian. This is the first time that typical Egyptian cobalt glass has been discovered outside the Mediterranean area.

The archaeologists can now also substantiate that there is a connection between the amber beads and the glass beads.

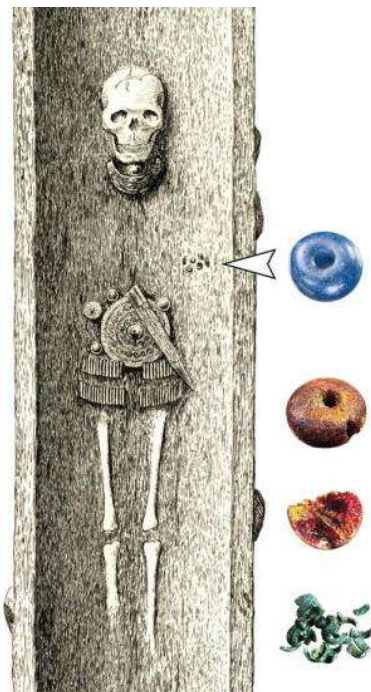
It has been known for a long time that amber was exported in the Bronze Age from Nordic latitudes and southwards. Tutankhamun and other Egyptian pharaohs had large amber chains in boxes in their burial chambers.

Now the researchers are linking amber and glass together in an unexpected way.

Nordic and Egyptian sun cults traded goods

One property that both glass and amber have is that sunlight penetrates their surface.

It appears that glass and amber beads have been found together on sites from the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Germany to the Nordic latitudes.



The women from the Ølby site. The site was excavated in 1880 by Sophus Müller. Next to the woman's left arm was a blue glass bead (from Egypt), two amber beads, and two small bronze spirals.

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The archaeologists believe this could be proof of a link between the Egyptian sun cult and the Nordic sun cult.

When a Danish woman in the Bronze Age took a piece of jewellery made of amber and blue glass with her to the grave, it constituted a prayer to the sun to ensure that she would be re-united with it and share her fate with the sun's on its eternal journey.

The old amber route to the countries in the Mediterranean thus now has a counterpart: the glass route to the North.

So far, the researchers have shown that there was a trade connection to Egypt and Mesopotamia in the years 1400-1100 BC. Finding out whether the route continued in the later Bronze Age is a future task for the Danish-French research team.

[Read the original article in Danish on Videnskab.dk](#)

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Translated by Michael de Laine

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Just wondering if there is more evidence to link amber beads being worn/found in burials throughout Europe and East Asia to reciprocal sun cults? Because Amber had widespread usage, and because "sunlight penetrates their surface" seems like a stretch to say that is a link between Nordic and Egyptian sun cults.

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Hard to believe it is 2014 and people still have problem believing in long distance trading between ancient civilizations. They could have sailed up river and traveled overland to get to the Baltics. Or they could have sailed around Spain.

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They also rode the gulf stream across the Atlantic.

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Did I miss something, when was she buried in the bronze age?

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I remember reading about the Ølby burial when I was a child, in a fictionalized romance called "The Faraway Lurs" by Harry Behn; it was one of the things that built my interest in archaeology. So strange to see this new discovery all these years later!

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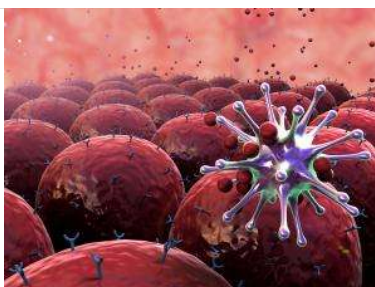
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