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Amber in the fine arts and crafts of Sicily

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Bursztyn w plastyce i rzemiośle artystycznym Sycylii

Od najdawniejszych czasów materiały rzadkie, cenne lub niezwykle, zarówno w rzeźbie (np. kość słoniowa, bursztyn, koral), jak w malarstwie i rzemiośle artystycznym, wzbudzały zainteresowanie zleceniodawców i artystów jako materiał, z którego wykonywano przedmioty zaskakujące swoim wyrazem artystycznym. Cechy bursztynu: struktura, barwa, transparentność oraz łatwość jego obróbki sprawiły, że chętnie wykorzystywano go do takich wyrobów.

Na południu Europy jednym z centrów produkcji przedmiotów wykonanych z bursztynu jest Sycylia, a w szczególności Trapani, zwłaszcza w XVII i XVIII wieku. Bursztyn sycylijski ma charakterystyczną czerwoną, głęboką barwę. Wykonywano z niego niewielkie medaliony z przedstawieniami rzeźbiarskimi, które oprawiano w bogate ramy ze srebra lub ołtarzyki. Jeden z takich medalionów, z przedstawieniem Pokłonu Pasterzy, znajduje się w zbiorach Muzeum Bursztynu w Gdańsku. W Trapani wykonywano także oprawy i ramki relikwiarzy, lusterek, ołtarzyków ze srebrnego filigranu, w którym montowano bursztynowe koraliki. Służyły one również do wytwarzania niewielkich waz ze srebra, w których osadzano srebrne bukiety z koralikami. Wazy te ustawiano na ołtarzach w kaplicach lub przy ołtarzykach domowych.

W zbiorach Muzeum Miasta Gdańska znajduje się też niewielka figurka, uznana ostatecznie jako wizerunek Św. Agaty, ustawiona na alabastrowym cokole, którego kształt jest charakterystyczny dla wyrobów z Trapani. Badania samego bursztynu pozwoliły zidentyfikować ten materiał jako bałtycki, nie

Abstract

Since immemorial, rare, precious, and unusual materials have inspired the interest of patrons and artists seeking to produce sculpture (e.g. ivory, amber, coral), painted works (using semiprecious stones like alabaster or agate as the substrate) and applied arts (amber, coral, seashells, nut shells) of astounding artistic expression.

Italy, and Sicily specifically was one of the centres of small scale sculptural production in southern Europe. Local specialist craftspeople produced artworks of coral, but also of ivory, tortoiseshell, mother of pearl, and other kinds of rare ornamental stones, e.g. alabaster and its varieties. They are particularly known for their works in amber.

In addition to the dimensions of the available raw material and its visual qualities (structure, colour, transparency, and translucency), amber's ease of working qualifies its use. Sicilian amber has a characteristic deep red colour. Carved amber medallions were set in rich silver frames or altars. One such medallion, with a representation of the Adoration of the Shepherds, is in the collection of the Amber Museum in Gdańsk. In Trapani, frames and reliquaries, mirrors, and altars were also crafted from silver filigree mounted with amber beads. Amber beads were also used to create the baluster of silver vases and set with silver bouquets set with beads. These vases were placed on altars in chapels or at home altars.

The collection of the Gdańsk City Museum also includes a small figurine, now recognized as an image of St. Agatha, placed on an alabaster pedestal characteristic of Trapani. Studies of the amber itself have identified this material as Baltic rather than Sicilian, suggesting this artefact may be an antiquarian marriage.

“Sicilian amber differs from northern amber in its wide range of colors, from transparent or opaque wax and honey tones to a stunning hyacinth red.” This is how the German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe described the collection of amber objects presented to him by the Duchess of Biscari in her palace in Catania. Goethe was invited to the palace by Prince Vincenzo di Biscari on May 3, 1787, accompanied by his traveling companion and draftsman, Christoph Heinrich Kniep.¹

The delighted traveler admired urns, chalices, and other objects displayed in a glass cabinet alongside items from Trapani and ivory trinkets. He listened intently to the duchess's anecdotes and explanations provided by her son. Unfortunately, the collection has not survived to the present day. The Polish-Lithuanian nobleman Count Michał Jan Borch also wrote about the amber found in the vicinity of Catania.² This contribution deals with amber in the

¹ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Podróż włoska* (tłum. Henryk Krzeczkowski), Warszawa 1980, p. 258.

² Michał Jan Borch, *Lettres sur la Sicile et sur l'Ile de Malthe: à M. le C. de N., écrites en 1777; pour servir de Supplément au Voyage en Sicile et à Malthe de Monsieur Brydonna; ornées de la carte*

artistic production and heritage of Sicily, and considers not only Sicilian amber, but also Baltic amber in Sicily, Italian ambers more generally, and the challenges of interpreting artefacts on the whole.

Since time immemorial, rare, precious, or unusual materials have evoked interest in both patrons and artists. Whether sculpture (e.g. ivory, amber, coral), painting (semiprecious stones as the material for the groundwork, e.g. alabaster or agate) or other artisanal crafts (amber, coral, seashells, nut shells), these materials have been exploited to produce astoundingly expressive artistic objects, parts or all of which, in some cases, have been ascribed secondary meanings such as counteracting witchcraft or disease. Because of said features, artefacts of the type were possibly desired by many more than could actually afford them.

Deposits of Sicilian amber are located in the central and eastern parts of the island, at the foothills of the Castrogiovanni mountains, near Caltanissetta. During the Miocene, amid significant geological transformations of the Earth's crust, these deposits were washed out by heavy rains and carried into water-courses. Today, deposits in the vicinity of the River Simeto, the river which flows through Catania, are now depleted, and the Sicilian variety of amber, particularly the deep red type, is exceptionally rare.³ The mineralogical name "simetite" is derived from the river's name and was introduced by Otto Helm and Hugo Conwentz in the 19th century.⁴ They were the first to conduct investigations on Sicilian amber, which included determining its physical properties and analyzing its general chemical composition.⁵

This rare and valuable material, which captivated the interest of antiquarians and travelers,⁶ was highly favored by artists working in the workshops of Trapani and Catania during the 17th and 18th centuries.⁷ The material occurs in nature in the form of irregular lumps, eggs, dripstones (known as tears), and fragments. Like Baltic amber, it contains inclusions of animal or plant origin. Translucent and often honey-colored but also found in dark red and

de l'Etna, ..., avec 27 estampes ..., Bd. 1, Turin 1782, lettre IX, pp. 112, 116, 123, 133, <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/borch1782bd1/0155/image/info> [accessed: 28.12.2024].

³ Jiri Kourimsky, *Minerały i skały: ilustrowana encyklopedia*, Warszawa 1995, p. 243; Barbara Kosmowska-Ceranowicz, *La genesi e la varietà delle resine fossili* [in:] *Ambra oro del nord*, Catalogue of Exhibition, Venezia 1978, p. 19.

⁴ Davide Leoni, *L'ambra siciliana*, Roma 2011, pp. 14–17; Otto Helm, Hugo Conwentz, *Sull'ambra di Sicilia*, "Malpigia: rassegna mensile di botanica" 1886, vol. 1, pp. 49–56; Otto Helm, *Mittheilungen über Bernstein*, "Schriften der naturforschenden Gesellschaft in Danzig: Neue Folge" 1884, Bd. 6, H. 1–2, pp. 133–134.

⁵ Leoni, *L'ambra siciliana*, pp. 14–18.

⁶ *Dell'ambra siciliana. Testi di antichi autori siciliani 1639–1805*, ed. Carmelo Erio Fiore, Catania 1996, pp. 17–27; 63–83.

⁷ Rachel King, *Finding the Divine Falernian: Amber in Early Modern Italy*, "V&A Online Journal Issue" 2013, no. 5 Autumn 2013, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-5-2013/finding-the-divine-falernian-amber-in-early-modern-italy/> [accessed: 9.12.2024].

even black hues, it was referred to as “*luce solidificata*,” or petrified light.⁸ Simeitite is relatively easy to work with, having a hardness of 1.5 to 3 on the 10-point Mohs scale. First, the dull and brittle outer layer was removed with scrapers. Blades and precision chisels were then used for cutting and carving. The surface was smoothed with wooden blocks and sand, pastes made from ash and water, and wooden tools with gypsum. For sculpting figurines, for example, pieces of glass mounted in wooden grips were used.⁹

One of the fundamental problems which has long dogged some of the greatest treasures in amber consists in tracing these artefacts back to their origins. In only few cases, can researchers ascribe pieces to specific workshops using surviving signatures.¹⁰ The vast majority, even the most magnificent, are presently only attributable to a place of making, to say nothing of a specific workshop and even then only after detailed analysis. Studies of the type are still scarce for authentic amber artefacts. This is probably why it is common to indicate Gdańsk or Königsberg as the origins of exhibits on museum labels or in professional publications, a custom which could be considered to be somewhat ridiculous and which sadly mirrors the deep-seated caution within every art historian etc., historian, or museologist. Personally, I believe that the approach stems from the presumed artistic superiority of Gdańsk over other, less or more distant Baltic cities. German researchers claimed this in the 19th and early 20th centuries,¹¹ followed therein by Polish researchers, particularly in the changed territorial and political reality after 1945. This approach was underpinned by nationalist tendencies – completely in contradiction with the spirit of scientific objectivity.

One of the most fundamental stereotypes has consisted in seeing the Mediæval and Early Modern Gdańsk as a leading center of amber working. While this is a possibility for the late mediæval era, finding proof for the theory with respect to post mediæval age has proven difficult. Most raw amber obtained from the Baltic Sea was distributed among Königsberg (capital of Ducal Prussia) and Słupsk (the largest town of eastern Pomerania), cities of the state of Brandenburg which encircled the territory of Gdańsk.¹² Gdańsk faced notorious shortages of the raw material, especially as concerns its quality and even more the size of the pieces, since most amber nuggets found on the beaches under

⁸ Jean Campbell Cooper, *Enciclopedia illustrate dei simboli*, Padova 1987, p. 26.

⁹ Maurizio Vitella, *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare. Le tecniche di lavorazione* [in:] *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare nell' arte trapanese e della Sicilia occidentale tra il XVIII e il XIX secolo*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, Trapani 2003, p. 100.

¹⁰ King, *Finding the Divine Falernian...*

¹¹ Rachel King, *Whose Amber? Changing Notions of Amber's Geographical Origin*, *kunsttexte.de/ostblick*, Nr. 2: Gemeine Artefakte, 2014 (22 Seiten), kunsttexte.de/ostblick.

¹² Jacek Kriegseisen, *Słupskie bursztynnictwo. Wroby słupskiego cechu bursztynniczego od XVI do początku XX wieku*, Słupsk 2002.

the Gdańsk administration and fished from the sea were small. Such material was most suitable for beads.¹³

Alongside the dimensions of the available raw material and its visual qualities (structure, colour, transparency and translucency), the ease of working it ranks among the core features which qualify its use for sculpture. For that reason, Italy, or Sicily to be precise, was one of the centres of amber artefact production in southern Europe. The local craftsmen specialising in works of art produced primarily of coral, alongside ivory, tortoiseshell, mother of pearl, and several kinds of rare ornamental stone, e.g. alabaster and its varieties (to name e.g. *pietra incarnata*), were supremely able to transfer these skills to amber. The links between amber artefacts and Italy have had some attention, from Marjorie Trusted¹⁴, Rachel King (as a supplement of a kind to the former author's work), Maria Concetta di Natale (as a sideline to her discussions of the Sicilian precious materials used in the local art and crafts) and most recently Rahul Kulka. Yet, whenever Sicilian output has been studied or identified, the origin of the raw material has always remained an irresolvable problem. We know that simetite, a fossil resin similar in its properties to Baltic amber, is characteristically dark red and was found primarily in eastern Sicily. What we do not know, yet, is the degree to which the material from the Baltic region was used in Sicilian production. Information on this subject is dispersed and of questionable credibility, prevaillingly second hand. We have very few physical or chemical test results which could unquestionably resolve the issue of the raw material origin and type.¹⁵ Work to link artefacts to Italian production (Marjorie Trusted¹⁶, Rachel King¹⁷) through stylistic and iconographic analysis, but also inventory evidence is therefore highly important.

The oldest amber artifacts discovered in Sicily, attributed to the Castelluccio culture, are dated to the transition between the second and third millennia BCE.¹⁸

Goethe mentions that some of the vessels he observed must have been made "from exceptionally large pieces".¹⁹ He does not mention the period they

¹³ Anna Małka, Regina Kramarska, *Zarys górnictwa złóż bursztynu bałtyckiego w Polsce* [in:] *Bursztyn. Złoża – Właściwości – Kolekcje*, eds. Barbara Kosmowska-Ceranowicz, Anna Sobiecka, Elżbieta Sontag, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 18–23.

¹⁴ Marjorie Trusted, *Catalogue of European Ambers in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London 1985.

¹⁵ Identification of Sicilian amber is possible based on the molecular structure of the resin. Cf. Inez Dorothé van der Werf, Daniela Fico, Giuseppe Egidio De Benedetto, Luigia Sabbatini, *The molecular composition of Sicilian amber*, "Microchemical Journal" 2016, vol. 125, pp. 85–96.

¹⁶ Trusted, *Catalogue of European Ambers...*, pp. 82–89; Alexis Kugel, Rahul Kulka, *Amber. Treasures from the Baltic sea 16th–18th century*, Paris 2023, p. 72.

¹⁷ King, *Finding the Divine Falernian...*

¹⁸ Mateusz Cwaliński, *Circum-Adriatic branch of the amber route in the Bronze Age*, Lousanne 2023, abstract: https://archo.amu.edu.pl/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/337963/Mateusz-Cwalinski-Poszerzone-streszczenie-w-jezyku-polskim.pdf [accessed: 26.12.2024].

¹⁹ Goethe, *Podróż włoska*, p. 258.



Fig 1. Necklace, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, Palermo private collection

originated from, but the terms “urns” and “chalices” may suggest objects older than the modern era.

The Sicilian amber artefacts of proven origins that we know of include extremely simple pieces such as strings of irregularly ground beads of dark reddish amber which, due to its characteristic color, has traditionally been traced back to the local Sicilian material (fig. 1). Simple necklaces made of strung amber beads in Sicily trace their origins to Greek and Roman traditions. Documentary evidence confirms the production of rosaries as early as the 15th century. However, surviving artifacts do not pre-date the modern era. One reason for this is likely the fragility of Sicilian, indeed all, amber. Pieces can easily shatter, and this brittleness increases over time due to the gradual oxidation of the material.

The necklace shown in the illustration, originating from a private collection in Palermo, is a very rare example of a rosary once intended to adorn a statue of a saint or the Virgin Mary. The large, distinctively

cut beads were repurposed for this necklace, which was likely created in the 18th century.²⁰

Authentic works dating back to the 18th century, with some known from the previous century too, are, technologically speaking, slightly more complex. Meant here are ornaments for domestic altars, namely small “flower pots” (It.: *portapalme*) the bodies of which and sometimes the flowers placed in them are made of globes of amber (figs. 2, 3). They represent examples of semi-processed amber which was mounted by goldsmiths using the characteristic techniques of their trade, silver filigree in particular. Small oval or round frames were also crafted (figs. 4, 5). The silver filigree frames take the form of scrolling flora, and round or faceted beads have been strung onto silver wires. They encase medallions a few centimeters in height. The medallions present scenes, often carved from larger pieces of simetite. One such medallion, without its frame, is housed in the collection of the Museum of Gdańsk, and was described with

²⁰ Rita Vadalà, *Collane, ambra* [in:] *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare nell' arte trapanese e della Sicilia occidentale tra il XVIII e il XIX secolo*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, Trapani 2003, pp. 321–322.

information about its graphic source, by Joanna Grażawska.²¹ It depicts the Adoration of the Shepherds, a scene strikingly similar to that adorning a *capezzale* medallion from a Trapani workshop, dating to the first half of the 18th century, from a private collection in Catania (figs. 6–8).²² The medallion from Gdańsk is significantly larger and of much higher artistic quality than that from the Catania collection. The figures are carved with great precision and finesse. The relief is almost fully three-dimensional, with the entire background cut out. The lace-like composition is attached to a metal plaque. The way the figures are shaped, their movement, faces, as well as the size of the figures and the color of the material are very similar to the two objects indicated by Rachel King.²³ These are the “Adoration of the Shepherds” from the Corsini collection and “The Baptism of Christ” from Edinburgh, both dating from around 1700. Interestingly, the latter, when tested, was found to be Baltic rather than Sicilian amber.²⁴ Another related object is an oval medallion depicting the “Adoration of the Shepherds” from the collections of the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte in Naples, further pieces have recently been discussed by Alexis Kugel and Rahul Kulka.²⁵ Several of the above examples of carved amber are framed in wooden house altars, decorated with lapis lazuli, gilded bronze and ivory elements (fig. 9).²⁶ A hitherto unpublished relief of the Holy Family (fig. 10) now in the collections of the Palazzo dei Priori (Galleria



Fig. 2. Flower vase, filigree silver, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, private collection

²¹ Joanna Grażawska, *New attribution of the Adoration of the Shepherds medallion of the collection of Museum of Amber, Gdańsk*, „Bursztynisko/ The Amber Magazine” 2022, no. 46, pp. 60–64; *The World of Amber*. Catalogue of the permanent exhibition of the Muzeum of Amber in the Grand Mill, Gdańsk 2021, pp. 110–111.

²² Carmelo Bajamonte, *Natività ambra e argento* [in:] *Materiali preziosi dalla terra e dal mare*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, p. 154.

²³ King, *Finding the Divine Falernian...*

²⁴ Information provided informally by Rachel King.

²⁵ Kugel, Kulka, *Amber...*, p. 73

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 74.



Fig. 3. Set of *portapalme*, filigree silver, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, private collection

Nazionale dell'Umbria Perugia) undoubtedly belongs in future discussion of these house altars.²⁷

Small pieces of amber were also used in Trapani workshops to decorate the richly decorated frames of domestic *capezzale* and mirrors made in the 17th and early 18th centuries.²⁸ The frames of these small objects featured highly intricate plant-like ornament, incorporating elements of mother-of-pearl, lapis lazuli, ivory, agate, tortoiseshell, glass, and amber. Amber was used, for instance, to craft individual flowers or the tips of *acanthus flagellum*.²⁹

²⁷ *Sacra Famiglia con San Giovannino*, 9 × 3.43 × 8.36 cm, weight 98 g. The amber is one of a small group of objects acquired for the Archaeological Museum in 1841 by Giovanni Battista Vermiglioli, who also acquired non-archaeological objects. The catalogue explains that it is cited in AS PG, Comune di Perugia, Amministrativo, 1817–1860, b. 162, fasc. 3, List of objects left as a legacy by the late Monsignor Arciprete of the Counts of Oddi on 13 January 1841: “15. A small bas-relief painting in amber representing the Holy Family”, <https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/1000016945> [accessed: 28.11.2024].

²⁸ Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Gioielli come talismani e Schede* [in:] *Wunderkammer siciliana: alle origini del museo perduto*, ed. Vincenzo Abbate, Napoli 2001, pp. 67–75, 155.

²⁹ Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Capezzale con Giudita e Ooferne* [in:] *Materiali...*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, pp. 269–271; Roberta Cruciani, *Capolavori trapanesi in corallo del XVII e XVIII secolo a Malta*, “OADI Rivista Dell'Osservatorio Per Le Arti Decorative In Italia” 2013, no. 8, doi: 10.7431/RIV08032013 [accessed: 16.12.2024]; *Splendori di Sicilia. Arti Decorative dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, Milano 2001, p. 64.



Fig. 4. Reliquary, filigree silver, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, private collection



Fig. 5. Fragment of *capezzale* frame with a vision of Saint Anthony of Padua, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, Valetta National Museum of Fine Arts



Fig. 6. *Immaculata*, filigree silver, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, private collection



Fig. 7. The Adoration of the Shepherds, amber relief, filigree silver, amber beads, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, private collection



Fig. 8. The Adoration of the Shepherds, amber relief, Sicilian workshops, 18th century, Museum of Gdańsk



Fig. 9. *Immaculata*, Tipa workshop, 18th century, private collection



Fig. 10. Holy Family with St John, amber relief, 17th century, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria



Fig. 11. The Adoration of the Shepherds, amber relief, Sicilian workshops, about 1700, private collection

Sicilians of the 18th and 19th centuries used amber to produce carvings of deities or heads of the heroes of antiquity, artefacts composed like the coral camei used in the production of jewelry and characteristic of Trapani, as well as other centers on the Italian Peninsula. These ambers cannot be thought of as self-contained works of art, but rather fulfil ornamental roles for other larger, grander pieces.

The Trapani workshops, such as the Tipa family workshop, also produced small statues of the Virgin Mary or saints, placed on pedestals and surrounded by sunbursts. These statues were crafted from various precious materials, including ivory, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, tortoiseshell, silver, and amber. One such example is an amber statue of the Immaculate Conception, surrounded by silver filigree decorations and painted stones. This piece, from a private collection in Bagheria, measures approximately 15 cm high and is dated to the first half of the 18th century (fig. 11).³⁰

A small amber figurine, made of two types of amber, set on an amber base and on an alabaster pedestal (fig. 12) has been connected with Trapani on Sicily.³¹ Today in the collection of the Gdańsk Museum: it was originally in a private collection and was identified as the Virgin Mary,³² before being reidentified as Saint Agatha.³³ The small, standing female figure is dressed in a dress with a collar, a generously draped cloak and veil. The whole is made of transparent amber with a dark, almost red color. The face is made of white amber. A dowel hole is visible in place of a lost

³⁰ Giuseppe Ingaglio, *Immacolata, ambra, filigrana d'argento, pietre policrome* [in:] *Materiali...*, ed. Maria Concetta di Natale, p. 136.

³¹ Annamaria Precopi Lombardo, *Scultori trapanesi „d'ogni materia in piccolo e in grande” nella dinamica artistico-artigianale tra XVIII e il XIX secolo* [in:] *Materiali...*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, pp. 77–93.

³² *Bernstein für Thron und Altar, Das Gold des Meeres in fürstlichen Kunst- und Schatzkammern*, ed. Wilfried Seipel, Wien 2005, p. 126.

³³ *The World of Amber...*, p. 120.

hand. Seventeenth-century figurines of Virgin Mary mourning the crucified Jesus Christ with applied white amber faces and hands are characteristic of amber altars made in workshops in Gdańsk.³⁴ Figures depicting the Virgin Mary as Immaculate employ the same techniques.

The color of the amber does not predict its origin³⁵ and when “St Agatha” was scientifically analyzed it resulted in the confirmation that the amber is succinite.³⁶ The figure follows the models of the Virgin Mary at the Foot of the Cross, and Sicilian Immaculate Conceptions. The latter were produced in multiple versions in Trapani from alabaster, coral and amber. Yet two important details are also different from the latter type: the arrangement of the lost hands and her garment. Though no longer there, the suggestion is that the hands are directed down, while the *Immaculata* typically crosses them on her breast. Surviving *Immaculata* and figurines of Mary at the Cross wear smooth robes, however attention has been paid to the rendering of Agatha’s dress. The plinth, made of alabaster and built of the central cartouche and the surrounding volutes, is highly typical of Trapani and visible in many alabaster, ivory and coral works indisputably made there.³⁷ The transitional element between the figure and its plinth is the tiered amber base. Composed of three different fragments, this element, indeed possibly the figure, may be a historical fragment from another northern European artefact.

Simetite, like Baltic amber, is highly sensitive to changes in relative humidity and oxidizes. Exposure to light causes irreversible optical changes in the surface and damage. Its low hardness renders it susceptible to scratches and cracks.³⁸ Many sculptures in amber are small and their details are easily blurred by artistic



Fig. 12. *Immaculata*, Sicilian workshops, Museum of Gdańsk

³⁴ E.g. Figure from a home altar from the collection of the Amber Museum, from a Gdańsk workshop circa 1660 or Immaculata from the collection of the Pauline Treasury at Jasna Góra, a foundation of the abbot of the Cistercian monastery in Oliwa, David Konarski, Gdańsk workshop, 1611.

³⁵ Grążawska, *New attribution of the Adoration...*, p. 62.

³⁶ Ewa Wagner Wysiecka, *International Amber Association Examination report*. Report No. 28624_10062021, Gdańsk 2021.

³⁷ Maria Concetta Di Natale, *Iconografia Mariana* [in:] *Materiali...*, ed. Maria Concetta Di Natale, pp. 127, 128, 129, 133, 134.

³⁸ Jadwiga Łukaszewicz, *Problematyka konserwatorska zabytków z bursztynu* [in:] *Bursztyn. Złoża–Właściwości–Kolekcje*, eds. Barbara Kosmowska-Ceranowicz, Anna Sobecka, Elżbieta Sontag, Gdańsk 2017, pp. 100–103.

treatments of the material or postproduction polishing through care and use. Ambers age and become less transparent. Their surfaces become matte and there are changes to color. Much of the above is and would have been visible Within 25 years of making.³⁹ The combination of amber with other materials, frequently metals, also affects their condition. The substructures of many objects weaken, and pieces, such as altars or reliquaries, loose their integrity as the material degrades.

Especially concerning is that materials used for historical repairs themselves degrade, imperiling surviving artefacts.⁴⁰ During the 20th century, many methods of cleaning, impregnating and re-gluing amber objects were developed.⁴¹ How these needs have been and can be met continue to be researched. A separate issue, often controversial, is the scope of reconstruction undertaken during conservation and restoration. There are many irreversible changes in the structure of the material, which will never allow the full restoration of the object's original appearance. Delicate and fragile elements are easily lost and destroyed, which is why we often deal with objects preserved only fragmentarily.

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³⁹ Sławomir Safarzyński, *Konserwacja zapobiegawcza elementów wystroju architektonicznego dekorowanego bursztynem* [in:] *Bursztyn...*, eds. Barbara Kosmowska-Ceranowicz, Anna Sobecka, Elżbieta Sontag, pp. 104–107.

⁴⁰ Maria Rudy, *Bursztynowy relikwiarz z Redlina 1680 r.* [in:] *Bursztyn jako przedmiot ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego*, ed. Janusz Hochleitner, Jantar 2011, pp. 27–41.

⁴¹ Annina Bertog, *Vom Buckelpokal zum Venusbad: Restaurierungsberichte eines Bernsteinpokals aus dem Grünen Gewölbe Dresden*, "Restauro" 2003, no. 5, pp. 327–331; Michaela Lechner, *Restaurierung und Konservierung von Bernstein Ein Altaraufsatz aus der alten geistlichen Schatzkammer in Wien*, "Restauro" 1998, no. 1, pp. 26–31; Katarzyna Kwiatkowska, *Conservation of Amber. Selected Topics*, „Bursztynisko/ The Amber Magazine” 2022, no. 46, pp. 48–53.

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Jacek
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