

On the Amber Road. Bioarchaeological and archaeometric studies of raw materials identified in the artifacts from an Early Iron Age biritual cemetery in Opole-Groszowice (southern Poland)

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Cremation was the predominant burial practice across much of Europe during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (around 1000/950–500/400 BCE). In south-central Poland, numerous biritual cemeteries emerged along the ancient Amber Road during this period. One such cemetery is Opole-Groszowice, where 12 skeletal burials were found alongside 142 cremations. The latter yielded practically no finds apart from ceramics. In contrast, the skeletal burials were accompanied by a variety of objects emphasizing the prestige of the deceased. Despite the poor preservation of the bones and the contamination that affected some of the isotopic results, a bioarchaeological study of the skeletal remains provided limited insight into paleodietary patterns. Archaeometric analyses of the raw materials used to produce the grave goods facilitated provenance studies. Some of the metal objects originated from the north or north-west (the Baltic region) while glass beads came from the south (the Mediterranean region). The amber beads were also produced somewhere to the south and south-west of the Sudeten mountain range (possibly in the Mediterranean), but the raw amber actually came from the Baltic region. Combined bioarchaeological and archaeometric data suggest that the individuals interred in the inhumation graves may have belonged to a local elite who most likely controlled the nearby section of the trade route running alongside the Oder river. These results support the idea of long-distance exchange, status differentiation, and funerary variation within an Early Iron Age community.

Słowa kluczowe

Urnfield culture, Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Biritual cemetery, Amber Road, Archaeometry

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