

Myrrh Oil: A Thin Thread Through Ancient History

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Myrrh oil is a fascinating ingredient in the beauty industry because of its subtle yet powerful contributions. The ingredient is not often discussed yet maintains a constant in perfume production as trends change. Historically the oil has been used for many different purposes. For thousands of years Europeans relied on Myrrh as a pain management tool; it was only replaced by morphine in 1803 (Aromatics, 2023). In ancient civilizations it was used in spiritual and cultural rituals. Today it is used in homeopathic treatments, meditation exercises, and the beauty industry.

Myrrh oil is derived from the sap of Commiphora Myrrha trees. The scrawny and short Commiphora Myrrha trees are native to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Saudi Arabia and have been imported around the globe for thousands of years (Geist, 2022). The bark of the trees is repeatedly cut to increase the flow of sap which is collected and stored in its hardened form. During steam distillation the hardened sap is melted in boiling water (Fernandes, 2023). The myrrh oil separates and is collected in its purest form. This ancient process is still used today. The most well known historical references of myrrh oil date back to the ancient Egyptian and Persian empires.

In ancient Egypt, Myrrh oil is among the Seven Sacred Oils and is referenced in multiple sources including Papyrus Salt and inscriptions of the temple at Abydos (El-Badrawy, 2023). The oil was used mostly in death, post death, and funeral rituals. It was both burned as incense and used to embalm corpses. The embalming process helped to preserve the mummies; many of which still smell of the warm and spicy aroma today (Taylor & Francis, 2021). Historians believe there is a deliberate symbolism between the 'violent' method used to extract myrrh sap,

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which wounds the tree, and its use in death and post death rituals. King Sahure, of the fifth-dynasty, was first to import myrrh to Egypt from present day Somalia (Wachsmann & Bass, 2009). Like much of the details of ancient Egypt's history, myrrh's contribution to these rituals is somewhat of a guesswork because of the limited sources.

In comparison, ancient Persia's use of Myrrh is well documented. During the Persian Empire myrrh was used for medicinal purposes and beauty treatments. Medicinally, the oil was used for many purposes including as a uterine stimulant and as a way to cause a complete abortion (Vafaei et al., 2020). A recent study published in May of 2020 by the Iranian Registry of Clinical Trials, tested whether this method is scientifically accurate. General results showed an over eighty percent success rate in completing an abortion. Myrrh oil is now labeled with a 'use during pregnancy' warning. Multiple biblical sources reference a beauty ritual which included myrrh baths as part of a six month pre pageant ritual. The pageant was held by King Xerxes to find a new queen following the death of Queen Vashti on his orders (Esther 2:12). The baths were intended to treat and moisturize the skin and aid body hair removal. The combined effect was 'pristine skin' to greet the King.

Today myrrh oil is used as an ingredient in perfume and medicinal products. The unique scent is often described as spicy, warm, and opulent. The oil is used as a fixative to extend the scent life of the perfume (Samtani, 2023). Homeopaths use the oil to reduce inflammation and provide relief for colds, congestion, and coughs (Yao, 2021). These uses are in line with the ancient Persian tradition. In meditation, myrrh oil is used in massages to encourage spiritual awakening, tranquility, and open the third eye.

To call Myrrh oil popular in the perfume industry would be to call textbooks popular in academia. These are not popular or a trend in either of their respective areas, they are key

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pillars. A specific class may not use a textbook but it is an undisputed fact that academia needs textbooks. The same is true for myrrh oil, it is not used in every perfume but it is a key player in many and stands as a strong pillar in perfume manufacturing.

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