

## **GLOBALIZING SCENTS AND SPICES. EXCHANGE OF AROMATIC PLANTS ALONG THE INCENSE TRADE ROUTE**

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Some of the most highly desired natural products that moved along ancient trade routes were not substantive, calorie-laden foods, but aromatics, powders and extracts that nonetheless packed substantial flavor and aroma. Not only did these substances possess the ability to transform cuisines or to perfume people and their environment, they also played significant roles in economic, cultural, and ritual contexts. Control over and access to these trade goods became the source of great wealth and political power. Thus, to understand the dispersal of goods and early forms of globalizations, it is key to identify the origins and use of these aromatic substances. Traditionally, it has been difficult to study them in the archaeological record due to their ephemeral nature. Moreover, macroremains of spices or plant exudates are scarce in archaeobotanical assemblages in contrast to more tangible remains such as seeds and fruits. However, recent advances in biomolecular analyses of organic residues in artefacts make it possible to also trace the “invisible” commodities of trade.

Here, we present the study of organic remains from objects associated with the use of aromatic substances, such as incense burners, perfume flasks and unguent containers, alongside the Arabian incense road and at destinations in ancient Egypt in the 1st millennium BCE using biomolecular fingerprinting of plant secondary metabolites, lipids and proteins. Our study provides a unique insight into the sensual world of the past by shedding light on the consumption practices of aromatics.

### **Keywords**

organic residue analysis, aromatic plants, dispersal of goods, early globalization, archaeology of the senses

### **Note/comment**