

### Summary protocol: Frankincense and the Dhofar region

**Frankincense** has been object of trade since the antiquity. It was known and used by the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans, as well as by many indo-oriental people. Frankincense is a natural rubber-gum exuded from the bark of trees of the genus *Boswellia* (also called Olibanum). The *Boswellia* trees belong to the family *Burseraceae*. *Boswellia sacra* Flueck only grows in northern Somalia, Yemen and south-western Oman (region of Dhofar).



**Figure 1: Frankincense tree in the Frankincense Park of Wadi Dawkah. Photo: Jawtusich 2007**

To obtain the resin, trees are scored at various places along the main trunk and branches with a special designed tool (called mengaff) or an ordinary axe. The milky liquid which comes out of the tree hardens into droplets or tears. Those can easily be detached by collectors. Frankincense has numerous traditional, religious, ceremonial and medicinal uses. Terracotta burners, whose design has not changed for centuries are often used to burn the dried resin. The

incense is also chewed to strengthen teeth, or stimulate digestion. Frankincense is used during festive events like weddings, or a birth of a newborn. Dried frankincense resin may also be burnt to perfume clothes, or hair. Moreover, frankincense is simply used to demonstrating one's hospitality to visiting guests.



**Figure 2: Frankincense (dried resin) Photo: Wikipedia**

Frankincense has always played a crucial role for the region of Dhofar. From here the incense was sold to traders at the port of Aden (Yemen), or it was directly shipped through the Red Sea northwards to Egypt or Gaza and from there to the Mediterranean Sea. During the first century BC and the first century AD frankincense was as valuable as gold.

Nowadays one has to pay only 10 Omani Rial for 1kg of frankincense, because the demand for it decreased over the past centuries and so the price went down. The frankincense which can be bought at the markets of Salalah today is mainly imported from Somalia where it is cheaper to harvest.

To show how important frankincense was for the Dhofar region in the past, the Frankincense Park of Wadi Dawkah (approximately 40km north of Salalah) was established. Since the year 2000 the park is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It covers an area of 7.964km<sup>2</sup>. The central feature is a north-draining wadi on the edge of the desert. The frankincense trees are to be found in the flat bed of the wadi.