

What scents did the ancient Egyptians use?

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Pharaoh Hatshepsut was a power-conscious woman who assumed the reins of government in Egypt around the year 1479 B.C. In actual fact, she was only supposed to represent her step-son Thutmose III, who was three years old at the time, until he was old enough to take over. But the interregnum lasted 20 years. "She systematically kept Thutmose out of power", says Michael Höveler-Müller, the curator of Bonn University's Egyptian Museum.

Hatshepsut's perfume is also presumably a demonstration of her power. "We think it probable that one constituent was incense - the scent of the gods", Michael Höveler-Müller declares. This idea is not so wide of the mark, as it is a known fact that in the course of her regency Hatshepsut undertook an expedition to Punt - the modern Eritrea, and the [Egyptians](#) had been importing precious goods such as ebony, ivory, gold, and just this incense, from there since the [third millennium](#) B.C. Apparently the expedition brought back whole incense plants, which Hatshepsut then had planted in the vicinity of her funerary temple.

The filigree flacon now under examination by the researchers in Bonn bears an inscription with the name of the Pharaoh. Hence it was probably once in her possession. The vessel is exceptionally well preserved. "So we considered it might be rewarding to have it screened in the University Clinic's Radiology Department", Höveler-Müller explains. "As far as I know this has never been done before".

This world premier will now in all probability be followed by another one: "The desiccated residues of a fluid can be clearly discerned in the x-

ray photographs", the museum's curator explains. "Our pharmacologists are now going to analyse this sediment". The results could be available in a good year's time. If they are successful, the scientists in Bonn are even hoping to "reconstruct" the perfume so that, 3,500 years after the death of the woman amongst whose possessions it was found, the scent could then be revitalised.

Hatshepsut died in 1457 B.C. Analysis of the mummy ascribed to her showed that the ruler was apparently between 45 and 60 years of age at the end of her life; that she was also overweight, and suffering from diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and arthritis. Obviously for reasons of security, she was laid to rest in the tomb of her wet nurse. In 1903, over 3,300 years later, the famous Egyptologist Howard Carter stumbled upon the two mummies. However, more than 100 years were to pass before the Pharaoh's corpse could be identified using DNA and dental analysis in the year 2007. [Thutmose III](#), incidentally, appears not to have shed a single tear for his step-mother, as during his reign he had every image destroyed which showed her as ruler, and which could have belonged to her.

Source: University of Bonn ([news](#) : [web](#))

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