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NAMES OF AROMATA IN SEMITIC AND CUSHITIC LANGUAGES *

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1. Severe limits of space compel us to confine ourselves in this paper to discussing a representative selection of words denoting «frankincense» and «myrrh» in Semitic and Cushitic languages, as well as some taxonomies for incense grades and the main tool employed for harvesting frankincense. Other aromatics shall be mentioned only when they will have to be distinguished from the two mentioned above.

Concerning the identification of lexemes denoting incense, however, one should consider that:

1) singling out the gum-resins of frankincense and myrrh with respect to other aromata is often difficult, particularly in the most ancient literary sources and in the reports by the earliest European travellers;

2) many botanical identifications are controversial in languages attested only scantily or fragmentarily;

3) cognate words may have different referential scope in different languages, even more so in semantic fields such as botanical terms¹.

* RC is responsible for the Semitic data, GB for the Cushitic and Egyptian ones, whereas we are jointly answerable for the general structure of this paper and for the etymological proposals offered here. Materially, §§ 1-2 were written by RC, §§ 3-5 by GB. Bibliographical references have been kept to a minimum because of lack of space. We thank all those who helped us on different occasions in preparing this paper, in particular: David Appleyard, Alessandra Avanzini, Marilina Betto, Giovanni Canova, Aldo Corcella, Federico De Romanis, Carlo Di Giovine, Rodolfo Faltovich, Bernd Heine, and Miranda Morris. Obviously only we are to blame for any mistake we may have incurred.

¹ These methodological principles were of course tacitly adopted by the most careful scholars who studied plant-names in the classical Sem. languages.

In fact, some tendencies displayed by botanic ethno-taxonomies should be always kept in mind:

a) they do not exhibit a one-to-one correspondence between sign and referent;

b) they are not systematic, i.e. some lexical areas are highly structured, while others are shapeless and loose;

c) they are variable from speaker to speaker: i.e., the same word may denote only an aroma, or only the plant that yields it, or both;

d) in contradistinction to Linnaeus's and the subsequent scientific classifications, which order plants according to their reproduction-mode, ethno-botanic nomenclatures are fashioned according to a number of different criteria (external shape, size, smell or taste of one of the plant's components, peculiar characteristics, uses to which the plant may be put, and many more): this often results in more than one species sharing a single name (e.g. «myrrh» and «aloe» in MSA, both lexicalizing the salient feature of «bitterness»), or in one plant displaying a variety of names (as is the case with many *Commiphoras* in Arabic and Somali)¹.

As is well known, the plants producing the best qualities of frankincense and myrrh grow almost exclusively in areas where Semitic and Cushitic languages are now spoken (roughly, the two sides of the Gulf of Aden), which fact alone justifies our comparative perspective. Even if a detailed discussion of the nature of the lexical evidence on Semitic and Cushitic names for aromata would be impossible here, a few cautionary remarks are nevertheless in order:

1) Both these incense-producing areas are today markedly multilingual: we do not know which languages (Semitic or otherwise) were spoken in Southern Arabia before and

ges (only to a limited extent ascribable to a common Sem. stock), chief among them I. Löw. On the other hand, old studies on plant-names in Arabic- and Ethiosemitic- or Cushitic-speaking areas, such as those by G. Schweinfurth, are today more difficult to use because of the recent headways in botanical classification.

¹ Cf. Cardona (1985: 117-128 on ethnobotany; 129-145 on naming processes); Morris & Miller (1988: XVIII ff.) for Dhofari (Ar. and MSA) plant-names, one of the very few available ethno-botanic studies on a Semitic-speaking country. See also the relevant sections in the six volumes of ethnobotanical surveys of Kenyan languages by the Köln group, e.g. Heine & Brenzinger (1988), Heine & Heine (1988).

during the period when ASA was written; in the case of the Somali-speaking area we do not even know what languages were used in some of its regions before the probably fairly recent spread of north-central Somali, and similar considerations hold also for large areas of Ethiopia and Eritrea that are now either Oromo-, Amharic- or Tigrinya-speaking.

2) The botanical classification of the most important frankincense-producing trees – for which the relevant languages are MSA and Yem. and Dhof. Ar. in Southern Arabia and essentially Som. in the Horn of Africa – is more or less established, although the possibility that *Boswellia sacra* and *Bosw. carteri* are in fact different species is still disputed². But we do not yet have comparable evidence about the distribution of *Bosw. papyrifera*³, even to the point of knowing in which languages of Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea (beyond Tigre) one should be looking for the relevant plant-names. As regards myrrh, we do not know which gum-resins produced by *Commiphoras*, besides *Comm. myrrha* proper which is said to grow only in Somalia, were regarded as «myrrh» in antiquity. Indeed, the botanic classification of the genus *Commiphora* is still uncertain, and the various gums are often described or correlated with the plants inconsistently⁴. Therefore, we shall refrain from discussing here the names of myrrh-producing plants (in MSA, South Ar., Ethiosemitic, Oromo and Som., respectively) and concentrate upon words denoting the resin.

Finally, Cushitic and – more surprisingly, considering its long history – Semitic etymology is still far from having reached the degree of subtlety and exactitude current in Indo-European and particularly Romance scholarship. This means that the proposals put forward in this paper, the first systematic exercise in comparing Semitic and Cushitic names for incense, cannot but be tentative in many cases. Furthermore, what appear to us as cognate words sometimes cannot be accounted for by direct lexical diffusion, and our etymological suggestions have to employ different heuristic devices, not forgetting those «collateral evolutionary fac-

² Groom (1981: 103); Martinetz *et al.* (1989: 73 ff., 183).

³ Groom (1981: 102 f.); Martinetz *et al.* (1989: 74 ff.).

⁴ Groom (1981: 117 ff.); Martinetz *et al.* (1989: 89 ff.).

tors» pointed out by theoreticians of etymology such as Yaa-kov Malkiel⁶.

2. The most important term for «frankincense» both in Semitic and in Cushitic is of course *libān*, on which we do not need to dwell too long, since the history of this word has already been reconstructed masterly by Walter Müller some 20 years ago⁷. Its different forms are listed below in (a.) according to their likely morphological history and chronological attestation⁸:

- (a.) *LBN* «frankincense» ← «white»
libān: ASA *lbn* (?), Gr. *λίβανος* since Sappho, Yem. and Dhof. Ar. *libān*, Beja *libān*, Ti. *lāban* coll. (either directly from *libān*, or from Ar. *lubān*);
libān > Ar. *lubān* (with regressive labialization of *i*), Sa. Af. *lubān* (Af. predicate form *lubāan-a*), Som. *luu-baan*;
lbnt 1: Gr. *λίβανωτός*, Pun. *lbnt*, BH *l'bōnā*, OfA *lbwnh*, Syr. *lbō(n)tā*, Ti. *lābanāt* (n. unit. of *lāban*), Har. *libanāt*, Or. *libaanata*, Som. *libaanad*;
lbnt 2: Akk. (~~late- and Neo-Bab.~~) *libanānt* and *lub-* (b) *unītu*.

Sold

Standard Bab. (pre-Sarg.)
libanītu / *libānītu* and

We should only note that the form **libānat* presumably developed by affixing the derivative ending *-at* to express some semantic modification of the primitive form, according to a principle in Semitic historical morphology famously illustrated by David Cohen in 1964⁹. The original character of this modification is hard to define precisely in this case: possibly the designation of a single grain of the dried gum in contradistinction to the commodity in a general sense, as we

⁶ On the principle of lexical contamination «it is demonstrable that, the more thoroughly a field has been ploughed under by etymologists, the higher the number of plausible blends» (Malkiel 1976: 64). On «multiple causation» see, e. g., Malkiel (1977), with instances culled from Romance languages.

⁷ See particularly Müller (1974) and (1978: 703 ff.), with the main etymological data; further, Nielsen (1986: 60 ff.).

⁸ The same criteria of course obtain also for the subsequent etymological sketches.

⁹ Cf. Cohen (1970¹ [1964]: 43 ff.).

still ascertain in Tigre. From the rt. *LBN* expressing «milky whiteness»¹⁰ many more plant-names are derived in Semitic languages: cf. ASA *lbn* [*libnāy* ?] probably denoting «stor-ax»¹¹, because of the whitish colour of the clots of this resin (an incense-ingredient imported in Southern Arabia from Syria). Of the two Somali allotropes, one points towards Arabic, the other towards Harari, just as the Oromo form.

The Sem. root *QTR* – *QTR* (with alternance between *q* and *t* owing to dissimilation of the emphatic consonant or to lexical blending) expresses the notions of «incense», «odoriferous smoke» and «fumigation»:

- (b.) *QTR* – *QTR*
QTR: Ug. *qtr* «smoke, incense», BH *q'īōret* «incense (offering)» and *miqtēret* «Rauchpfanne», ASA *mqtr*, Ar. *miqtar* – *miqtarah* «censer»¹², etc.
QTR: Akk. *qatāru* «fumigate, make an incense offering» and *qutrēnu* «incense (offering)», Ar. *qatara* «exhale an odour», G. *qatara* – *qattara* «fumigate» and *qattār(e)* «incense, fumigation»¹³, Som. *jādar* [*jādar*]¹⁴ «incense from Bosw. frereana».

The Som. form *jādar* may have been borrowed from

¹⁰ The dominant colour of the fresh sap oozing from an incision in the bark of the tree should thus be regarded as the «sème lexicogène» (Guiraud) of the main word for «frankincense» in ASA, later diffused in the other languages. But see also what is said in § 3 about Eg. *ḥrꜥw* (= Hesych. *αέντιον*, cf. Edel 1980: 46 ff.) «Harz», «incense» or «myrrh» and Som. *caṇḍad* [*anānd*] «quality of frankincense».

¹¹ On formal grounds (cf. BH *libnē*, Ar. *lubnā*), as rightly stressed by Müller (1978: 705); see also Sab. Dic. (81).

¹² Cf. HAL (III: 1022 ff.) with the relevant comparative information, and Nielsen (1986: 52 ff.). Ar. has also *qut(u)r* «aloe-wood» and *qatr* «encens de bois d'aloès» (Kazimirski 767 b), that easily fit together with Ar. *miqtar* (– *miqtarah*) «censer», etc. On the other hand, the origin of the Ar. lexical family of *qatara* «drip (of tears or of resins from plants)», *qitr* «molten brass», *qat(i)rān* «liquid pitch» (> It. *catrame*, etc.), that has no obvious match in Semitic, is unclear.

¹³ Leslau (1987: 452 a).

¹⁴ From Axmed Cartan Xaange (1984: 23 ff.), *jadar-goyā* «frankincense harvest» lit. «frankincense-cutting» also in Ahmed Yusuf Farah (1994: 69). Here *k'* > Som. *j*- as in East Cush. **k'eb-i* «break (tr.)» > Som. *jeb-i*, but Arbore *k'eb-i* «id.»; cf. also Sasse (1979: 47 ff.). Som. *-d-* < *-(t)-* is the most obvious explanation.

Ethiosemitic *qattār(e)* with Ethiosemitic *a* > Som. *a* that palatalises the preceding **q*- [k'-]. Ar. *q* usually gives Som. *q* or more rarely *g*. The only other example of Ar. *q* corresponding to Som. *j* is Som. *jāud* «kat, narcotic plant, *Catha edulis*» vs. Ar. *qāt* «id.» (> Som. *qāad* regularly), but this is likely to have entered Som. through Ethiosemitic, cf. e.g. Harari *čāt*, Amh. and Gurage *čat* etc.

As is well known, names of aromata are frequently derived from roots meaning «burning» and «smoke, fumigation» by lexicalizing the semantic feature of the use as burned incense to which these substances were put (as in late Lat. *incensum*). Other examples beside the family in (b.) above are Ar. *bahūr* ~ *buhūr* «incense»¹⁵ (< BHR «turn into smoke; fumigate») and *duhūn* «burnt aroma»¹⁶ (< DHN «smoke»). Similarly Afar has 'er-tó «incense» from Af. 'ér (predicate form 'éer-i) «smoke, steam» (cf. Dasenech 'eer «id.», Oromo *aara* «smoke», etc.).

Also Cl. Ar. *kundur* «frankincense»¹⁷, which has been traced back historically to an Indian word denoting «frankincense» from Bosw. *serrata*¹⁸, might ultimately turn out to be linked with the QTR ~ QTR root. But it is at present impossible to prove that the family originated ultimately from Sem. QTR ~ QTR or from another language along the an-

¹⁵ In Yem. Ar. *bahūr* ~ *buhūr* also designates a specific mix of aromatics (varying regionally, but apparently not including frankincense) burned on solemn and festive occasions, while *tabhūr* denotes «fumigation with b.» (Bonnenfant 1994: 35 f.).

¹⁶ Recorded as «encens» in Hadr. (van den Berg 1888: 102) and Dath. Ar. (Landberg 1920: 724), it denotes today at as-Sihr a kind of aromatic bark, an ingredient of *duhūn*, a mix of 7 (vegetal and animal) aromatics burned on coal fire (Camielin 1994: 22).

¹⁷ WKAS (I: 83, 553). The word seems to be unattested in Southern Ar. dialects, although Landberg (1901: 496 f.) explained Hadr. Ar. *kundara* «shave one's head» as being originally a denominative from *kundur* that meant «fumigate one's head with frankincense».

¹⁸ More convincing than the alleged derivation from Gr. *χόνδρος* «grain» (i.e. of frankincense). The Indian forms are *kunduh*, *kunduru*, *kundah*, etc. «resin from Bosw. *serrata*» (*kunduh* also «Jasminum pubescens»), *kuntī*, *kundur-ukī*, *kundur-ikā* «Bosw. *serrata*», all of them unattested in the older texts or known only from lexicographers. Mayrhofer (1956: 230) regards this family as etymologically unclear. It is however likely to be the source of MPers. *kunduruk* «frankincense», Arm. *kndruk* and of the Ar. word. Forms with initial *q*- are known from Syriac (*qandri*, etc.) and Ge'ez (*q'andra* ~ *q'andre*, in a medical recipe), cf. Müller (1978: 707 f.).

cient trade routes between the Near East, the Indian Ocean and India.

A specifically Ethio-Semitic root is 'TN «incense», «to burn incense, to fumigate with incense», that passed also into Cushitic¹⁹:

- (c.) 'TN n. «incense», v. «burn incense, fumigate with incense»
G. Tñ. 'əṭān, Amh. Har. Gur. ṭān, Sa. 'etān ~ etān²⁰,
Or. (h)ixāana ~ (h)ixana [(h)it'āna].

Its relationship with the Sem. 'TR «perfume, scent» (particularly in Aram. with the same specialization of «perfume produced by burning») may be due not simply to «Reim-wortbildung» with forms of the root TNN «to smoke», as advocated by Brockelmann²¹, but rather to a contamination between Sem. 'TR «perfume» and (a metathesized allotrope of) the possible ancestor form of both O.Eg. 'ntyw (= Hesych. ἀέντιον) «incense», «myrrh» and Som. *canāud* ['anād] «best grade of frankincense from Bosw. *carteri*» (cf. § 3 for its possible affiliation).

2.1. Among minor terms for «frankincense» the following one should be mentioned:

- (d.) G. *səhin* «frankincense» > Amh. *səhin*.

This is from Sem. ŠHN «be or become warm, hot» according to Leslau (1987: 495 b, 694 a), but the semantic specialisation can be neatly explained as an Ethiopian folk-ety-

¹⁹ Etymological data in Leslau (1987: 76 b).

²⁰ Leslau (1987: 76 b) reports Sa. Af. 'etān, whereas Reinisch (1989: 67) has Sa. 'etān and etān and adds that the same form occurs also in Af. All these forms are partly wrong because (i.) no Sa. Af. variety has long vowels in final closed syllables, and (ii.) ' does not exist in Af. and occurs in Sa. only in unadapted loanwords from Ethiosemitic. Since Reinisch often misspells *ā* for *i*, the forms in (c.) are probably the correct ones. It is not clear what the Af. form actually is.

²¹ Brockelmann (1927: 28). Another candidate for lexical contamination with 'TR «perfume, scent» might be BH-ŠN, Ar. 'TN «smoke» (HAL III: 848 b), that, however, does not seem to occur in Ethiosemitic.

mological reinterpretation of Copt. (S, A) $\omega\omicron\Upsilon\text{-}\zeta\eta\eta\epsilon$, (B) $\omega\omicron\text{-}\zeta\eta\eta$ «encens» with -2- [-h-]²². Indeed, as Zaborski (1995: 538 s.) has most recently shown, there is evidence that some Coptic words passed into Ethiopic directly and not via Greek or Arabic.

MSA $\dot{S}H\dot{Z}$ appears to be isolated within Semitic (except if the Qatabanian clan-name $bn\text{-}\dot{s}^h\dot{z}$ mentioned by Müller 1976: 127 should actually reflect the use of this word in ASA as well).

- (e.) MSA $\dot{S}H\dot{Z}$ «gum, resin, frankincense»
 Jib. $\dot{s}ahaz$ «gum, resin (gum Arabic and frankincense)»,
 Me. $\dot{s}ehaz$ «resin, frankincense», Ha. $\dot{s}ahaz$ «frankincense», Soq. $\dot{s}ahaz$ «gum, resin, frankincense»²³.

Similarly isolated are the following words:

- (f.) Som. $béeyo$ «Bosw. sacra or carteri and its incense».
 (g.) Som. $yagcār$ [$yag'ār$] ~ $jagcār$ [$\check{y}ag'ār$] «Bosw. frereana»²⁴.

Some possible etymological connections can be suggested for another Somali name of the Bosw. frereana:

- (h.) Som. $máydi$ «Bosw. frereana and its incense».

It corresponds to Yem. Ar. $lubān mīdī$ wrongly regarded by Rossi (1939: 169 f.) as imported into Yemen from India. Variants attested in S. Arabic are also $lubān mīfī$ (Schopen 1983: 162) and $lubān mīdī$ (Honda *et al.* 1990: Y 38 f.). Variation between -d- ~ -f- ~ -ḏ- may reflect different attempts at adapting this Som. word to S. Ar. phonology.

²² Crum (1939: 688 b), Vycichl (1984: 274 a).

²³ Jahn (1902: 265); Johnstone (1981: 250) and (1987: 377); Morris & Miller (1988: 78). Lestau (1938: 427) quotes Glaser (1899) as suggesting a connection with Eg. $\beta\beta r$ «a kind of plant» (WAS IV: 412), whose identification is, however, uncertain.

²⁴ $Yagcār$ attested, e. g., in Yaasiin (p. 472 a), $jagcār$ in Ahmed Cartan Xaange (1984: 23 ff.). Notice that the alternation y- ~ j- in Som. is rare, although there are a few other instances of it, e. g., $yābaq$ ~ $jābaq$ «umore confuso di voci (umane o animali) a distanza» (DSI: 643 b).

Alternatively, the N. Somali coastal settlement of $Máydh$ [$māyṭ$] in the area where Bosw. frereana grows may be the source of the S. Ar. nisbah $mīfī$ ~ $mīdī$ ~ $mīdī$ that re-entered Som. as a loanword ($máydi$). Dr. M. Morris (personal communication) also suggested us a possible connection with Soq. $mēde$ «a hot wind blowing in May-September, that also includes the period of the SW monsoon». Since this is also said to be the best time for harvesting this kind of frankincense, the Som. word $máydi$ could thus contain either a place name or the name of a season. A connection has been suggested (Grohmann 1930: 144) between this word and the enigmatical $\mu\omicron\tau\omega$, mentioned in the *PME* (§§ 12 f.) together with frankincense and other aromata produced and traded on the Somali coast. Its identification with the second-best grade of cassia suggested by Casson (1989: 130) is purely hypothetical, and the possibility that the frankincense of Bosw. frereana is here differentiated from the resin of Bosw. carteri should at least be considered.

2.2. One of the most interesting connections between Semitic and Cushitic names for «incense» is represented by the word $M?R$, whose modern reflexes denote the «frankincense tree» in MSA, Dhof. Ar., Ethiosemitic and Som. (the referent – different species of Bosw. – changing in the various areas):

- (i.) $M?R$ «Bosw. sacra» (Som. Bosw. sacra or carteri, Ti., Amh. Bosw. papyrifera?)
 Meh. $māgarāt$ «Bosw. sacra», Jib. $māgarāt$ ~ $māgar$ «Bosw. sacra», Dhof. Ar. $mūgereh$ (coll. $mgor$), Som. $móxor$ [$móhor$] «Bosw. sacra or carteri», Ti. $māgar$, Amh. $māqār$ ²⁵.

This word is known at least since the 1st cent. CE in the form ($\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\mu\alpha\ \tau\acute{o}\ \lambda\epsilon\gamma\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$) $\mu\omicron\chi\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ recorded by the *PME* (§§ 9 f.) as a kind of incense imported from the Somali coast of the Gulf of Aden²⁶, with a semantic shift from the

²⁵ Cf. Johnstone (1987: 262); Morris & Miller (1988: 78); Rhodokanakis (1911: 56 b); Littmann & Höfner (1962: 142); Strelcyn (1973: no. 163).

²⁶ Cf. Casson (1989: 56 f., 127). The connection of $\mu\omicron\chi\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon$ with Sem. and Cush. words for frankincense had already been put forward by Glaser, see Schoff (1912: 81).

tree to its product which is also attested for *muḡ(u)r* in medieval Yem. Ar. by Ibn al-Mujāwir and modern Dath. and Dhof. Ar.²¹ The linguistic affiliation and precise semantic range (whether denoting the tree, the resin or both) of the original word is uncertain, this is why the middle radical is here replaced by a question mark. However, were the Qat. clan-name *mīr* mentioned by Müller (1976: 127) actually to be vocalized **muḡ(u)rum* and related to the same root (as indeed names of aromata are often present in Semitic onomastics), the hypothesis of an ASA origin would gain weight.

2.3. The most widespread word in Semitic (as well as Greek, Latin and modern European languages) denoting «myrrh» harks back from the root *MRR* denoting «bitterness»:

- (j.) *MRR* «myrrh» ← «bitter»
Akk. Amarna Can. *murru*, Ug. Ph. *mr*, BH *môr* ~ *môr*, Gr. *μύρρα* (already in Sappho), ASA **murr* and pl. **murr*, Syr. *mūrā*, Ar. *murr*, Yem. and Dhof. Ar. also *murr*, Som. *murre*, Soq. *irmher(?)*²².

A different form occurs in MSA:

- (k.) MSA *ṭayf* ~ *ṭuf* «myrrh (Commiphora myrrha)», «aloe (Aloe perryi and other species)»
Meh. *ṭayf* ~ *ṭuf*, Jib. *ṭuf*, Har. Soq. *ṭayf*²³.

MSA verbs like Jib. *ṭaf* «be bitter» and Meh. *ṭayif* «collect aloe» may be denominative. Leslau's (1938: 203) assumption that it is connected with BH. *ṭōḇ* «an aromatic sub-

²¹ Müller (1978: 726 f.); Landberg (1942: 2710); Thomas (1932: 122, «frankincense tree»); Thesiger (1964: 45, «frankincense»).

²² Main data in HAL (II: 595 b). See also DNWSI (p. 682) for Ph.; Mason (1967: 54 ff.) for Gr.; Robin (1994a: 12) and (1994b: 30), and Swiggers (1995: 338 and fn. 22) for ASA; Rossi (1939: 169), Schopen (1983: 169 ff.), and Behnstedt (1993: 194) for Yem. Ar.; Morris & Miller (1988: 86 ff. and 306) for Dhof. Ar. (denoting both true myrrh, imported from Yemen, and local «false» varieties); Leslau (1938: 251) for Soq.

²³ Johnstone (1987: 414, 561); Morris & Miller (1988: 182); Simeone-Senelle (1994: 187).

stance», ASA *ṭyb* and Ar. *ṭīb* «perfume» needs to explain the surprising correspondence *f* ~ *b*.

The nominal term for «myrrh» is *karbe* in Ethiosemitic, that shows here lexical independence from the rest of Semitic. It occurs also in the some neighbouring Cushitic languages, but the etymology of this areal word is at present unknown:

- (l.) G. *karbe* «myrrh», Ti. Tñ. Amh. Gur. *kärbe*, Bil. Sa. *karbe*, Har. *küräbi*²⁴.

It may be interesting to point out here that the Demotic word *hl* (also spelt *hry*) «myrrh», that developed into Coptic (S, B) *ⲱⲗⲗ*, (A) *ⲉⲗⲗ* «id.» with *ψ*-, is likely to be a loanword from Cushitic:

- (m.) Proto-Agaw **qVr-* «smell (n., tr. v.)»
Bilin *qira* «smell (n.)», Xaniir *xara* «id.», Kemant *xera* «id.», Awngi *γari* «id.», Dem. *hry* ~ *hl* «myrrh» > Copt. (S, B) *ⲱⲗⲗ*, (A) *ⲉⲗⲗ* «id.».

The Demotic word does not seem to occur before the IV century BCE, and Betrò (1994: 42) suggests that the quality of myrrh called *hl* ~ *hry* had become known through the new trade routes opened during the Persian era. The Eg. sequence *h*- > *z* - [ç-] (or at least a front variety of [x]) > *ⲱ*- [š-] points toward a variety of Agaw that had already developed **q-* (preserved as such only in present-day Bilin) into a velar fricative. The *r* > *l* shift is but another instance of the well-known *r* ~ *l* instability in Egyptian.

A similar semantic development «(good) smell» > «incense» occurs in Adeni Ar. *fūh* «frankincense, incense» (Stace 1893: 86 b) and Som. *fōox* [fōh] «id.» from Ar.

²⁴ Leslau (1987: 290 a); Littmann & Höfner (1962: 400 b); DETA (p. 411); Streleyn (1973: no. 137) and Müller (1981: 579); Leslau (1979/II: 424 f. and /III: 348 a); Leslau (1963: 93 b).

²⁵ On the interpretation of this word see now Betrò (1994: 41 ff.), and the literature she quotes.

²⁶ Relevant data in Appleyard (1984: 52), as modified by Appleyard (personal communication).

*fawh*¹¹ verbal noun of Ar. *fāḥa* «be fragrant, exhale a pleasant odour», cognate of BH *PWH* «blasen, durchwehen», but Hiph. also «let exhale (a fragrance)» in *Ct* 4:16 *hpyhy gny yzlw bšmyw* «(o wind) let my garden exhale its fragrance, that its aromata may flow out», and Syr. *pāḥ* «olfecit, fragavit».

A different kind of semantic development is probably to be seen in the Som. name of «myrrh»:

(n.) Som. *malmāl* «myrrh»

Som. *malmāl* «myrrh, name of different kinds of myrrh-producing plants (Commiphora myrrha, Commiph. Playfari, Commiph. Ellenbeckii, Commiph. Molmol)», Rendille *mālmāl* «myrrh-like gum of Commiph. paolii»¹⁴.

It is an isolated word within Cushitic, but it is probably not to be connected with Sem. *MRR* «myrrh» as claimed, e.g., by Löw (1928: 306 reporting an opinion of J. J. Hess) because root reduplication and *r* > *l* in Som. would require an *ad hoc* explanation. It is more probably a loan from Amh. *mālmāl* «selected, chosen» (ultimately < *MLH* «remove, pull out», cf. Leslau 1987: 343 b)¹⁵, the likely name of a commercial grade of myrrh widely traded by Ethiosemitic-speaking merchants from the highlands of the Horn. This was generalised to indicate myrrh as a commodity, the plants that produce it, and another myrrh-like gum. «Selected» as the name of a commercial grade of an aroma is found also in Som. *nākhwe* < Ar. *naqwah* «selected, top quality», cf. § 3.

3. Taxonomies of different qualities of incense and other aromata are found in Egyptian sources¹⁶ and, since the IV-III century BCE, also in classical authors (e.g., Theophrastus, *Hist. Pl.* IX.iv.1-10). As already stated above in § 1, it is

¹¹ Also occurring in the phrase *lubbdn fawh* «aromatic white-resin frankincense» in Yem. Ar. (Piamenta 1991: 444 b).

¹² For the Rendille form cf. Heine & Heine (1988: 64).

¹³ Also here Ethiosemit. *a* > Som. *a* as in *jddar*, cf. (b.).

¹⁴ For instance, the 14 kinds of incense listed in the Edfu Laboratory (cf. Chassinat 1990: 205, 12-208, 10).

not always easy to understand exactly what kind of fragrant substance is being talked about, but the clearest cases are when the object is frankincense. Pliny (*HN* XII.xxxii) provides a very detailed account of it in the 1 century CE, and it is worthwhile looking at its details.

- a. i. The best and natural harvest was done *autumno* «in autumn», after incisions had been made in the trees' bark *circa canis ortum flagrantissimo aestu* «about the rising of the Dog-star», when the heat was most intense». The sap was thus given a few months' time to ooze out and harden into big drops. This frankincense was *purissimum, candidum* «of the purest kind, bright white in colour», and was called *carfiathum*.
 - ii. A second harvest was done *vere* «in spring», *hieme corticibus incisus* «after cuts were made in the barks in winter». This was *rufum ... nec comparandum priori* «reddish, but could not be compared with the former», and was called *dathiatum*.
- b. Frankincense received on the ground *tegete palmea* «on a mat of palm-leaves» was *purius* «purer». What was collected just *area circumpavita* «on the space around that had been rammed hard» was *ponderosius* «heavier», whereas *quod in arbore haesit ferro depectitur* «the residue adhering to the tree was scraped off with an iron tool» and was *corticolum* «containing fragments of bark». Later on *micas concussu elisas* «particles that got loose through shaking» are also mentioned, that were called *mannam*¹⁸.
- c. The resin *novellae arboris* «from a sapling» was believed to be *candidius* «whiter», but *veteris* «that from an older tree» *odoratius* «more fragrant»¹⁹.

¹⁶ The rising of Sirius in mid July, that marked the beginning of the flood season in the Egyptian calendar (cf. Bickerman 1968: 41).

¹⁷ Cf. *μάννα λιβανωτοῦ* (*Gr.* 6.6.i) and *λιβανομάννα* (*Orph.* II. 20. tit.). This was not necessarily a fourth procedure for collecting frankincense. In fact, Ernout translates in the «Belles Lettres» edition of Pliny «quant aux nquettes détachées par les secousses [du transport]», taking *concussu* as having as its object the already harvested frankincense drops, rather than the trees. In other words, the powdery particles that got loose during the transport were collected separately as a distinct commercial grade.

¹⁸ Similarly Theophrastus (*Hist. Pl.* IX.iv.7) claimed that frankincense from older trees was not only *εὐοσμώτερον* «more sweet-smelling» but also *ἑυχρότερον* «less white».

d. The most appreciated shape of frankincense were big drops formed *cum haerente lacrima priore consecuta alia miscuit se* «when a following drop unites with a previous one still hanging suspended»; this was called *mammosus* «breast-shaped» in Latin. Another shape was in round drops, and was called *masculum* «male», that *aliqui putant a specie testium dictum* «some people think to be so called from its resemblance to the testicles»⁴⁰. Pliny also mentions the Greek terms *stagonian* (σταγονία) «in drops» and *atomum* (ἄτομον) «uncut», but it is not wholly clear whether they refer to «male» or «breast-shaped» frankincense in his text. Frankincense in smaller drops was called *orobian* (ὀροβίαν) «vetch-shaped» in Greek.

e. Three commercial grades of frankincense were sold in the Roman markets for respectively 6, 5 and 3 *denarii* a *libra* «pound». Each of them was ranked by *candore ac pinguedine* «whiteness and bigness», *fragilitate* «fragility», *carbone ut statim ardeat* «its readiness to catch fire from a hot coal», and *ne dentem recipiat potiusque in micis frietur* «it should not give to pressure of the teeth, and should rather crumble into small fragments».

The main parameters were thus the harvesting season, the way the resin was collected, the form and size of the pieces, and their colour. These are still now the basis for classifying frankincense in its producing areas, sometimes with the very same words that were used 2,000 years ago.

For instance, Pliny's *carfiathum* was probably a feminine *nisbah* from ASA *hīrf* glossed as «autumn, autumn crops» in Sab.Dic. (p. 62) and in Ricks (1989: 75). This

⁴⁰ This looks like a loan translation from the same source that originated λιβανωτός ἄροην (Dioscorides, *Mat. Med.* 1.68), as well as Egyptian Ar. *libān dukar* (Hinds & Badawi 1986: 779 b) «olibanum, frankincense from Bosw. carteri» and Yemeni Ar. *lubbān dukar* «id.» (Behnstedt 1993: 188; Pimenta 1991: 444 b also mentions *lubbān dukrī* attested in written documents from the Ben Zvi archive). From Ar. this term entered Somali as *lu-baandākar* «a kind of incense», and Oromo as *dakaru* and *dakkarroo* «Bosw. neglecta» and «Bosw. hildebrandtii», whose gum, wood and bark are burnt as incense by islamized Southern Oromos (cf. Heine and Brenzinger 1988: 118; da Thiene 1939: 83). For some amusing parallels to Pliny's orchiomorphic metaphor in Italian dialects see Beccaria (1995: 20, 28 f.).

word still survives, e.g., in Jibb. *xārf* «monsoon rains, rainy part of the summer (mid June to early September)» (Johnstone 1981: 304), Meh. *xarf* or Soq. *hārf* (Johnstone 1987: 446) with a vocalisation that is likely to derive from **hārf*, rather than from Ar. *harīf* (usually «fall», but indicating the season from «July to Sept.» in Southern Arabia, cf. Morris 1995: 1). It also survives in Som. *khāraf* (< **hārf* with the regular echo-vowel epenthesis of the second -a-) «frankincense from Bosw. sacra (or carteri) produced in the *xagaa* season (the time of the SW monsoon, ca. July-September)» according to Axmed Cartan Xaange (1984: 30), and in its masculine *nisbah*-adjective in the phrase *śāhaz xārfī* «the gum harvested during the monsoon season», i.e., the hottest June-Sept. months, in the Jibbālī taxonomy published by Morris & Miller (1988: 301 b; cf. also Morris, in print).

Also Pliny's *dathiatum*, the reddish and inferior spring harvest, is a feminine *nisbah*, from ASA *dr'* «spring», that still survives in Jibb. *dōtē'* «spring», Meh. *dōtā* «spring rain», etc. This seems to match the Jibbālī *śāhaz eštebī* «winter gum», the lowest quality «harvested during the coldest season of the year» (Morris & Miller 1988: 301 b; cf. also Morris, in print), from *śēte'* «winter, ca. Jan.-March», cognate of Ar. *šitā'* «winter». Morris & Miller (1988: 301 b) and Morris (in print) point out that this spring or winter incense (named after the season the cuts are administered or the gum is harvested) has been collected in (relatively) recent times outside of the best areas, and only when «the prices for gum were high». Indeed also Pliny remarked that *iam quaestus alteram vindemiam adfert* «now demand introduced a second harvest», whereas *meti semel anno solebat minore occasione vendendi*, «it used to be the custom to gather it only once a year, when there were fewer opportunities of selling it».

A complex classification based upon the size and quality of the pieces of the *bēeyo*, the Som. frankincense from Bosw. sacra (or carteri), has been published by Reinisch (1902: 93b f.; the Som. forms in angled brackets are in Reinisch's notation, the other ones in the current official orthography):

- (o.) i. <ʾanād > m. «die beste sorte»;
- ii. <fusūs, fesūs > m.;

iii. *nākhwe*, < *nāqwa* > m. «harz das nach wegnahme der zwei ersten sorten aus dem rest sorgfältig ausgelesen wird»;

iv. < *dābaq*, *dābaq* > m. «etwas mindere sorte als *nāqwa*, doch dieser am nächsten kommend und von den händlern auch als *nāqwa* verkauft»;

v. *iskujir*, < *is-kū-jir* > m. «ein gemisch von gutem und verunreinigtem harze»;

vi. < *hūbla* > f. «harz von wasser angequollen und davon schwarz geworden»;

vii. < *jéndal* > or < *majéndal* > m. «harz das über der rinde zur erde gefloßen und daher mit sand und staub verunreinigt ist».

Were Som. *canāad* (Reinisch's < *anād* >) to be confirmed by other sources, it could be an obvious cognate of Eg. *ḥryw* (= Hesych. ἄρντιον) «Harz», «incense» or «myrrh» reconstructed as *ḥnt-w* by Edel (1980: 47, who also suggests transcribing *ḥnw* rather than *ḥryw*)¹¹. Its connection with Semitic (Heb., Aram., Syr., Ar., Geez) *ḥnt* «to embalm» suggested, e.g., by Reinisch (1902, p. 93), has to explain the two somewhat ad hoc correspondences Eg. *ḥ* vs. Sem. *h* and Eg. *r* vs. Sem. *l*. On the other hand, if the Som. word actually exists and is not a loan from Egyptian or from a third language, it could have an East Cushitic etymology in **a(a)n-* «milk», cf. Som. *caan-ó*, Rendille *haan-ú*, Oromo *aann-án*, but Afar *hān*, predicate form *hāna* with short -a-. This etymology would involve the same metaphoric connection between «milk» and «frankincense» as in modern frankincense-related Som. oral poetry reported, e.g., by Ahmed Yusuf Farah (1994: 135 ff.), that often portrays frankincense trees as female camels that are milked of their sap. The following short song alliterated in g provides a good example of this (from Ahmed Yusuf Farah 1994: 33, 135):

Geel an naga gablooleyn «Camels that never run dry of milk

¹¹ For the exact meaning of *ḥryw* as «myrrh» in Late Egyptian see now Betrò (1994: 44 ff.), confirming Hesychius's gloss ἄρντιον Ἀἰγυπτίων ομυρρίον. Cf. also Germer (1982, 1986), and Nielsen (1986: 5 ff., fn. 67 and 521).

¹² Som. *-dad* and Eg. *-ryw* would thus have a suffixal origin.

Haliba guawa leedahay

An biyo loo garsaareyn
Gaajana looga yaabeyn
Yaa Gubanka noogu yaal.

Female camels yielding each a bucketful of milk

That don't need to be watered
And never risk to starve
We have in the Guban region.»

Since camel pastoralism has been practised in the Horn of Africa for at least 2 kys, still earlier in Southern Arabia (cf. Bullett 1975, Banti 1993), and cattle have been herded in the same regions already much earlier than that, it is possible that the metaphoric imagery of this modern poem actually is of considerable antiquity. It may even occur in the family of frankincense names from the root *lbn*, that means «white» in several Semitic languages (e.g., Akk., Ug., Hebr. *lābān*, Mehri *əwbān* ~ *əybān* < **l-*, etc.), but «milk» in Arabic *laban*¹². The «white»-metaphor obviously matches the whitish (*candidum*) colour of the best grade of frankincense, but it would be interesting to know whether any instance of the «milk»-metaphor can be found in ancient sources.

The majority of the terms listed by Reinisch above are actually Arabic words, as one would expect since most of the frankincense trade has been going through Aden in the last centuries. In this manner < *fuṣūṣ* >, the same as Southern Ar. *lubān fuṣūṣ* that was the best quality of frankincense in Aden according to Hunter (1877: 113; cf. also Behnstedt 1993: 162), is the Ar. pl. *fuṣūṣ* «gemstones». Ar. *faṣṣ* «gemstone» also occurs in the name of another commercial grade of frankincense: Som. *fas-saqiir* < Ar. *faṣṣ saqīr* «small gemstone», one of the intermediate qualities of resin from Bosw. *frereana* (Ahmed Yusuf Farah 1994: 17). *Nākhwe* is Ar. *naqwah* «top quality (of dates, etc.)» (Kazimirski: 1335 b), and < *dābaq* > or < *dabaq* > is Yem. Ar. *ṭabaq* with the expected *d* - *ṭ*, variation in a Som. adaptation of Ar. *ṭ*. This word is translated both as «[ein Weihrauchbaum] für *fuṣūṣ*» and as «= *lubān badawī*» (a quality of frankincense) in Behnstedt (1993: 132). It is probably a metonymic specialisation of Yem. Ar. *ṭabaq* «round tray woven in palm leaves» or *ṭabaqah* «storeroom for grains, cereals, etc.» (Piamenta

¹² Already in the Koran, e.g., *nusqī-kum ... labanān ḥaliṣan sā'iḡan li-ṣ-ṭāribīna* «we give you ... pure milk, delicious for those who drink it» (16.66).

1991: 300 a), and thus refers to where frankincense was kept for selling.

The inferior quality that had been swollen by water was called <hubla> from Ar. *hubla* «pregnant», and <jëndal> or <majëndal>, the resin that had fallen on the ground and was mixed with dust, is from Ar. *jandala* «throw to the ground» or Ar. *jandal* «sandiger boden» (according to Reinisch 1902: 94). On the other hand *iskujir*, a blend of good and low frankincense grades, is a fully Som. word, since it is clearly a root noun from Som. *iskū jir* «to be together, be mixed».

4. The first account of how frankincense is tapped can be found in Theophrastus (*Hist. Pl.* IV.iv.4): the trees had incisions (ἐντομιάς) both in their stems (τὰ στελέχη) and in their branches (τοὺς κλάδους). The former looked ὡσπερ ἀξίνη ... τετμήσθαι «as if they had been cut with an axe», while the latter had slighter (λεπτοτέρως) incisions. The only instruments he mentions explicitly, however, are iron tools (σιδήροις) for scraping off (ἀποξύειν) the resin that remains sticking to the trees.

Medieval Arabic authors mentioned axes (an-Nuwayrī, cf. Grohmann 1930: 127 f.) and knives for administering incisions to the trees (*yajraḥūna-hā bi-s-sikkīn* «they wound it (the tree) with the knife», Yāqūt III: 577 [Wüstenfeld]). In a Soq. account of how frankincense was harvested in Dhofar in the late 19th century, D. H. Müller (1905: 43) mentioned *menéqas min hēšchin wa di-yūle biš be-ʿéd tarb* «Eisenhammer, deren Griff Holz ist» for cutting the bark and *menāqif il-hēšhin* «eiserne Meißel» for scraping the dry gum from the trees. The pl. *menéqas* is from the noun of instrument of MSA *NQŠ* «open, take off; extract (an embedded thorn)» (cf. also Dath. Ar. *NQŠ* «casser, arracher», Landberg 1942: 2813) that is recorded as Jib. *mīnkūš* pl. *minēbkeš* «pincers» and ḥars. *menkāš* «id.»⁴⁴, and also in Yem. Ar. *minqāš* «elaborate pincette»⁴⁵. But it does not occur in modern accounts of frankincense harvesting. Instead, these mention the other tool, that consists in a long wooden handle with ei-

ther one or two blades (one at each of its ends). The two-bladed variety is described for north-eastern Somalia both by Ahmed Yusuf Farah (1994: 62) and Axmed Cartan Xaange (1984: 27, with a drawing on p. 27). The single-bladed one has been portrayed for the frankincense-gathering areas in Southern Arabia by Martinetz *et al.* (1989: 83) and Morris & Miller (1988: 81).

(p.) *MNQF* «tool for harvesting frankincense»

Dhof. Ar. *manqaf* ~ *manqif* «frankincense knife having a long wooden handle and a small blade» (Elqassani 1984: 45, Mandaville 1980: 87), Meh. *mānqaf* «id.» (cf. Jahn 1902: 217; Morris, in print);

Dhof. Ar. *munqif* «frankincense knife», Jib. *mūnšif* «id.» (cf. Morris, in print);

Jib. *minkēf* «id.» (cf. Johnstone 1981: 190);

Som. *mingāaf* > *migāaf* «frankincense knife having a long wooden handle and two small blades, a sharp one for cutting (Som. *afēeye*) and a blunt one for scraping (Som. *habtogūre*)».

These are all nouns derived from *NQF* «peeling off, picking off, removing sth. (as a dry crust)», that specialized into «removing dry frankincense drops» and subsequently into «make incisions on a tree for tapping frankincense» attested, e. g., in Som. *nagaf* «to make small cuts (on a frankincense tree)» and *nāgaf* «incision (n.) on a frankincense tree». Agent nouns occur in Dhof. Ar. *engif* «Weihraucharbeiter» and Meh. *neqqōf* «id.»⁴⁶. All the Som. forms imply S. Ar. -g- or S. Arabian glottalised -k- [-k'-], otherwise one would expect Som. -kh- ~ -q-. The historical phonology of MSA is not sufficiently known for one to reconstruct with certainty the original vocalisation of Jib. *minkēf*, but its second vowel was probably a short *-a-, cf. Lonnet (1993: 63 f.). We thus remain with three or four allotropes of this word: *manqaf* ~ *manqif* (S. Ar., Mehr.), *munqif* (Dhof. Ar., Jib.), **minkaf* (? Jib., if not < **manqaf*), **minqāf* (Som., if long -ā- is not due to MSA secondary lengthening.

⁴⁴ Cf. Johnstone (1981: 191; 1977: 97).

⁴⁵ Cf. Pimenta (1991: 494 b).

⁴⁶ Cf. Rhodokanakis (1911: 60 a) and Landberg (1942: 2816) for Dhof. Ar., and Jahn (1902: 217) for Mehri.

cf. Lonnet 1993: 62). Of these, *manqaf* has a pattern known for nouns of instrument in Southern Ar. dialects (Qafishch 1992: 105), and **minkaf* has a pattern often used for this kind of nouns in Classical Ar. beside the more usual pattern of **minqāf* (Brockelmann 1908: §§ 197 a, 199). Instead, *munqif*, apparently an active participle of the IV form, is not known to be used for nouns of instrument.

5. In a general way, the comparison between Semitic and Cushitic names, as well as a few Egyptian terms, reveals some cases of straightforward lexical diffusion already in ancient times. However, there are also some striking divergences, already in Geez, but especially in MSA and Som. that have several words such as MSA *ṢḤZ* «gum, resin, frankincense», Som. *bēeyo* «Bosw. sacra or carteri and its incense», or Som. *yagcār* ~ *jagcār* «Bosw. frereana» that seem to be wholly isolated and still defy any attempt to find plausible etymologies. This may indicate that, while the frankincense trade diffused a number of especially Semitic words over a wide area already in antiquity⁴⁷ – and still does so in modern times, since the many Ar. words in the Som. taxonomy under (o.) are likely to be quite recent loans –, the harvesting of the gums continues separate traditions in the different areas. Nevertheless, the main tool for performing this harvest, the *MNQF*, has the same name everywhere, an indication that it is a rather recent introduction, in spite of the fact that iron tools were used already in the IV century BCE (as reported by Theophrastus), unless its spread can be explained through the fact that at least since the last century Somali workers were employed in the harvest of both frankincense and myrrh in Hadramaut and elsewhere in Yemen, as well as in Dhofar⁴⁸.

Finally, the etymologies discussed in this paper show that a handful of metonymic procedures underlie most of the names of these aromata: «white» because of the colour of the frankincense sap, «bitter» from the taste of the myrrh

⁴⁷ On the trade routes along the Red Sea in ancient times see now the excellent book by De Romanis (1996).

⁴⁸ Pace Groom (1981: 148); that Somalis today gather frankincense also in Dhofar has been kindly told us by Dr. M. Morris.

sap, «smoke» for incense, «(good) smell», «select (quality)», etc.

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