



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 76, Incense

Wikipedia

Incense is aromatic biotic material that releases fragrant smoke when burned. The term is used for either the material or the aroma. Incense is used for aesthetic reasons, aromatherapy, meditation, and ceremony. It may also be used as a simple deodorant or insect repellent.

Incense is composed of aromatic plant materials, often combined with essential oils. The forms taken by incense differ with the underlying culture and have changed with advances in technology and increasing number of uses.

Incense can generally be separated into two main types: "indirect-burning" and "direct-burning". Indirect-burning incense (or "non-combustible incense") is not capable of burning on its own and requires a separate heat source. Direct-burning incense (or "combustible incense") is lit directly by a flame and then fanned or blown out, leaving a glowing ember that smoulders and releases a smoky fragrance. Direct-burning incense is either a paste formed around a bamboo stick, or a paste that is extruded into a stick or cone shape.

History

The word incense comes from Latin *incendere* meaning "to burn". Combustible bouquets were used by the ancient Egyptians, who employed incense in both pragmatic and mystical capacities. The purpose of the usage of incense stick varies; some people use it for the duration of meditation and rituals.

Incense was burnt to counteract or obscure malodorous products of human habitation, but was widely perceived to also deter malevolent demons and appease the gods with its pleasant aroma.

Resin balls were found in many prehistoric Egyptian tombs in El Mahasna, giving evidence for the prominence of incense and related compounds in Egyptian antiquity. One of the oldest extant incense burners originates from the 5th dynasty. The Temple of Deir-el-Bahari in Egypt contains a series of carvings that depict an expedition for incense.

The Babylonians used incense while offering prayers to divining oracles. Incense spread from there to Greece and Rome.

Incense burners have been found in the Indus Civilization (3300–1300 BCE). Evidence suggests oils were used mainly for their aroma. India also adopted techniques from East Asia, adapting the formulation to encompass aromatic roots and other indigenous flora. This was the first usage of subterranean plant parts in incense. New herbs like Sarsaparilla seeds, frankincense, and cypress were also used by Indians.

At around 2000 BCE, Ancient China began the use of incense in the religious sense, namely for worship. Incense was used by Chinese cultures from Neolithic times and became more widespread in the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties. The earliest documented use of incense comes from the ancient Chinese, who employed incense composed of herbs and plant products (such as cassia, cinnamon, styrax, and sandalwood) as a component of numerous formalized ceremonial rites. Incense usage reached its peak during the Song dynasty with numerous buildings erected specifically for incense ceremonies.

Brought to Japan in the 6th century by Korean Buddhist monks, who used the mystical aromas in their purification rites, the delicate scents of Koh (high-quality Japanese incense) became a source of amusement and entertainment with nobles in the Imperial Court during the Heian Era 200 years later. During the 14th-century Ashikaga shogunate, a samurai warrior might perfume his helmet and armour with incense to achieve an aura of invincibility (as well as to make a noble gesture to whoever might take his head in battle). It wasn't until the Muromachi period during the 15th and 16th century that incense appreciation (kōdō) spread to the upper and middle classes of Japanese society.

Christianity

Incense has been employed in worship by Christians since antiquity, particularly in the Orthodox Christian churches, the Roman Catholic Church and some Anglican and Lutheran Churches.

Incense is being increasingly used among some other Christian groups as well; for example, the Book of Worship of The United Methodist Church calls for incense in the Evening Praise and Prayer service.

The practice is rooted in the earlier traditions of Judaism in the time of the Second Jewish Temple (see Parts 23 and 24). The smoke of burning incense is interpreted by both the Western Catholic and Eastern Christian churches as a symbol of the prayer of the faithful rising to heaven. This symbolism is seen in Psalm 141 (140), verse 2:

"Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight: the lifting up of my hands, as evening sacrifice."

Incense is often used as part of a purification ritual. In the Revelation of John, incense symbolises the prayers of the saints in heaven - the "golden bowl full of incense" are "the prayers of the saints".

(Revelation 5:8, cf. Revelation 8:3) which infuse upwards towards the altar of God.



Egyptian Incense Burner, 7th century BC



Botafumeiro, Santiago de Compostela