



Sacred Luxuries: Fragrance, Aromatherapy, and Cosmetics in Ancient Egypt

Lise Manniche

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The art of modern fragrance-making owes much to practices developed in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians attached great importance to perfumes and cosmetics, which men and women wore to make themselves attractive and alluring, to restore vitality and good health, and as a means of venerating the gods and of negotiating a passage to the realm of the hereafter. In this lavishly illustrated, oversized book, Lise Manniche looks at the role played by scents and cosmetics in ancient Egyptian society and discusses their preparation?in some cases providing actual recipes.Manniche details three categories of ingredients used by the Egyptians to make fragrances: plants, including cardamom, cinnamon, saffron, and mint; gums and resins, particularly myrrh and frankincense; and oils and fats ranging from almond oil to ox fat. "In order [for a scent] to achieve fame," Manniche writes, "the finished product had to have an aura of rarity, of exclusiveness, and of the divine. The more exotic the ingredients, the more valued the commodity; the more exquisite its presentation, the greater the appeal. In this way, the visual and olfactory arts combined to make small objects of the greatest luxury appreciated not only in Egypt, but all over the ancient world."Drawing on Arabic and other sources, Manniche explores the application of perfumes in ritual and on social occasions, and examines the erotic connotations of scent in Egyptian art and poetry. Fragrant remedies, the central element in ancient medicine, are fully discussed. Finally, she investigates the widespread use of cosmetics, as revealed in wall paintings and painted sculptures. The book features a hundred color photographs, taken by Werner Forman, of objects in the world's most celebrated museum collections. Exquisite cosmetic containers in the form of birds and animals, reliefs representing kings and priests perfuming images of deities, and lifelike mummy masks displaying make-up are among the images represented.During the past decade, the West has seen a revival of traditional skills, particularly in the areas of spirituality and healing. This stunning book introduces an abundance of once highly prized skills to be reacquired and ancient products to be sampled anew.

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