

60270 Olibanum, incense

German: Gummi Olibanum, Weihrauch

French: gomme olibanum, encens

Gum Olibanum is the dried exudate obtained from incisions or other damages of the trunk of different Burseraceae species (*Boswellia* spp.), from Somalia, Ethiopia or southern Arabia.

Of these burseraceae, it is mainly *Boswellia carteri* from which Olibanum is collected. *Boswellia serrata* and *Boswellia bhaw-dajiana* are less important producers. The bark of the trees is deeply cut in the spring and fall, so that a whitish sap runs out, which hardens in the air. Olibanum is on the market in two different commercial forms: gum resin that runs down the trunk and hardens on the ground, and roundish grains that are collected from the trunk and are the better, because cleaner, product. Olibanum should be of light yellow color.

Other types of incense are the lemon-scented "Luban Mati", which comes from *Boswellia frereana* and can also be found in the market as East African Elemi, and the Cayenne incense, which, however, is not produced by a *Boswellia* but by *Protium guianense*. This gum resin is also traded as Elemi (Cayenne Elemi). The so-called "wild frankincense", also known as "forest frankincense", is a spruce resin from Styria or Tyrol and was often used to adulterate olibanum.

The name olibanum is derived from the Hebrew word "Lobonoh", which means milk.

As gum resin, the real incense contains about 20% gum and about 70% alcohol-soluble resin, which contains boswellic acid, boswellic acid ester and olibanoresin. It also contains essential oil and bassorin, a pectin-like substance that swells in water. Little can be said about the solubilities of olibanum due to the partially opposing proportions of gum and resin. The resinous portion is readily soluble in alcohol, as well as in ether and in chloroform.

In medicine, Olibanum was sometimes used as an additive to ointments and plasters or in mouthwashes. By far the greater part, however, is used as incense. The Olibanum required by the churches was transported to Europe centuries ago on the incense route along the west coast of Arabia. So-called Indian incense probably did not come from India but was only called so because it was picked up from Arabia by Indian ships and brought to Europe.

Specification

Appearance:	light-yellow to brownish, 4 – 6 mm drop-shaped tears and uneven nuggets
Odor:	slight characteristic odor, when burned aromatic and pleasant
Shelf-life:	5 years under dark and dry conditions
Storage temperature:	ambient temperature