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## **Aromatic Wisdom Podcast Episode #019** **Three Sacred Resins: Frankincense, Myrrh, Opopanax**

This is the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast, Episode 19. In today's show I'm going to talk about three beautifully aromatic tree resins: Frankincense, Myrrh and the lesser-known Opopanax, which may or may not have some interesting history behind it.

*You're listening to the Aromatic Wisdom Podcast with your host, Liz Fulcher.*

*If you're interested in learning about Essential Oils, hearing interviews with industry experts, and discovering ways to grow your own Aromatherapy business, this is the podcast for you.*

*For more information and show notes, visit the website at [www.AromaticWisdomInstitute.com](http://www.AromaticWisdomInstitute.com). Now sit back. Relax. Take a deep breath and enjoy as Liz shares a dose of Aromatic Wisdom.*

Hi, Everyone! It is Christmas Eve here in the United States. I celebrate Christmas, so I wish everyone a very Merry Christmas! If you don't celebrate Christmas, then I wish you a very Merry whatever-you-celebrate!

My name is Liz Fulcher. I am your host for the Aromatic Wisdom podcast, and I am a clinical aromatherapist. I created this podcast to talk to you about essential oils and aromatherapy and natural health. I hope you are enjoying the podcasts as much as I enjoy sharing them with you. Thank you again for being here. I love when my people show up and I love getting lots of great letters; more and more every week from people telling me how much they have gained from the podcasts. That's what keeps me going—so thank you for being here.

If you enjoy the podcast and receive value from the contents and feel like you'd like to hop over to iTunes and leave a review that would so make my day! I've written a tutorial on how to leave a review on iTunes. You can find it on my website at: [aromaticwisdominstitute.com/review-podcast-iTunes](http://aromaticwisdominstitute.com/review-podcast-iTunes). I'll put a link to that in the show notes anyway so it's easy for you to find. If I may, I'd like to read the latest review that



came which completely blew me away. This review is from Robin from North Carolina, and she says, “Very informative!” (Thank you for the five stars Robin. I appreciate that.) “Liz’s podcast is great! It’s very informative with a lot of practical advice. I enjoy her style: she is entertaining and I feel like I know her. But at the same time, every episode is mostly packed with practical and useful knowledge. She is very relatable and gets down to the basic information I want to understand. I’m new to aromatherapy and her podcast has been the most useful source of information for me that I have found. I highly recommend this podcast if essential oils is confusing you. Her blog on her website is also very helpful.”

That’s so nice to hear. It just made my Christmas Robin! Thank you so much. I’ll put a link to the blog as well in the show notes.

Let’s jump into today’s content. The Christian tradition tells us that there were three wise men, three Magi that came south Arabia bearing gifts for the infant Jesus. This is a classic story: you see the three wise men and their camels, following the star, bearing gifts on every Christmas card. We were told that the three gifts they were bearing were Frankincense, Myrrh and gold. That’s a classic. I think any eight-year-old can recite that. Why would they have taken those particular gifts, do you think? What would have been so valuable in “the day” that they would have offered them to this new King? Well, I have a couple of facts and a theory.

I’m going to start out by talking about Frankincense and Myrrh since those are the two resins and essential oils that you are probably most familiar with. I’ll tell you a little bit about their history and their therapeutic properties. Frankincense and Myrrh trees are shrubby little trees, they are hearty and they thrive in the arid climate of the Middle East, North Africa—they do really well in those climes. When the trunk of the tree is wounded, whether it is cut with a knife or a machete, the tree exudes a resin as most trees do because it’s a protective measure; it’s basically trying to heal it’s own wounds. This thick, sort of golden brown—with Myrrh it’s more of a brown; with Frankincense it’s more of a golden color—resin comes out, it’s very sticky and beautifully aromatic. Frankincense has been used for thousands of years. In fact there are something like over 200 references to Frankincense in the Bible, so it has been around for a long time. It has these amazing healing properties because it is high in Monoterpenes, Sesquiterpenes, Monoterpenols and Sesquiterpenols. The Latin binomial is *Boswellia carterii* and is in the *Burseraceae* family. Today’s Frankincense is usually grown in Somalia and is extracted through steam distillation.



Here are some of the therapeutic properties of Frankincense essential oil. Frankincense resin actually:

It's analgesic, so it would have been great back then for pain relief.

It alleviates inflammation. It is great for the skin. I'm guessing that this is how the plant medicine was used; that it would have been for topical use, because it is so regenerative for the skin; it is great for scars, it's great to put on any kind of wound. If you think about what the tree is doing when you wound the tree, it produces this resin to heal its wounds. It does the same thing with our topical wounds. It is also great for emotional wounds. It's a diuretic so it will help with the reduction of fluids.

It's a great expectorant. If you have a lot of excess mucus in your respiratory system, it's good to help it remove that. It stimulates immune function. It's my go-to for skin support. It's also very good for aging skin; softening aging skin.

It's very safe. It's really not toxic or irritating. Unless it's [the oil] really old, it's very safe for your skin.

You can see how this would have been some big plant medicine back in the biblical times. Frankincense is also my go-to if some has asthma. It's a bronchodilator. I did a blog post all about Frankincense a couple of years ago and is still really a good read. I share in there a story about a massage client who had an asthma attack on the massage table once. I got the Frankincense and rubbed it into her chest; I held my cupped hands over her nose so she could breathe it in deeply, and within two to three minutes she was able to take a full, deep breath. Frankincense really helps to deepen your breathing which is great if you have asthma, but it is also great for relaxation. If you stop and think about how Frankincense is used a lot in churches, it helps to deepen the breathing, which then helps to put you in a meditative state. I lived in Rome for twelve years and I can tell you I've seen my share of Frankincense—every Catholic Church exudes this beautiful aroma of Frankincense, which I think has just permeated the wood of all of the churches and the pews. I will put a link to that blog about Frankincense in the show notes.

Just as an aside—this episode is not about hydrosols, but I have to talk about Frankincense hydrosol because I use it every day on my skin. After I clean my face, I spray a little Frankincense and let it dry naturally. I'll tell you that the tone of my skin is different immediately. I also use it for my cats if they have any topical wounds, I'll cleanse them with Frankincense hydrosol. Again, it is great for topical stuff.

Let's talk about Myrrh a little bit. Myrrh also is a resin that has been used for about 4,000 years. It is one of the old known essential oils and was most popular with the Egyptians. It



is still used today in religious ceremonies just like Frankincense is. Also amazing for its skin healing properties and its action against wrinkles, just like Frankincense; excellent for bedsores, wounds, and hemorrhoids—Frankincense as well. So, Frankincense and Myrrh can be interchangeable. Personally, I love the smell of Myrrh, and I prefer the aroma of Myrrh and use it for all kinds of skin issues: athlete's foot, any kind of wounds that are slow to heal, eczema, and again it's rich for skin. It has strong anti-inflammatory and analgesic affect. It's also great for the lungs and is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, Cicatrisant—there's a great word, which basically means it's cell-regenerative, so it's good for the skin and healing scars. It also has decongestant properties.

So Frankincense and Myrrh can often be interchangeable. Myrrh is *Commiphora myrrha* and is from the same botanical family *Burseraccae*. The essential oil is derived by steam distillation of the tears of the resin from the Myrrh tree. Myrrh is very safe to use. It's non-toxic and non-irritating. The only contraindication that I am aware of for Myrrh is in pregnancy and in breastfeeding because it has beta-elemene and furanodiene in it that can sometimes not be great for the fetus. Do not use it in pregnancy or if you are breastfeeding your baby.

Like Frankincense, Myrrh calms the mind and helps to bring tranquility if you are prone to over-thinking and distraction. It brings a lot to inner stillness. Frankincense and Myrrh are very good for meditation to help you connect with your deeper inner self and your spiritual side.

I hit the high spots of Frankincense and Myrrh. So we've got these two readily available trees that produce this thick, beautiful, healing medicine. Back in the days of the biblical stories, we can how the trees of Frankincense and Myrrh and the resins they produce would have been something of high value. Now I want to talk about a third, lesser-known resin. In fact you've probably never heard of it, called Opopanax. The Latin binomial for this little tree is *Commiphora guidotti*. You remember Myrrh was *Commiphora myrrha*. They have the same genus, but are different species. Like Frankincense and Myrrh, Opopanax is this shrubby little tree that thrives well in an arid environment and it also grows in the same location as Frankincense and Myrrh. All three of these trees grow close to each other and are very, very similar.

Okay, for a quick recap we have taken a look at the therapeutic properties of the resin of Frankincense and the resin of Myrrh. Now, let's take a look at the therapeutic properties of Opopanax. Don't worry. I have not forgotten about the three Magi and how I'm going to bring this all together. Hang in there it will make sense in a minute.



Opopanax is very similar to Myrrh. It looks a lot like Myrrh although the aroma is very different. It's actually been called sweet Myrrh or scented myrrh. It's obtained from the tree the same way Frankincense and Myrrh. They take a machete and slice the trunk of the tree; they allow this beautiful, thick, dark golden resin to exude and harden. They then break it off, chop it into little pieces called tears and steam distill it, and that's how Opopanax essential oil is made.

The Opopanax resin is high in Monoterpenes and Sesquiterpenes and is also from the *Burseraccae* family. Opopanax has a lot of really tremendous clinical applications. It surprises me sometimes that more people aren't familiar with Opopanax. I guess it just doesn't have the PR that Frankincense and Myrrh have. It's great for the muscles, it helps to relax muscles, and it reduces stress and anxiety, and is another great friend to the lungs. It dries out the lungs in a good way, in the sense that it will dry out excess mucus. It's also drying for the intestines, in the sense that, if you have diarrhea it will help control that. It is a wonderful anti-diarrhea essential oil and again, the resin would have been well used in biblical times. It's great for an insect repellent as are a lot of the resins, the wood oils that are so great for insect repellents.

The resin of Opopanax has been used in incense, perfumes and herbal formulas since biblical times. I speak Italian and if you listen long enough you will know that I am fluent in Italian. The word *incenso* is what they call Frankincense, but it's also what they call incense. The original *incenso* was Frankincense and Myrrh and Opopanax because these resins can be burned, and they put off this gorgeous smoke, which again, calms down your breathing; slows down your breathing when you inhale it. It's very grounding and useful for bringing energy down. It is great for inflammation. Back in the biblical days it would have been anti-inflammatory and antibacterial. They didn't have the medications that we have today, and they would use whatever plants they had available, and these trees were available. It is also a great friend to the skin; it supports the skin to heal in so many ways. It's really non-toxic and not really irritating. It's a wonderful resin.

You can see how Opopanax would have been another valuable resin along with Frankincense and Myrrh because it was available and it has all of these tremendous healing properties. Okay, so those are some facts.

Now, I'm going to throw out a little theory that I have. Well, it's not only my theory, I've read this particular theory in several books and it's one that resonates with me. So here goes: In the language of the day the word "dhh" and I'm sure I'm pronouncing that



incorrectly, but it's spelled "dhb", refers to spices or gums that produce fragrant odors when burned. So, remember that Frankincense, Myrrh and Opopanax were all resins that were burned for ritual, religious and health reasons. The word "dhb" was spelled the same way as the word for gold. So "dhb" means spices or gums that produce fragrant odors when burned and it also means "gold". It is possible that this third gift was another precious plant resin, rather than a precious metal. When you stop to think about what was available in those days, what were available were tree resins: Frankincense, Myrrh, and, another balsam, "dhb", which could very likely have been Opopanax rather than metal or gold.

Please know that I mean no disrespect to anyone's religious beliefs about the three gifts. If you feel in your heart that it resonates with you that it was gold, then absolutely I honor that. I'm simply throwing out some food for thought about plant medicine since that is what this podcast is about.

If Opopanax is new to you I invite you to get yourself a bottle and try it. Better yet, get a bottle of Frankincense, a bottle of Myrrh, and a bottle of Opopanax and put them side-by-side. Smell each one individually. Learn more about these resins because they are amazing healers for the skin and they do have a fascinating history and they have been around forever. You can also find the resins of Frankincense, Myrrh and Opopanax on-line and I think that would be interesting to get a sample of each of the actual physical resins which is more likely to give you an idea of what they would have used in the biblical times.

There you have it! Frankincense, Myrrh and Opopanax: were these the three gifts brought by the Magi? I leave it to you to sit with that to see if it resonates with you or if it sounds like phooey. Either way I invite you to share with me your thoughts. I'd love to hear your thoughts. If you'd like to write to me, my email address is [liz@aromaticwisdom.com](mailto:liz@aromaticwisdom.com).

I'm going to keep this episode short because it is Christmas. I wish you the happiest of holidays and a really, really safe, restful holiday period and I will see you again in 2016.

Until then, be well. Be happy.

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