

1. CENNI ALL'ANTICA ARTE PROFUMATORIA



Il sostantivo del latino volgare *per fumum* – dal verbo *perfumare* – indica l'uso di bruciare aromi sul fuoco per spargere, col fumo, le loro proprietà. La preziosità dei materiali e le conoscenze specifiche divennero fonte di lauti guadagni per gli *speziali*, cioè coloro che possedevano l'arte del miscelare le spezie per ottenere unguenti ed essenze odorose.

I *profumieri* si distinsero nel tempo dagli *speziali* per soddisfare il crescente bisogno di igiene personale e di godimento sensoriale dei prodotti di cui crebbe la necessità tra il Trecento e il Quattrocento, col dilagare delle pestilenze. Si usavano materie vegetali, come le resine, e sostanze minerali come l'allume di rocca (oli odoriferi e pomate per viso e capelli). Si profumavano ambienti, oggetti e corpi per esaltare salute, bellezza e pulizia, in senso fisico e culturale.

Le spezie aromatizzavano cucine, case e borghi. Esisteva un *odore* connotante quartieri e città. Si combattevano in tal modo i miasmi che ammorbavano la vita collettiva, odori temuti e combattuti durante le ricorrenti malattie pandemiche. (Paola Roncarati, Garden Club Ferrara)



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1. NOTES ON THE ANCIENT ART OF PERFUMERY



The Vulgar Latin noun “*per fumum*” – from the verb *perfumare* – indicates the use of burning aromas on a fire to spread their properties with smoke. The preciousness of the materials and the specific knowledge became a source of good earnings for the apothecaries, i.e. those who possessed the art of mixing spices to obtain ointments and fragrant essences.

Perfumers distinguished themselves over time from *apothecaries* to satisfy the growing need for personal hygiene and sensory enjoyment of the products, which became necessary during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the spread of the plagues. Vegetable materials were used, such as resins, and mineral substances such as rock alum (odoriferous oils and ointments for face and hair). Environments, objects and bodies were perfumed to enhance health, beauty and cleanliness, in a physical and cultural sense.

Spices flavored kitchens, houses and villages. There was a *smell* connoting neighborhoods and cities. This aimed to combat the miasms that tainted collective life, the smells feared and fought during the recurring pandemic. (Paola Roncarati, Garden Club Ferrara)



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la *putrefazione atmosferica*. (Paola Roncarati, Garden Club Ferrara)



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2. AROMAS AND PERFUMES AROUND POLISSENA D'ESTE



Did Polissena, nephew of Duke Borso d'Este, love to surround herself with fragrances and use perfumes?

Polissena's cousin, Isabella d'Este (1474-1539), duchess of Mantua, indulged abundantly in the perfumes that arrived from the East through the Venetian port: there is evidence of a fervent market – reserved for very wealthy classes – of «*musk, amber, civet, camphor, labdanum, aloe wood, styrax, benzoin, incense, dragants, cloves, nutmeg and sandalwood*» (A. Messinis) towards the north and south of the country, including nearby Ferrara.

It is unlikely that Polissena remained immune to so much exclusive charm. We know that Giovanni Romei owned an apothecary (G. Tagliati) in the San Romano district, a very profitable business during the waves of the ferocious Black Death pandemic that scourged the population since the fourteenth century.

To alleviate miasma and counter the contagion, vinegar and rose waters were widely used, fragrant dry woods were also burned (myrtle, rosemary, juniper, laurel, ash, oak) together with sandalwood, camphor, incense, fumigating to combat *atmospheric putrefaction*. (Paola Roncarati, Garden Club Ferrara)



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