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## Frankincense research in France beckons young Omani scientists

📅 03/11/2019 👤 Ray Petersen

From its reverence during ancient times, to its emergence as an essential perfumery, to becoming a potentially life-saving element in modern organic medical science, the Boswellia sacra, or Frankincense is an example of Omani flora that has the potential for significant economic diversification opportunities according to French scientist, Dr Nicolas Baldovini. Holding a special place in Oman's culture and traditions, its resin has significant potential for medicinal development, and to this end, the Natural and Medical Sciences Research Center (NMSRC) of the University of Nizwa, in collaboration with the French Embassy in Oman,



Cartoon

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organised an internship for three young Omani researchers at the University Cote d'Azur, in Nice, in the South of France. As a result, Mohammed al Baroumi, Mohammed al Jassasi and Suleiman al Shidhani have interned in a prestigious throughout October.

Mr Franck Vermeulen, the cultural attaché of the French Embassy, underlining the continued importance of developing and strengthening scientific research collaboration between the two nations and cultures, saying: "The French Embassy in Oman is very proud to support collaboration between these two prestigious universities and their researchers."



Youthful Omanis, Mohammed al Baroumi, Mohammed al Jassasi and Suleiman al Shidhani have been working under the guidance of Dr Nicolas Baldovini, a global specialist in the field, with the research internship, focused on analysing the differences in volatile compounds found in frankincense sap, harvested from six different Boswellia trees species found throughout the MENA region, in Oman, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, India and Socotra Island. To be the topic of a research publication, co-authored by the entire research team, their synthesis, or combining of specific constituents of the

frankincense, is to further facilitate biological testing and evaluation within the current NMSRC programme.

Dr Baldovini, widely recognised as an energetic and passionate advocate for the benefits of frankincense research, has, for some time, worked in collaboration with Professor Ahmed al Harrasi, the chairman of the NMSRC, and presented his initial research findings at the First International Conference on Frankincense and Medicinal Plants, in October 2018, itself a high-profile collaboration between the University of Nizwa and Sultan Qaboos University. Since then, Baldovini and Harrasi have consistently collaborated on research and publications, particularly in respect of some rare and exotic Boswellia species.

The Nice based Dr Baldovini praised the impressive facilities of the NMSRC, and particularly the variety of innovative, active research, in the 'organic and natural' environment of the region's flora and fauna, and even fondly recalls his first 'living' encounter with Frankincense,



many years ago in Wadi Dawkh. "I didn't hesitate for a second when I was offered the three young interns, due to their experience in the field and their absolute traditional, cultural and scientific knowledge of this fascinating plant, and what ensued was a mutually rewarding social, scientific and personal experience for us all."

For their part, the tyro scientists thrived in their work environment, with one, Mohammed al Baroumi, surprised at "how humble, cooperative and accommodating Dr Baldovini was with us, making us feel like colleagues instead of interns, and valuing our contributions." It would appear that the




benefits were obvious as Baldovini commented, "All in all, it was a very fruitful experience and I am looking forward to the next occasion to host them for a longer period, and to come again in Oman to continue our collaborations on this fascinating plant."

Dr Al Harrasi commented, "As the Sultanate continues its drive for sustainable diversification, and knowledge-based intellectual capitalisation, NMSRC research and collaborations on the Boswellia Sacra, and its less common species, unique in the world and found only in the Dhofar Governorate of Oman, demonstrate the promising potential for economic benefits."


PHOTOS BY M Al Barouni




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