

Gum Arabic has been seen as a symbol of the “noble Orient” and later as a symbol of trouble. It is the hardened sap of varieties of acacia trees which grow exclusively in the Sahel, an area stretching across the African continent just south of the Sahara. From the time of the Crusades, when Europeans purchased it in Arab countries, it has played an ever-growing role in the global economy. It is now a common ingredient in foods, sodas, and cosmetics.

Combining cultural history with travel writing, Dorrit van Dalen follows *the fascinating history and shifting meanings assigned to gum Arabic* from Shakespeare to Bin Laden and from the Industrial Revolution to a veteran of a recent coup d'état in Chad. She shows that both Western and African civilisations would not be the same without *these tears of the acacia*.

DORRIT VAN DALEN has worked in West Africa in international cooperation and as a journalist. She is now affiliated with Leiden University as an Arabist.

It is both a commodity history and a personal account, with scholarship presented in a narrative rather than formal style. It is very well written. To me, this is the most difficult kind of non-fiction to write, and one of the most rewarding to read, with knowledge conveyed through enjoyment and fascination.
– Kaori O'Connor, University College London

This book provides much background knowledge on an omnipresent but elusive subject and includes surprising additional information and insights, even for someone who has been studying the history of gum Arabic for years.
– Jutta Wimmeler, author of *The Sun King's Atlantic: Drugs, Demons and Dyestuffs in the Atlantic World, 1640-1730*

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THE GOLDEN TEARS OF
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