

By Stefania 2007 Science Editor

Some Very Old Foods

And wine

1. Researchers were taken by surprise a few years ago when they found two wine bottles under the ruins of a London building destroyed in 1682. The cork tap of one bottle had rotten and the wine had turned into vinegar, while the other bottle was hermetically encased because of its tap fixed by wires and wax. With a special occasion of wine tasting organized by London Museum, experts tasted samples from the centuries old wine, which had been extracted from the bottle using syringes. It appeared it could have been a dry Madeira wine and its taste was described as being "fresh, fine, energizing and balanced".

2. In 2006, researchers found the oldest noodles in the world. They were thin, yellowish, and 50 cm (1.6 ft) long, being made of millet. They were found in a clay pot hermetically enclosed, buried 3 m (10 ft) below a sediment layer close to the river Huang (northwestern China). The place had been probably destroyed by an earthquake and a disastrous flooding 4,000 years ago. If there was a doubt about where pasta originated, Italy or China, now it is clear that the place was the Extreme East.

3. A species of date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), extremely appreciated in ancient times for its beauty, shadow and curative properties, which grew in ancient Israel, was exterminated by the crusaders during the Medieval Age. Recently, Israeli researchers managed to germinate a seed of the ancient date palm, 2,000 years old. The seed, named Methusela, was found during the digging at Masada, the famous Jewish fortress conquered by Romans in 73 AD. Still, the tree will have to wait years to produce fruits, and only in case it is a she date palm.

4. A wrecked first-century vessel found in 2006 off the Spanish coast, with 30 m (100ft) in length and a 400 tonnes in weight, is the largest Roman boat found in the Mediterranean. The main good carried by the ship consisted of about 1500 well preserved one-meter-high two-handle clay jars of garum, a fish sauce highly praised by Romans who used it as a condiment to a wide variety of dishes and supposedly as an aphrodisiac. The sauce is no longer in the amphoras because the eroded ceramic-and-mortar seals were not hermetic so as to last two millennia under water, but traces of fish bone were found inside and researchers hope they will find the formula for the sauce.