

# First archaeobotanical analysis from a Medieval well (14th cent. A.D.) in Sassari (Sardinia - Italy)

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This excavation covers an area (via Satta) which was occupied by houses and courtyards, built with stones of limestone and clay, located in the Sassari's old town, in the 14th century AD.

In one of these courtyards there was a well, the oldest one of those found in the town, a very narrow one, about 90 cm ø, and 14 m deep. By 1330-1350 AD, the well was no longer used and was filled with household waste, mostly leftovers from meals and dishes. In the pit were even preserved organic objects, found in very large quantities; the lack of oxygen and the presence of water allowed the preservation of various wooden items, in addition to many botanical and zoological ones (the latter being studied by Barbara Wilkens - University of Sassari).



1, 2 - the site and the well



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Among the remaining items, a hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) with a small circular hole which contained a drop of mercury (fig. 6, 7), is really particular: this is an amulet against the eye of evil of the Catalan tradition, a tradition which never had a popular following on the island.

3 - the reconstruction of the well (exhibition december 2009)

4, 5 - jug (*maiolica arcaica pisana*) and plate (*maiolica valenzana in verde e bruno*) (first half 14th century AD)

6,7 - amulet (hazelnut containing a drop of mercury)

Archaeobotanical research, still in its early stages, shows the presence of cereals, such as wheat and barley, herbs, vegetables and wild plants. The most significant fact, for the moment, is the large presence of remains known as "fruit": *Citrullus lanatus*, *Cucumis melo*, *Ficus carica*, *Juglans regia*, *Malus/Pyrus/Sorbus*, *Morus nigra*, *Prunus cerasus*, *P. domestica* subsp. *domestica* and subsp. *insititia*, *P. dulcis*, *P. spinosa*, *Punica granatum*, *Rubus fruticosus* s.l., *Vitis vinifera* subsp. *vinifera*. In several cases, concentrations of these remains are very high, for example *Cucumis melo* has over 1500 seeds in 8 litres.



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8 - mix carpological remains; 9 - *Prunus dulcis* (endocarp fragment - 21,3 mm); 10 - *P. domestica* subsp. *domestica* (endocarp - 19,8 mm); 11 - *P. domestica* subsp. *insititia* (endocarp - 17,2 mm); 12 - *P. spinosa* (endocarp - 7,9 mm); 13 - *P. cerasus* (endocarp - 9,3 mm); 14 - *Cucumis melo* (seed - 10,7 mm); 15 - *Citrullus lanatus* (seed - 13,3 mm); 16 - *Vitis vinifera* subsp. *vinifera* (pip - 7,1 mm); 17 - *Punica granatum* (seeds - 10,7 mm\*); 18 - *Morus nigra* (endocarps - 2,8 mm\*); 19 - *Rubus fruticosus* s.l. (endocarps - 3,1 mm\*); 20 - *Ficus carica* (achene - 1,7 mm\*) - \* mean

The large quantity of remains associated with this category can develop more ethnobotanical considerations, linking traditions of the past with ones of the present. For example, in Sardinia, melon is now used in a typical preserve: melon peel oil. Peels are boiled in water and vinegar, then drained; then peels are put in jars with spices and oil. In Italy the practice of eating the peel of this fruit (it is considered excellent in soups) has been attested at least since the Renaissance, as well as the practice to preserve whole melons in honey.



*Cucumis melo* L.

ETHNOBOTANY