

In Ancient Rome, Citrus Fruits Were Status Symbols

By Atlas Obscura, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.19.17

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Level **820L**



In ancient Roman times, citrons and lemons were precious rare fruits. They were brought to Rome from Persia and the Middle East. Photo from Pixabay

To most people in the ancient Mediterranean, citrus fruits were very rare and very expensive. In fact, there were only two kinds of citrus known to the ancient Romans: lemons and a fruit called citron.

The Romans were an ancient people who took over much of Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East. They started from Italy more than 2,000 years ago. The Romans set up trade routes with distant places, where they could get precious goods. One of these goods was the citron.

Experts have found out that other citrus fruits such as oranges and limes were not brought to Western Europe until hundreds of years later. They were first brought from Southeast Asia.

Ancient citrus trade route

Dafna Langgut studies the ancient history of plants. She used texts, art and other records of the past to learn about the ancient citrus trade. She wanted to know how citrus plants moved and were

Quiz

1 Read the selection from the section "Keeps moths away, too!"

And, "when one has drunk deadly poison ... it upsets the stomach and brings up the poison." In other words, if you needed to throw up, a citron could do the trick.

What does the author mean by stating that a citron "could do the trick"?

- (A) It would do something new each time.
- (B) It would confuse people watching.
- (C) It would do what you need it to.
- (D) It would perform a magic act.

2 Read the sentence from the section "Precious fruits."

The oldest remains of lemons found in Rome were from about 2,000 years ago.

What is the meaning of "remains" as it is used in the sentence above?

- (A) forgotten books
- (B) burned ashes
- (C) ancient bones
- (D) leftover pieces

3 What effect did being rare have on the citrus fruit?

- (A) It made people think it was poisonous.
- (B) It made it more popular and expensive.
- (C) It made it hard to cook and eat.
- (D) It made it less important for trading.

4 According to the section "Ancient citrus trade route," HOW did Dafna Langgut study Roman citrus?

- (A) She studied Roman art and writing as well as the fossils of seeds.
- (B) She used modern citrus to study how they were traded.
- (C) She studied the work already done by other scientists.
- (D) She used the fossils of seeds to grow new fruit she could study.