# Study: Olive oil fed 2,000 B.C. foundries

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Italian scientists have reportedly discovered the Mediterranean's first foundries were fueled by olive oil and not, as previously believed, by charcoal.

The researchers from Rome's Institute of Technologies Applied to Art made the discovery at a dig site in southern Cyprus that has already yielded the oldest wine and silk in the Mediterranean, as well as copper-smelting ovens dating to 2,000 B.C., the Italian news agency ANSA reported Tuesday.

The walls of the site were covered with thick, black resin that analysis showed was the burnt residue of olive oil.

"It's the first time in the history of metallurgy that this fuel has been found in place of charcoal," said ITAA's Maria Rosaria Belgiorno.

Copper from Cyprus is known to have been the most prized in the Mediterrean during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1600 B.C.), she told ANSA. "This was probably because olive-oil smelting leaves fewer impurities from the ore."

She said the discovery of olive oil's potential was probably serendipitous. "A few olives may have fallen into a fire and people were surprised at how well they burned," she said.

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