



Associazione Culturale e Sociale Sarda Inc.  
Sydney N.S.W. Australia

Battista Saiu and Raffaele Zanella

## “Sardinia, Heart of Bread”

Club Five Dock RSL, Sydney NSW

14<sup>th</sup> August 2016

### **Sardinian bread, delicious speciality to eat**

Artistic, ritual ceremonial and votive bread is made to celebrate the nuptials, the first mass to remember particularly worshipped saint or for special events.

Sardinian Bread has a large variety of shapes which clearly show a sort of vibrating imagination typical of Sardinian people. Expert hands shape the bread like crowns, baskets, flowers, leaves, which are expression of old and new religiosity inherited and passed on through oral tradition, gestures and words. Bread and the art of baking are the archives, the treasure of Sardinian science, religion, theology and cosmology. Bread represents the old memory of the ancestors, the echo of their heart, the expression of joy and sorrow in everyday life, close to the nuptial bed and to the grave.

Bread, basic nourishment with high symbolic value, has been an essential food in Sardinian nutrition since immemorial time. Beside everyday bread, it has various shapes according to the seasons winter and summer bread and to the consumer bread for shepherds or for farmers. There are simple or more accurate and decorated variety of bread made to celebrate important families, community feasts to prove how important the cycle of bread was in social life.

Sardinia has 377 municipal districts which have their own typical bread: “quite different types of bread that have the same name or on the contrary the same kind of bread with different names.”

According to an approximate evaluation there are quite a few thousand of different kinds of Sardinian bread, most of them cannot be easily and promptly classified as they are made with different shapes, with various types of flour, for ceremonial, votive, ritual purposes. Bread can reveal the thousand-year-old Sardinian history, its different names through the centuries can speak the old languages of the inhabitants that ruled over Sardinia for at least 3.000, from vulgar age up to some centuries after the beginning of the New Age.

### **The bread of the souls, *pane de sas animas* - Orani (Nuoro)**

The cult of the dead in Sardinia has its own kinds of bread. There are different types of bread, flat bread or pasta dura bread, all made of wheat with an oval or round shape, all called *pane de sas animas*, the bread of the souls, some are made for celebrating the day of the dead, some others prepared to celebrate a person soon after death.

In Orani (Nuoro) the bread to celebrate the dead is flat or decorated with three little scallops which are equidistant from the circumference. The housewife makes the sign of the cross while whispering prayers and summoning and shapes the pastry by hands avoiding any metallic tools. She uses shells, straw stalks or her nails to carve the bread. When it is cooked it is the first bread to be offered to poor people, *est su*

*primu chi ch'essit, (it's the first one leaving the house). Bread might be given for a year or even longer to the poor families of the village.*

It is said that if someone doesn't keep the promise by forgetting to make the bread the dead appears in a dream to ask for what they deserve.

Some really special bread are made and given to the dead person's relatives before the funeral, or to celebrate the thirtieth or the first year anniversary of death. In Orani, Ottana, Sarule, Orgosolo and some other places in the North-Central Sardinia. In some cases bread delivery takes place in different period of time, after having dreamt the dead man asking to reconcile with the people he had some disagreements with in life.

*"In case of a murdered person all the ovens in the village are lighted (even the oven of parish priest). Every single oven (even the ones that are not used to make bread) must be cleaned and lighted, some flour will be put inside to spread out the bread smell. The Making of the bread has a particular meaning: a duty for guaranteeing the serenity of the dead in the afterlife and the reconciliation on earth".*

Even in these occasions "*su pane de sas animas*" the bread of the souls is delivered by muffled up men who wore a cap for not being recognized at night. Three loafs of bread are usually delivered.

"*Su pane de sas animas*", the bread of the souls, may have accurate or less refined shapes according to the amount of time the baker has to make it. In case of lack of time the bread can be broken into two or three pieces to be given to the enemy to make peace. The person who receives the bread doesn't know who is the giver. Receiving the bread means that there is an enemy who wants to make peace with the receiver under the name of the dead man. This is a clear invitation for the receiver to be reconcile with all his enemies.

In these villages when there is a dead man at home, the house door is left half-closed and if someone knocks at the door in the evening, it's for sure an enemy who wants and must be reconciled thanks to "*su pane de sas animas*" the bread of the souls, just to let the dead man rest in peace: that is a strong invitation to social reconciliation.

*Sas animas*, the souls, is a kind of flat bread made in Orani (Nuoro) for the dead man, it has two diametrically opposite orthogonal cuts, made with a cutter on the raw dough. This kind of bread is offered during the begging on the second of November.

Another kind of bread offered the same day in Pozzomaggiore is *sas corrocias* (the horns), a oz head-shaped bread with turndown horns, similar to some other *pane de animas* (the bread of the souls) made in Borore (Nuoro) and in Quartucciu (Cagliari) reproducing zoomorphic forms of some menhirs, particular stones typical of the central area of Sardinia or found on the walls of "*domus de janas*" (tombs excavated in the rock, whose walls have sculpted images of straight or turndown bulls and deer) widespread in every part of the island dated back to V-VI millennium BC.

In Sindia (Nuoro) the bread of the dead is called *cuccuru mortu*, the head of the dead; *forrotula*, flat bread with a central hole, in Bonorva (Sassari); *arenadeddas*, pomegranates, in Quartucciu (Cagliari); *covazza de ria*, lenthened flat bread, in Tresnuraghes (Oristano), in some cases still given as offering "*assolta*", to friends, relatives, poor people and begging children during the commemoration of the dead.

### **Wedding bread, *su pani de Canna* - Tertenia (Ogliastra)**

In Tertenia various compositions of *pani de canna*, bread on the reed, different in shapes and size are fasten to green reeds and taken to the church by a bearer walking beside the groom during the wedding procession.

"*Sos cicirillios*" are seven or nine little anthropomorphic loaves with the shape of stylized naked children that are tied up in a scattered way to the reed. When the religious ceremony ends, some "*cicirillios*" are

removed and kept in the house of the married couple to be used as teething ring for the first born. "*Sa pippia*", the little girl par excellence, is put beside the reed handle, it might be a reproduction of "the Queen of heaven" Astarte idolized by the ancient people of Mediterranean and "fertile half moon" areas as "the goddess of fertility, love and war"; personification of Mother earth, goddess and gods, men, plants and animals creator. She is mentioned in Jeremiah's book where the prophet criticizes Jewish women hiding their husbands the use of Her image for the making of the flat bread.

"*Sa reula*", the rule, according to the most immediate and easiest meaning is placed in the middle of the reeds, it has the shape of the Greek cross with a circle in the middle, in the half part of the arms. In the ancient language of Accadia "*rehû(m)*" would mean "*inseminate the earth, fecundate a woman*" [...] having sexual relations like a God that uses his penis as a plough sowing the earth waiting for the fruits.

"*Su siddu*" in the old language of Bitti (Nuoro) is "the coin put on the top of the green reeds". *Su siddu* is also the bishop's ring made of palm leaves, it is placed on the top of the stranded branch and taken to the church to be blessed on Palm Sunday.

In common language "*siddu-siddadu*" means 'treasure', 'precious object'. *Su siddatu* was the underground hidden treasure, the one that some families hid to the revenue or to the enemies stealing, or didn't recuperate in case of violent death. The etymology of *siddatu* is the academic *siddatu* 'storage, big container base'. "*Sid* is one of the several Semitic names of the god Baal in the high places cult, "*culto nei luoghi elevati*" recognizable in Sardinia with the eponymous, founder, native god *Sardus Pater*," characteristic that more than any further consideration would explain his own identification with *Sid*". The god of *Sidonian* "*Phoenician ancestor whose leadership made them sail Mediterranean sea and establish their empires*".

"*Siddu*" and "*Pippia*" are the arcaic survivals of the most important goddesses beloved by Phoenician people. *Siddu*, *reula* and *pippia* mean to the church what the loaves mean to the synagogue, according to the Bible. Rules of the offering loaves, similar to the "amulon", the flat bread offered by the Greek to propitiate the gods.

In Tertenia a village in the middle of Ogliastro, the artists of bread called "*pintadoris*", according to an old tradition handed on from mother to daughter make "*su pani de coja*", a kind of wedding bread with several shapes, the most frequent is the crown. Some loaves are shaped like animals, flowers, birds and fruits, some others are shaped like doves, horses or snakes, all of them have decorations, ornamentations. Among the flowers very popular are the rose, sacred to Venus, whose statues were decorated with roses and myrtle flowers. *Su gravellu*, the carnation has different meanings according to the colour, red means passionate love; pink means maternity; white means pure love.

### **Crown shaped wedding bread, *pane de s'affidu***

A selection of bread of the sisties is kept In the "Museum of life and popular Traditions "in Nuoro. Wedding bread, collected by the branch of History of popular traditions at the University of History and Philosophy in Cagliari, is made with the highest quality flour as it had to be white even after baking

*Su mandatiu* "bring as you need" is the typical bread of Lodè, made to celebrate the engagement, it is given by the future bride to the godmother and to the godfather. There are three kinds of bread, made for *su madatiu*, called *sas tres Marias*, the three Marys; the shape changes according to the receiver: bordered with scallops, sun-rayed like a little sun, or with one or more little holes in the middle of the bread for the godfather; with no holes but with some little bevels, with a sort of full moon for the godmother.

In Pozzomaggiore traditional wedding still takes place at home with the wheat ceremony celebrated by the mother, the oldest relative or the godmother in case of an orphaned bride.

At the family's house threshold there is "a prie-dieu made with pillows with white pillow-cases, the bride

and the groom kneel down looking at the nearest sea point. The mother stands in front of the couple delivering a good wishes formula while putting slowly by slowly wheat and flowers handfuls on the girl's head and making the sign of the cross once or more times."

In the heart of Mejlogu, a place in Sassari area, the wedding bread is called *su pane de s'affidu*, it is waved with a periwinkle garland and placed on the head, *su tedile de pruninca*.

In Monteleone Rocca Doria (Sassari), the bread crown is waved with periwinkle branches. The bread is decorated with birds holding a red thread on their beaks just to remind the menstrual flow colour.

In Romana (Sassari), the girl celebrates the good wish ceremony by putting on her head *sa còtzula*, a super-fine flat bread, the bread is broken into pieces and shared with the guests soon after the celebration. Similar crown-shaped bread, *su pane de isposos*, is found in Cheremule (Sassari), Olmedo (Sassari), Villagrande Strisaili (Ogliastra).

In Pozzomaggiore (Sassari), crowns are placed on the head of girls who haven't reached their sexual maturity yet, they stand in pairs on a chair on the bride and groom's threshold. They throw the wheat on the guests when they are leaving the house through the open-wide door, soon after the plate containing the wheat is thrown at the floor in front of the bride and the groom. The breaking of the plate is frequently mimed together with the repetition of good wish formulas and blessings by the neighbours during the way to the church. The breakage of the plate symbolically reminds the hymen rupture that is going to happen on the wedding bed.

Wearing bread on the head in the wedding symbology means fertility and abundance, values that come from the ancient divinities cult: the head surrounded by green leafy branch circle or by a plain rope was a clear sign of the availability to ierodulia, the holy copulation typical in Punic, Phoenician, Babylonian cults addressed to Astarte. Herodotus and Strabo speak about old habits that came before the wedding ceremony.

*"A Babylonian law, given by an oracle, obliged every woman born in the country, to go once in life to Venus temple to give herself to a stranger. In Heliopoli women prostituted themselves to celebrate Venus. They did the same in Lydian before getting married. In Cyprus the future brides used to go on a prefixed day to the sea shore to sacrifice their virginity through prostitution."* Some rich women went by covered carriages to the holy paddock around Militta's temple. *"Isn't Militta, on the other hand, the goddess of every people, the uppermost creator? That's why Herodotus calls her Venus"*.

### **Wedding rubbed/browned bread, *de iscadda/ischedda***

Crown-shaped bread or diamond-shaped bread with different names according to the places are typical of many Sardinian weddings. The habit of crowning is a sort of ancient world heritage used in important ceremonies or in feasts or simple banquets. In the past several elements could be used to circle the head: laurels, myrtle, olive crowns for men; flowers garlands, mainly roses for girls. Oranges flowers were used in the Saracen brides' houses. To Christian people orange flowers wedding garlands meant purity, chastity and virginity. In Greece they are considered a symbol of Diana because oranges were considered the golden apples from Hesperides.

*Su pane de s'affidu* in Pozzomaggiore has quite a few symbols: an orange flowers fall, little lilies, typical flowers coming from Araceae family, with visible straight spadix; *sas melas*, pomegranates; some pine cones representing the greatness of vital power and the glorification of fertility, symbol of the eternal return to nature and to life; two couples of birds stand for the reinforced plastic image of the future couple standing next to the procreation nest. Still in Pozzomaggiore the wedding bread placed on the tablemates' table is called *de iscadda* if it is rubbed, or *de ischedda* if browned, the vowel transformation from a into e gives a different meaning.

Both kinds of bread are exposed half-cooked to water steam to be baked again to get a rubbed surface, *Su pane de iscadda* is the rubbed, flat round bread made for the important celebrations such

as Easter or weddings. The very popular circular shapes are indented if they represent the sun, in this particular case there are rays and carvings; if they symbolize the moon the circumference is more linear, flat and uniform with few little simple garlands, the centre is smooth with some signs to avoid any bread swellings, with no added decorations. "In most traditions the sun is the universal father and the moon is the mother.

The sun and the rain together symbolise the union of masculine and feminine power. The symbols of the sun are the wheel, the disc, the circle which turn around a central point, the radiant circle, the swastika, the straight and wavy rays representing the light and the heat of the sun." In the farming world the best agricultural year is when the sun and the lunar calendar coincide and overlap the vernal equinox. In that case the union of the sun with the moon with the former entering Aries constellation while the fecundate full moon reflects its bright rays.

Thiesi (Sassari) makes *su poddine*, a half- moon shaped flat bread prepared with *sa podda*, special kind of flour hammered on the top by finger tips to make the upper part to be divided by the lower part while cooking. Cut into two half moons with a wavy edge. *Su poddine* was given by the bride and the groom to the guests as a greeting.

In Chiaramonti (Sassari), *su pane ischeddadu* has the shape of a bird head along the circumference this animal is a universal symbol of the relationship between the sky and the earth, the goddess' messenger that stands between what is above and man, and what is down on earth.

Apart from its large round variety ceremonial bread has the shapes of a leafy branch, of a sheaf of wheat cloak, of a bunch of flowers typical of the bread given during the offertory celebrations in Terralba and Villaurbana.

The so called *Su coccoi pintau* bread is a really refined variety in Villaurbana and Tramatza; *coccoi e pane de isposos* bread in Dorgali, Settimo San Pietro and Paulilatino. The bread with a heart shape is very popular in quite a few occasions. Bag-shaped bread is really is made in Ossi (Sassari), Orune (Nuoro), Urzulei (Ogliastra), Bitti (Nuoro), Lodè (Nuoro), in Quartu Sant'Elena (Cagliari), Borore, Sedilo, Noragugume (Nuoro) and Busachi.

In Pozzomaggiore bags and baskets are made "*in Iscadda*" with a different form according to the ability of the bakers, they evoke the "feminine power to keep and preserve what is really precious, they are the symbol of life and health, what is precious". Bread with the shape of hearts, doves, swallows, little horses are made in Pozzomaggiore and in some other districts nearby.

Pozzomaggiore shares with Bonorva a particular kind of bread with the shape of a feminine shoe that can be found on wedding banquets. Shoes have a double meaning: freedom (slaves walked with bare feet) and control, the control of the shoes means the control of the person, therefore if the groom possesses the bride's shoe he controls the bride as well. In Atzara a pair of shoes is given to the pander, the mediator who supports the wedding. It is a habit found in the Bible in Rut's book, where it is said that "Some time ago in Israel there was the old habit concerning the right of releasing or of exchange, to validate a document a person took off a sandal and passed it to another person; this was the way to certify in Israel "The importance of the shoe goes from the land control to the possession through a copulative meaning, of the future bride. When you get the land by marrying Noemi at the same time you'll have Rut, the Maobite".

In the third century the Roman rhetorician Claudio Eliano in his Greek work (about the animals nature) wrote about an eagle that stole a sandal to Rodope, while he was having a bath. The bird gave the shoe to the pharaoh who was so impressed by the foot fineness that looked for the girl and married her. This story inspired Charles Perrault, who wrote Cinderella, both the books identify the shoe with the person.

In the alpine wakefulness songs the pursued girl is identified with her little shoes that are usually red. Similarly in Sardinia "*s'iscarpitta de comare, andat bene a u pe meu*": the godmother's little shoe suits

my foot.

"Some experts identify the shoe with a sexual symbol or at least foot wakes up sexual desire. The ones who consider the foot a sort of phallic symbol can give the shoe a vaginal meaning and between the two it may occur an adaptation problem able to generate anguish". Feet never stop moving, they aren't easily at ease while wearing shoes. They reveal a never ending anxiety which shows a search for stability. They are our basis on the ground, on the earth, on mater, the mother-earth, creator and guardian of everything.

Nowadays "matter" is an inhuman arid and merely intellectual idea, lacking of any psychic meaning to us. The old image of the matter was completely different – The Great Mother- capable of holding and expressing the deep emotional meaning of the Mother Earth! "Symbols that according to Jung come to light in our dreams to compensate the loss suffered by modern man. Such symbols survive like illegible remains not only in the bread shapes but also in gestures and rituals whose original meanings we forgot. We can think about the groom's mother that in Puglia ties the best men's shoes before taking the future son-in-law to the altar.

In Piedmont area a big pair of woman white shoes and a man hat are hung on the votive big candle during the procession in Asigliano (Vercelli),to celebrate San Giorgio patron saint's day ( on the 23rd April).

If walking with shoes on means possessing the earth, cleaning our shoes on the doormat, wearing plackets, taking shoes off before entering our house or " a holy place, means leaving the earth contact outside, like living in a obedience and respect condition".

*The stranger must overstep barefoot its guest's threshold just to show he has nothing to claim. The mosque ground as the one in the sanctuaries doesn't belong to men that must walk them barefoot."*