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Around the Dinner Table with Grazia : Food and Cooking in the Work of Grazia Deledda

Grazia Deledda

Neria De Giovanni

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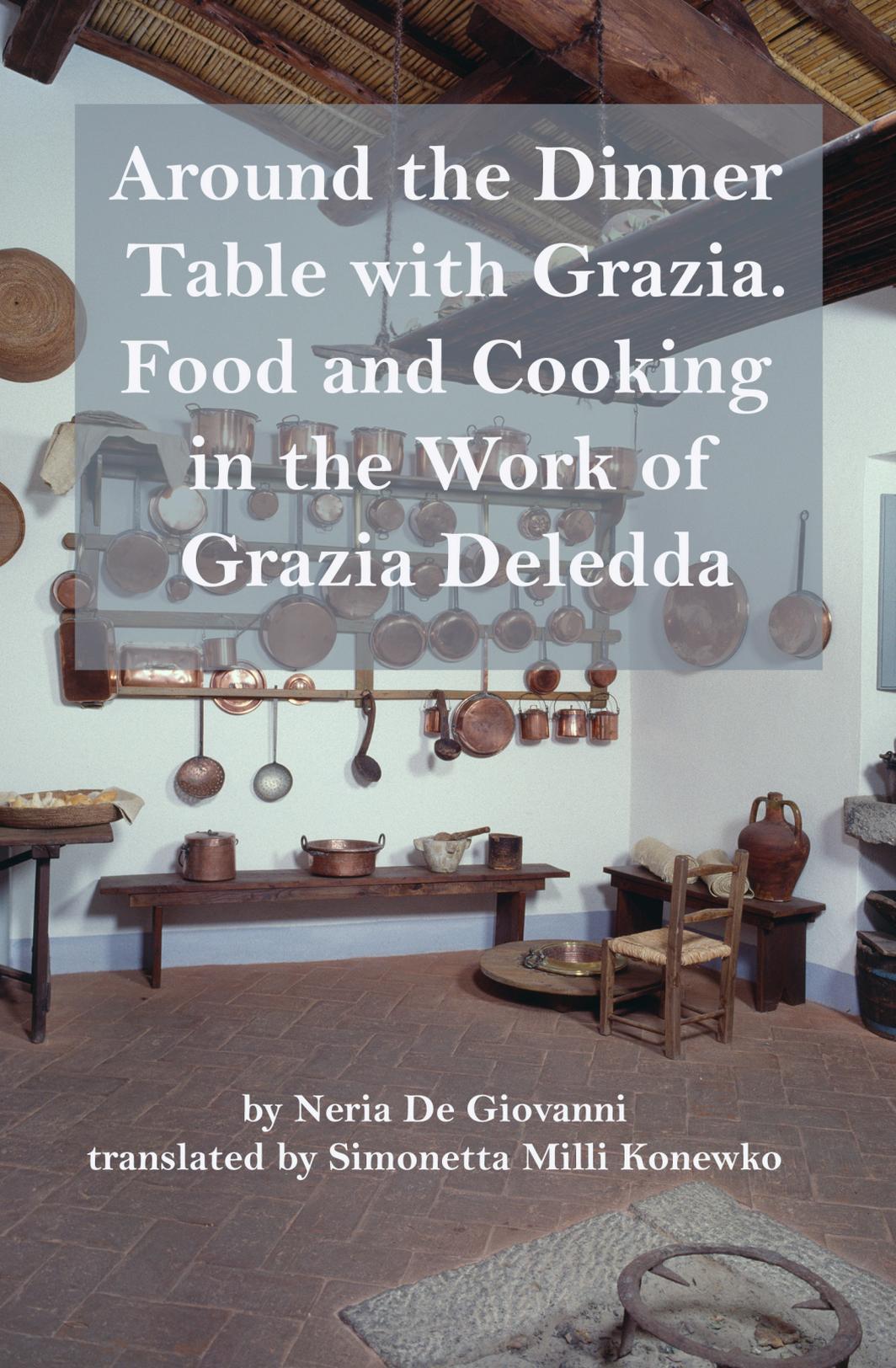
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Around the Dinner
Table with Grazia.
Food and Cooking
in the Work of
Grazia Deledda

by Neria De Giovanni
translated by Simonetta Milli Konewko



Nobel prize recipient, Grazia Deledda's kitchen. Photo courtesy of Istituto Superiore Regionale Etnografico della Sardegna

Simonetta Milli Konewko is Associate Professor in the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her book, *Neorealism and the “New” Italy: Compassion in the development of Italian Identity*, was published by Palgrave in 2016 and its translation, *L’Italia neorealista. Compassione e identità nazionale* was published by Carocci in 2018. Her articles have appeared, among others, in *Forum Italicum*, *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, *Holocaust and Modernity*, and *Sinestesia*.

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Translator's Preface

Around the Dinner Table with Grazia. Food and Cooking in the Work of Grazia Deledda, by Neria De Giovanni, underlines the love of Grazia Deledda (1871-1936) for her people's traditions, historic events, and food. It shows that Sardinians, adhering to an agropastoral economy, follow a very simple way of preparing food; they utilize vegetables and products from livestock farming and especially sheep; they respect traditional recipes and customary ways to preserve food. For instance, they prepare distinctive dishes, such as *pane currasau*, that last several weeks without decomposing; *porcetto*, a small pig usually cooked with myrtle and almond sweets, and *seadas*, a fried dessert filling with cheese. Another representative practice of Sardinian tradition is the conservation of fruit, such as grapes and melons, in home attics because it guarantees the right temperature and humidity. With this practice, Sardinians make seasonal fruit, abundant during the summer, available throughout the year.

Neria De Giovanni, journalist, essayist, Editorial Director of the online journal *PortaleLetterario.net*,¹ and President of the International Association of Literary Critics,² is a scholar from the University of Cagliari and the coordinator of the literary festival titled *I Venerdì di Propaganda: Temi e Autori* (The Fridays of Propaganda: Themes and Authors) at the Libreria Internazionale Paolo VI in Rome. As a literary critic, she has received numerous awards, including one from the Minister of Cultural Heritage in Rome for her book *Ilaria del Carretto, la donna del Guinigi*.³ She is the author of forty books of literary prose and criticism devoted to the exploration of important women who contributed greatly to the fields of literature, art, and history, as did Amalasueta, Arianna, Dolores Prato, Eleonora d'Arborea, Ilaria del Carretto, Hildegard of Bingen, Maria Carta, and Grazia Deledda, among others. Having

¹ <https://www.portaleletterario.net/>.

² <https://aiel-org.webnode.it/chi-siamo/>.

³ Neria de Giovanni, *Ilaria Del Carretto, La Donna Del Guinigi* (Lucca: M. Pacini Fazzi, 1988).

devoted twelve volumes to the study of Grazia Deledda, she is considered an expert on this author.

Grazia Deledda is the only Italian writer who has received the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1926, “for her idealistically inspired writings which with plastic clarity picture the life on her native island and with depth and sympathy deal with human problems in general.”⁴ Deledda, a great chef herself, who was attentive to learn the secrets of other women’s recipes, ironically remembered when the messenger from the Swedish delegation arrived to her house to announce she had won the Nobel Prize. He kissed her hand, which smelled like onions since, she had just finished browning the herbs and onion for some ragu sauce.⁵

It is worth noticing that although Deledda wrote her books in standard Italian, her mother tongue was Logudorese

⁴ From the award ceremony speech:
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1926/ceremony-speech/>.

⁵ Martha King, *Grazia Deledda: A Legendary Life* (London: Troubadour, 2005).

Sardinian,⁶ which is one of the two written versions of Sardinian, often regarded as the most conservative of all Romance languages. The absence of significant impact from languages other than Romance has been considered an important reason for the manifestation of conservative language features.⁷ Deledda grew up immersed in Sardinian legends, folklore, and native customs that preserved cultural traits from ancient times. For these cultural reasons, Deledda called the place where she was born, Nuoro, “a bronze-age village.” This respect for old regional customs is reflected in the preparation of the old recipes described in this volume.

De Giovanni’s examination of Deledda’s representations of food includes, among others, *Ferro e fuoco*, *Marianna Sirca*, and *Cenere*, works completed from 1895 to 1937. This collection of scenes associated with the preparation of food, according to De Giovanni, allows one to establish universal anthropological

⁶ S. Frota and P. P. Vives, *Intonation in Romance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷ Michael Jones, “Sardinian,” in *The Romance Languages*, ed. Martin Harris and Nigel Vincent (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 314-50.

and cultural connections. It has been often demonstrated that although the study of food and eating is noteworthy for its own sake, since the main purpose of food is nutrition, it has also a cultural component, according to which individuals select their food considering not only flavor or nutritional value, but also historic, economic, social, cultural conditions and environmental elements. Therefore, an analysis of food can advance anthropological discussions and approaches. For instance, such an analysis may cover considerations on food security, ethical consumption, the treatment of animals, the health consequences of meat consumption, eating and rituals, and eating and identity.

Similarly, in De Giovanni's collection, Deledda's representations of eating are not only described as biological action, but also grasped and conveyed in numerous representative means and customs associated with selecting, preparing, and consuming. The consumption of food in these examples always has meaningful connotations and means of interaction. Food discloses evidence about the people who

prepare it; Deledda's choice of food reveals Sardinian ideals, likes, and dislikes, and also information about the region she travelled and the people she encountered during her voyage, such as in the Romagna town of Cervia, where Deledda loved to spend her summer holidays. As such, Deledda's food scenes permit an analysis of her private and public stories, her connection with Sardinian popular traditions, the relationship between food and her literary works, and the creation of the kitchen, perceived as a special space in which the author can conceive and shape her own identity.

The intersection between Deledda's passions for writing and cooking is very significant. De Giovanni in her introduction refers to the difficulty women writers had in combining their ability to cook with their passion for writing. Women have been historically perceived as food providers; consequently, they were expected to learn how to cook for themselves and others. However, in the case of women's writers, the challenge was augmented, since they also needed to enter a space that

traditionally had been dominated by men. Deledda's life underlines clearly her effort to acquire a position in the literary world. Her literary career, which started very early when at seventeen years old, she wrote her first short story, *Sangue Sardo* (Sardinian Blood), published in the women's fashion magazine, *Ultima Moda* in 1887, persisted without disruption. She continued to write even after becoming a mother of two sons, Sardus and Franz. In later life, her children remembered how the family was accustomed to providing her with the crucial time of at least two hours every day to write her literary production. Franz, her younger son, when he was an adult, expressed his recollections in an outstanding way: "Unconsciously, we understood that in that room, for those two hours, Genius was rising to creation."⁸

Deledda strongly contributed to examining the time, place, characters, and culture of her Sardinian peasant neighbors. Her works have been recognized by critics for their deep

⁸ Martha King, "Introduction," in Grazia Deledda, ed., *Cosima*, trans. Martha King (New York: Italica Press, 1988), ix.

psychological insight, and recent studies of her work have explored her interest in the role of women in Sardinian society at the turn of the twentieth century. She greatly contributed to enhancing the field of women's writing, which as a separate category of scholarly writing, has only received attention relatively recently, since the eighteenth century. Deledda's consideration for ancient Sardinian folk stories and traditions related to women calls attention to women's broader cultural contribution, which can be found as far back as the eighth century BC. For instance, in early times, Hesiod compiled a *Catalogue of Women*,⁹ a list of heroines and goddesses, and Plutarch listed heroic and artistic women in his *Moralia*;¹⁰ in the Medieval period, Boccaccio employed allegorical and biblical women as moral examples in *De Mulieribus Claris* (On Famous

⁹ Hesiod, "Catalogues of Women," in *Fragmenta Hesiodica Ediderunt R Merkelbach Et ML West*, ed. Reinhold Merkelbach and Martin Litchfield West (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 2.

¹⁰ Plutarch et al., *Moralia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927).

Women),¹¹ and, moreover, he inspired Christine de Pisan to write *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405).¹²

Finally, the selections of Deledda's literary works that Neria De Giovanni collected and commented on in this volume evoke a passion for conviviality and gathering, which is an important aspect that links Sardinian culture to all the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declares, "Eating together is the foundation of the cultural identity and continuity of communities throughout the Mediterranean."¹³ The preparation of food underlined in these stories, emphasizing the values of friendliness and sociability and bringing together people of all ages, conditions, and social

¹¹ Giovanni Boccaccio and Vittorio Zaccaria, *De Mulieribus Claris* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1970).

¹² Christine de Pisan et al., *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies* (New York: Bard Hall Press/Persea Books, 1989).

¹³ http://www.unesco.org/new/en/member-states/single-view/news/fourteen_elements_inscribed_on_the_representative_list_of_th/.

classes, may invite an intercultural dialogue and a way of life guided by ideas of tolerance and respect for diversity.

The taste of reading!
Routes through food, literature and...

Neria De Giovanni

Around the Dinner Table with Grazia.
Food and Cooking in the Work of Grazia Deledda

Il leone verde

Translation by Simonetta Milli Konewko, 2020

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Cover photo: Nobel prize recipient, Grazia Deledda's
kitchen.

Photo courtesy of Istituto Superiore Regionale
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INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, food preparation has been assigned to women, and it figures large among their roles in the home. As females of their species, women are the ones who breastfeed, and they are therefore regarded as food providers par excellence. The image of a woman stirring a spoon in a pot, blurred by the rising steam, belongs to our collective imagination. It is surrounded by a positive aura when the woman is mother and nurturer; but it acquires dark tones when she is called a witch. Therefore the kitchen, where cooking happens, is also a female “place of power,” as through food and the satisfaction of an irresistible primary need, it often exerts influence, directly or indirectly, over the men who sit at the table.

Moving from the anthropological to the exquisitely literary, Banana Yoshimoto in her *Kitchen* has exemplified the importance and power of food in Japanese society, where rites and traditional roles are extremely important.

Isabel Allende’s *Aphrodite* signals a return to life in the true sense of the word. After *Paula*, the soliloquy of a mother whose daughter is in a coma, Allende rediscovers the erotic power of food in *Aphrodite*, and the joy of living that it brings. A community in Puritan Norway can smile again and enjoy the pleasure of gathering together, thanks to Babette’s banquet in Karen Dixen’s marvelous story, appropriately called *Babette’s Feast*. Conviviality as an expression of the joy of life is manifested in identical ways in different

cultures and countries, from Japan to Chile to Denmark, and also to Sardinia.

Cooking, preparing succulent meals, is closely connected to feminine identity, but today, several writers use the metaphor of aphrodisiac food to embellish their male protagonists, to touch them with a dose of narrative curiosity. The popular detective Pepe Carvalho, protagonist of many of the adventures designed by Montalban, and his close relation, Inspector Montalbano, created by our countryman Camilleri, are famous examples of this trend. And what about the unsophisticated taste of Simenon's Maigret for the food of the homely hostelry?

Women writers have a doubly meaningful relationship with cooking. As women, they soon become acquainted with "domestic" chores, and they learn to cook, for themselves and for others – or, rather, first for others and then for themselves. As writers, they need to appropriate a space that was thought to belong, at least originally, to the masculine sphere and behavior. Communication, especially of the public kind, has pertained to men for far too long, which is what is behind the guilt of many women writers who perceive the time they devote to their intellectual work as stolen from their official feminine activities, and from cooking of course.

We all know of the Brontë sisters, obedient to a strict father who was a Protestant minister; they were used to hiding the scribbled pages of their narrative masterworks under new ribbons of potato peels. Along the same lines, in 1952, Alba De Cespedes published a book that has become

exemplary of this attitude, *The Secret*. Its protagonist, Valeria, writes in the kitchen at night, after tidying up and tucking husband and children in bed; but she hides her “forbidden notebook” because she believes she is neglecting her family.

Unlike Valeria, who burns her notebook at the end of the novel and goes back to being a full-time mother and grandmother, Grazia Deledda succeeded in combining care for her family and writing, her true, great vocation.

Deledda is the only Italian woman to have obtained the Nobel Prize in literature. It was awarded to her for her novels in 1927, for the year 1926. She had been preceded by the “bard,” Carducci, who received it in 1906; then in 1934, it was given to the playwright Pirandello, and later to two more poets, Quasimodo and Montale, respectively in 1954 and 1972. Most recently, in 1997, the Nobel went to another playwright, Dario Fo. The novel, the most approachable of literary forms, almost the “happy medium” between grandiloquent poetry and theatre, was represented by the work of female creativity. After all, storytelling, just like cooking, is almost biologically appropriate to women.

Seven of the youths who choose the themes of the novelettes in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* are women. Scheherazade is another woman who uses her spellbinding narrations to save herself; she also stitches together the story of *One Thousand and One Nights*. And it is always the women who sing their babies to sleep and enchant them with words.

Oral storytelling has been naturally absorbed into women's written narrative. Women, in fact, originally lived very private lives in their family homes, protected by friends and relatives. Their writing came into its own in diaries and epistolaries, because of their intimacy. Grazia Deledda, for one, left an astounding epistolary: she was writing to famous literati, journalists, publishers, even politicians and aristocratic ladies of her time, as if by doing so she could escape the isolation that threatened to overwhelm her in her native Nuoro at the end of the 19th century.

She was born in Nuoro, the administrative seat of the Barbagia region in central Sardinia, in 1871; at just 17, she published her first story, *Sardinian Blood*, an intense tale of love and death, passion and bandits, just like so many others she wrote when she was a mature writer.

Since she was a little girl Grazia Deledda had been certain that her fate too, like the destiny of most of her characters, was predetermined. Grazia, or Grazietta as her family called her, knew that she was destined to write and to describe her Sardinia and its people, who were often misjudged without appeal, because they were so little known. Even the citation by the Nobel Committee did not consider the stylistic elements of her work, but rather its invaluable contribution to the unveiling of the traditions and customs of a region that despite its attractions remained obscure and therefore more fascinating. Telling the stories of Sardinia was Grazietta's life and motive, and she prepared for this role from an early age. Many of her letters clearly bear witness to this intent; in one she wrote: "I'll be 20 very

soon: by 30 I want to have achieved my radiant dream and created an exclusively Sardinian literature” (from a letter to Maggiorino Ferraris, cited in Neria De Giovanni, *Come leggere Canne al vento*. Milan: Mursia, 1993, 22).

Like any other writer, Grazia Deledda left a trace of herself in her novels, and towards the end of her life, in her last works, her presence is more evident, as she borrowed many details from real events. In *The Church of Solitude*, the protagonist Maria Concezione has breast cancer, which was to kill the novelist on August 5, 1936.

However *Cosima*, published posthumously, reflects more closely Grazia Deledda’s life. The novel appeared in instalments on *Nuova Antologia*, a journal edited by Antonio Baldini, and the first episode was issued in October 1936. It narrates the story of her life, from childhood to adulthood; her marriage to the public servant Palmiro Madesani, whom she met in Cagliari on her first long journey that would take her away from Nuoro. She then followed him to Rome, where she was to die 30 years later. Grazia’s middle name was Cosima, and this is the name of her fictitious protagonist, which underlines the closeness of fiction to real life. Moreover, the novel’s original title had been *Cosima quasi Grazia*, which openly declares the identity of the character, Cosima, “virtually Grazia” in fact. In these pages, one finds out how strong and precocious was Grazia’s passion for writing; but they also reveal the opposition and diffidence with which she had to contend in her little town, as Nuoro only had 6,000 inhabitants in those days. It could not have been otherwise for a young woman who defied the

traditional role and behavior that were considered proper for a woman in rural, patriarchal Barbagia.

In *Cosima*, one meets the Deledda family. Francesca, the mother, married without love to a much older man, 20 years her senior; she would sit by the fire in the kitchen and complain of her daughter to Proto, the old servant: Grazietta was setting a bad example, and this could harm her younger sisters and seal their destinies as spinsters. Grazia was only 28 when she met her future husband, but in her time she would have been considered a spinster; a shameful but also a dangerous status in a society where men supported the family, and a woman without a man would have run the risk of starvation or servitude.

Grazia, however, was different. She spent her time writing, and soon she could escape feminine chores, such as sewing and cooking, to withdraw into her fantasies, put them into words, and transform them into tales. She was defiant when she sent her stories to magazines for young ladies that were published on the “mainland,” and which were the prototype for the girls’ magazines of today. To her amazement, her first story was printed next to an advertisement for cold meats, and she was sent a little money, which would buy a silk scarf, thus betraying a tiny bit of vanity beneath the rough exterior of the island girl.

Grazia would receive letters from her admirers, readers curious to find out about the life of the writer who, neither married or engaged, yet seemed to know the passion of love intimately, thus causing great scandal among her fellow

citizens, and especially among those monumental busybodies that were her spinster aunts.

She did not let this get to her, though, and while she was cooking according to the ancient and esteemed traditions, or embroidering the family linens, Grazietta looked out of the window and over to the white tips of Mount Ortobene that dominate Nuoro. Another fellow writer and citizen, Salvatore Satta, was to describe the mountain as the “eagle’s nest”: Deledda’s writing too was like a powerful eagle that would take off and travel over the sea to reach the Italian people and show them the customs and the true reality of her folks’ lives.

Like all islanders, Grazia had a strong inclination to travel. She loved Sardinia, but she felt that only by fleeing would she have a way out; it is no wonder that the “great journey” over the sea is also one of the most incisive motifs in her novels, an experience that leaves an indelible mark on her characters.

But writing about Sardinia required the observation of its people, to understand their motives and behaviors, those same ones that in herself she recognized as natural and spontaneous. Deledda decided to write in Italian, the new national language of newly born Italy, which had to be learned as a foreign idiom; because in the home and everywhere she communicated in Sardinian. She also had to find out and record the traditions, the day-to-day life of her people and their history: rituals of life and death, economy, family relations, and all the hopes and trepidations of the Sardinians, of whom she was one.

Driven by her natural curiosity, when she was a little girl Grazia used to ride with her brother Andrea and follow him across pastures and mountains to reach the olive oil mill, and to listen to legends and stories of shepherds and bandits.

In 1896, Count Angelo De Gubernatis, the president of the Italian Folklore Society, appointed her to gather and record the popular traditions of Sardinia. She had just turned 20, and she started to work diligently, sending card after card densely covered with details of beliefs in magic, the use of herbs, and of innumerable rituals poised between superstition and religion, which belonged to that pagan substratum common to Mediterranean civilizations.

Grazia Deledda possessed a deep knowledge of Sardinian culture, which, infused into her writing, rendered her novels original and profound. Her use of the Italian language was equally unique: the Art Nouveau period, in fact, saw the spreading of an artificial literary language, conceited and coquettish, which was light years away from Deledda's language. The linguistic model of her native Sardinian supported the framework of the national tongue, which after all was only chosen to reach her youthful dream and to let everyone get to know her land, the real Sardinia. No one, not even her countrymen sitting in the parliament in Rome, had succeeded in such a plan.

Grazia Deledda's "Roman" literary production became a family affair. As her husband retired from his government position, he took on the role of agent, trustworthy and capable, and he secured for her the best contracts from the publishers. Meanwhile their sons, Franz and Sardus, helped

their mother with her writing, which had turned into a valuable source of income. Franz did the donkey work: in 1931, for example, she signed off a reading textbook for elementary schoolchildren, for which her son had collected the material. Franz also collaborated with her on the translation of Balzac's novel, *Eugène Grandet*.

Within her home, however, Grazia Deledda led a very ordinary, rewarding domestic life. An uncle from Nuoro, a Monsignor of the Catholic Church, who had been suspicious of his niece's unusual pursuits, was to visit her in Rome and to receive an embroidered stole from Grazietta, who had not lost her talent for feminine crafts.

In her stories, home, and especially the kitchen, is where sentiments storm out and rancor and hatred simmer; but remorse and reparation can also occur here. In the kitchen, social and gender divisions are blurred: the servant sleeps by the fireplace as the mistress of the house makes coffee for her guest (*Reeds in the Wind*). A fleeing bandit enters another kitchen and finds comfort and love with his ex-employer (*Marianna Sirca*). In the kitchen, the warmest room in the cold winters that grip Nuoro, pallets are made, and here, on one of these, death finds old "Uncle" Zua, killed by his "soul daughter" Annesa, who thus consigns herself to a life of remorse for the sake of her lover and master (*The Ivy*).

All those scenes in which Deledda describes a recipe or a traditional meal are never simply adornments. Each of these culinary episodes has two characteristics: the food belongs to the popular tradition of Sardinia, and it is

functional, as these scenes are important to the narrative and to moment the recipe has been included. In the most important of her novels, through the preparation of meals – an element anthropologically and culturally feminine – not only is one able to examine the traditional cuisine of Barbagia’s people, but also one better understands the world created by the novelist.

The food of the Sardinian novels is made with ingredients produced by the land and the people of the island. Today’s nouvelle cuisine is paradoxically not new at all, as it turns to the old traditions and rediscovers “peasant cooking” and the recipes our grandmothers knew and prepared during the war. Society was light years distant from today’s consumerism and excesses then, and women had to cook every day with few resources and fewer ingredients; the only abundant ingredient being imagination. Deledda’s meals belong to the same traditional world, and they appear within a ritual of behavior, an etiquette, that unfortunately has all but disappeared from our societies.

The recipes I have chosen and extracted from her numerous novellas and novels are still popular in Sardinia, but only some of the customs and traditions to which they refer have survived the changes that have taken place in the lives of the islanders.

As I have already said, the scenes of food making in the novels are never simply fillers; instead, they play an important part in the narrative. And the so-called Italian novels prove it even further. Deledda’ wrote thirty odd novels, of which a third are set in the towns and regions of

her biography post-Sardinia, after she left the island to join her husband in Rome in the early 1900s. Rome is the backdrop to *Nostalgia*, where, in 1906, the protagonist Regina is beset by a sense of engulfing loneliness, and she is homesick for her little town Viadana, in the Bassa Padana region. The Madesani family had also lived there at one point, or more exactly in the Cicognara hamlet. Later came *La danza della collana*, published in 1924 and similarly set in the capital; but these are only a couple of the most popular works set in Rome. Of these, *Nostalgia* is especially significant, with its contrast between the simple food of the country town and the opulence of the city.

When Grazia Deledda's husband, Palmiro Madesani, was growing up, he was helped financially, his studies being funded by a high-ranking serviceman who worked for the government and possessed a farm in Bassa Padana, where Palmiro's father was the administrator. Every autumn, Grazia and her husband returned to Cicognara, in the Viadana district, after a holiday by the sea, and his family welcomed her with true affection. Today, the window of the writer's room is still pointed out: there she would have been standing to admire the corner of the Padana valley, which reached the Po river bank. And it was in these places, among people without an ounce of affectation, that she resolved to locate some of her short stories and novels.

The year after her Nobel Prize, she produced *Annalena Bilsini*, which I have used to sample the Padan novels. This is an important work, nearly unique among the rest in that its title is the protagonist's name, like *Marianna Sirca*. It is

probable that a relative of Palmiro's was the inspiration for the powerful character of the title: the real Annalena would also be remembered by her family for her vitality and physical presence. In the novel, she prepares polenta, a typical dish from Northern Italy, with great care; and the description of this preparation is so accurate that only an attentive observer and a cook, as Deledda was, could have taken such note.

From this novel, I have extracted convivial scenes and party occasions, and I have made a comparison with episodes from the Sardinian novels. The food on the table is different, of course, and it denotes a different social environment.

Finally, Cervia: since the beginning of the 1920s, after Anzio and Viareggio, Grazia Deledda chose to spend her summer holidays in this Romagna town. Grazia was in love with Cervia, and she was loved back. In fact, a monument was erected in her honor, and the promenade was also named for her: it was the first among the Italian towns to make such a show of admiration for the novelist.

After *Cosima*, her most autobiographical work is *Land of the Wind* (1931), one of the very few novels to be narrated in the first person; in its pages, Grazia described her encounter with Palmiro. The setting is Cervia, "the town of the wind," which recalls her native Sardinia, an island buffeted by winds. In this story, the final banquet, meant as a celebration of a couple of newlyweds, proves the structural importance of those other scenes dominated by food: the numerous courses, the abundant and various dishes, all

watered down by flowing wine, stand in stark contrast with the death scene that follows, which takes place at the same time, and which is consumed in perfect solitude. The dying young Gabriele, whose name was probably a tribute to the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, had been the bride's first love when she was living in her family home.

The *Sanguinaccio* (Blood Sausage)

In the meanwhile, their father had appeared on the kitchen threshold, brushing the blood from his hand on his pant legs, and nodding to the guests to come forward, to come in. They came in and, despite the heat, took places around the hearth.

Simone looked around, greeting the things he knew so well: the smoke-blackened walls, the low roof, the matting on which he had slept deeply as a teenager, the rough benches, the cork containers, the leathers and the stones, and all the other sheepfold objects that smelled of cheese and leather, making the rough room resemble a tent of biblical shepherds. Opposite the little window that showed the green wood, you could see, through the open door, the nearby little room, which also had a door opening towards the clearing: the clean environment, with Marianna's white tiny bed, the table, a little picture and a mirror on the wall that contrasted with the one in the kitchen. (...)

“Your father made me kill a sheep: tell me what I have to cook, and whether I must prepare the blood sausage. Consider that I have no spearmint, just two bay leaves. Here they are.”

She showed them to him with her fingers covered with blood, and she also went to take the salt, the cheese, and a little bit of ground barley bread. Everything was mingled

with the blood gathered in the sheep's ventricle, clean like a velvet bag; and the ventricle was then stitched with a cane needle and placed under a heap of hot ash to be cooked. (...)

When dinner was ready, she sat among the men, around the meal set on the floor, in front of the open door. The table was a cork board, a whole tree bark, broken and levelled; also the trays and the containers were made of cork, and the cups of horn, carved by the shepherds; the big unperturbed servant, working as a carver, breaking the roast bones with his strong fingers. When the portions were ready, he pushed the chopping board in front of Marianna and said with a somber voice:

“Put on the salt.”

And she picked up the salt between her fingertips, and as gently as she had mixed the bay leaves with the blood, she sprinkled it, thoughtful, with her head bowed on the fragrant roast.

They were eating in silence. The red moon was rising like a quiet fire among the cork trees over there, at the edge of the clearing, lightening the fields with a blood sausage brightness; the woman, with her scarlet corset, made even redder by the light of the hearth flame, shone in the middle of the figures of men, like the moon among the trunks.

After the roast, the servant took the blood sausage from the middle of the ash, cleaned it a bit, broke it, and again offered the chopping board to Marianna.

“Put on the salt.”

(from the novel *Marianna Sirca*, 1915)

The Roast Meat of the Outlaw

He lit the fire again, stuck the meat on the wooden skewer, and placed it before the flame to be roasted; finally, he took off his clothes and went down to the pit, naked, looking at his chest, white like the chest of a woman.

He never stopped peeking around, while rubbing his feet with tufts of maidenhair fern, which made his skin greenish. When he lifted his face to listen to distant noises, his nice eyes mirrored the green and gold around there; and his white back, spotted with big moles like lentils, was crossed by a shiver, and the shadows of the reeds trembled.

He stood up and tried the bottom of the pit with his foot; in this way, he went slowly forward, and he jumped into the water completely; also his head, which he soon pulled out and shook, spraying sparks from his hair. (...)

The servant stood up and sprinkled salt on the little wild boar that was already stuck on the skewer.

But Simone was late, and Marianna kept feeling apprehensive; she went out into the little yard, and she listened at the front gate. The silence seemed to thicken with the darkness. Simone had promised that he would return: but she knew that he couldn't control his word, although he had the illusion of freedom. No, nobody is free: even she felt tied, a thousand times more than before, pulled by an invisible

chain. Why get upset? Better to crouch down in a corner, like a slave, waiting for her fate.

She came back into the kitchen; she came back to her place. From time to time, the servant made the skewer rotate, with the little wild boar now charred on the chain, while inside it had a golden red color, covered with a veil of salt, with dark guts and whitish ribs. Its little teeth and tusks sparkled in the light of the fire.

The hour was passing.

Wine and bread were ready on the table, and Marianna, to calm her anguish a bit and to convince herself that it wasn't all a dream, went up to the attic to get some grapes.

(from the novel *Marianna Sirca*, 1915)

The Supplies of a Respectable House

Therefore, she went up to the attic. It was a wide room, under the sloping roof, quite high, with two big windows overlooking the yard and the road, through which you could see the vegetable gardens, the valley, and the mountain. Bunches of grapes and pears hung from the beams; on the ground, golden almonds lay, together with potatoes, still yellow like apples. And there was also the grey barley bread for the sheepfold, the dark bread for the servant, the white bread for her; and flour and pasta, and legumes, and all the necessary supplies for a respectable house. Nothing was missing, and in a corner, between the two small windows, there was, finally, the servant's pallet: a low bed made of worm-eaten wood, with a rough grey and black woolen blanket that resembled the hide of a tiger.

(from the novel *Marianna Sirca*, 1913)

Marianna Sirca is a young woman, a rich estate owner who falls in love with Simone Sole, a former shepherd-servant of hers, who has gone into hiding, becoming an outlaw. To see him more easily, she moves to a little house within her mountain properties. Her cousin, Marianna's suitor, sees Simone going out of the house one night, mistakes him for a felon, and kills him. The relationship between Marianna and the outlaw is based on solidarity and

intimacy. Moreover, Simone feels responsibility to the family of his former employers.

Considering the particular story and the collocation of the plot, the narrative texts describing the food are often focused on a cooking style made in the country, by outlaws and shepherds. Therefore, when Simone is invited to have a meal in the “pinneta,” a typical building of Sardinian shepherds, Marianna’s father orders the servants to kill a sheep. Apart for the usual skewer-roast meat, there is the description of the preparation of a dish, whose existence is also attested by the shepherds of ancient Greece.

It is called *sanguinaccio* [blood sausage]. Made with the offal of the killed animal, filled with spiced blood, it is cooked under the embers until it gets hard. It is then sliced, so that children and adults can savor it.

I’d like to point out that the scenes with banquets are very often night scenes, thus boosting Deledda’s narrative intention, that is, to mingle food and *eros*, to combine this prime need – eating – with the other, more powerful one – sexual attraction. Well, many decades before Isabel Allende of *Afrodita*, Grazie Deledda had understood the strong, charming power of preparing a meal and eating it with her beloved.

Deledda was often accused of idealizing the figure of the outlaw, of considering him a sort of unlucky person, a victim of fate more than a real felon. To be honest, these allegations could be completely true. If we consider the story of Simone Sole, in the scene where the outlaw is cooking, again, roasted meat for himself, there is also the very Eden-like and sensual

description of him washing in the river, emphasizing his white, feminine flesh. Almost all of Deledda's protagonists differ from the physical prototype of the Sardinian man, dark and small, as we know from our collective national image. They often have, on the other hand, brown hair, light eyes and, as is the case of Elias Porolu, we notice their fingernails, rosy like the ones of a woman!

Towards the end of the story, Marianna, having already declared her love for Simone in front of everybody, is waiting for him to come for dinner, because she wants to convince him to turn himself in. That will be their last meeting. The dinner has an even wilder ingredient compared to previous meals. In fact, the servant has to roast a little boar, an animal species that is still plentiful in Sardinia today. Wine in abundance and then grapes, taken from the supplies in the attic, will be the right addition to the meat, prince of the Sardinian menu.

Deledda also finds the way to describe the supply room, which is sometimes the cellar, but is instead the attic in the case of Marianna Sirca. Bunches of grapes and pears hang from the beams, almonds and potatoes are on the floor; there are three varieties of bread, according to its destination: barley grey for the sheepfold, black for the servants, and white for the masters. Then flour, pasta and legumes. The servant slept on a pallet set right in the attic to keep guard on all that goodness of God.

Homemade Bread

Making bread at home, as still happens in many houses, even in bourgeois provinces of Italy, is not an easy thing, but it is only half as complicated as you might believe. However, the fatigue and patience, as well as the responsibility necessary for the success of the work, are alleviated by the almost religious sense with which our good housewives perform the rite. It is enough to observe the spontaneous, yet conscious signs of the cross with which they accompany it. My mother, in our house in Nuoro, when the time had come to begin the matter, took on a more attentive, serious, almost priestly aspect than usual. She could have charged the servant with the most difficult tasks; but she looked at them well. She was, one might say, jealous of her prerogative, of her ancient initiation. She tied a handkerchief on her head, like a monk's hood, and entered the pantry and drew, that's the right word, the wheat from the sack. With the measure of metal, duly stamped and recorded, she drew the quantity of it. A quarter, two quarters: twenty-five and twenty-five liters, half of a hectoliter. Sometimes even three. She poured the wheat into the corbels, the flexible and resistant baskets of asphodel, and she carried it under the canopy of the courtyard: in a shining and capable copper pot shone the clear water, also just drawn from the family well. Sitting on a stool, my mother washed the grain: little by little she

washed it, inside a sieve of rushes, carefully dipping it in the water, mixing it with her thin, agile hand, used to very fine embroideries of silk and gold as in all sorts of domestic work; then she lifted the sieve, made it drip, and shook it, with an art that clearly divided the content from the stones and waste. And she made them jump on one side, while on the other side she poured the damp wheat into a wide basket, which was also made of asphodel. And so on, until all the wheat was washed and put to dry. Once dry it was cleaned again, almost grain by grain, on the large kitchen table, carefully cleaned. (...)

Then the yeast came out from the closet where, in a golden bowl that looked like a sacred vase, it was kept from one bread baking to another, and above the pile that welcomed and buried it, dissolved like lifeblood, the white hand of flour marked a cross: a cross that was repeated on her face, as if to be reflected in the circle of the precious dough.

Night passes: the housewife sleeps and watches at the same time: at the first chant of the rooster, she jumps up, calls the subdued servant, asks her to call the girls. (...)

In the meantime, one or two fresh loaves were sent as a gift to relatives and neighbors, who in turn returned them on the days of their baking: if a friend or even a hidden enemy, and especially a poor person or a beggar, the offer was repeated; and if the beggar came by chance from afar and was unknown, my mother and the women, and perhaps even some of the unscrupulous ladies, thought, with a secret thrill,

that they could hide him. Him! The only one who can take thousands and thousands of forms to experience the heart of others. He who chose bread for his communion of love with man.

(from the novel *Il pane casalingo*, from the collection *Ferro e fuoco*, 1895)

As I have already written, Grazia Deledda describes a world of traditions and cultures in which she herself had first lived and then studied. Even the custom of making bread at home, described here, is related to the agropastoral society to which she belongs. In fact, the bread, still consumed today and known as “pane carasau,” is a typical product of the family economy for the shepherd and the farmer who stayed away from home for many days. They had to carry non-perishable products, such as leavened and “toasted” bread with them, the consumption of which was possible even months after being prepared. The close connection, the affective compromise between the world narrated and its narrator, in this novel is very visible precisely because of the autobiographical declaration at the beginning of the book.

Cookies and Meat to be More Beautiful

Try to put on weight, and your husband will love you more. Don't you have any eggs to make your pastry? – Madalena had supplies, but she had no money to waste on delicacies. One day her stepmother observed that the wheat crate was pierced and that the wheat was blooming. Do one thing, my silver daughter: sell the wheat and buy eggs and sugar. You will tell Mauru that little by little the ants have stolen the wheat from the chest. He is simple and he will believe you. And so they did, and they bought eggs, sugar, and chocolate, and they made cookies, island bread, raisin, and sapa cakes; and after the wheat, it was the turn of the barley; and you will tell your husband that the monks and priors of St. Francis and St. Cosimo passed by, and that you gave them barley for almsgiving. They also decimated the oil and mixed the water with the wine, and the mice gnawed the cheese. (...) But one day, Madalena said: Now that's enough: I'm fat enough. In fact, she looked like another; her face had taken a dark and warm tint and her eyes shone like two stars in the brown sky of the evening.

With renewed blood, an unusual energy flowed through her veins; and when her husband came back, she knew how to tell him so many lies that he looked at her with respect and thought:

“Almost as if she were as wise and thoughtful as her stepmother.”

Mauru left on Monday morning with the bag of provisions on his shoulders. Some neighbors who were going to the fountain, reached him, looked laughing at the bag, and asked him:

“Did your wife, Maureddu Pì, give you good stuff?”

“Good stuff; why, what do you care?”

“No, nothing! Because she fasts when you’re not there, and so should you.” (...)

A few days later, he suddenly returned home and found the house dimly lit and Madalena roasting a nice piece of fatty meat on a spit.

“We have a guest,” she said. “Your friend Juarne Zichina, who came from his country because of a quarrel he had with his brother.”

(from the novel *Le tredici uova*, from the collection *Chiaroscuro*, 1912)

Mauru is a farmer who stays in the country for weeks, so his wife Madalena has to prepare his saddlebag (a typical bag he puts on his horse or shoulders) full of cooked and non-perishable food.

To keep her husband close to her, Madalena follows her stepmother’s advice and tries to eat very substantial things to become white and red and round, which Sardinian men seem to like.

The reconstituent “natural” care begins with the preparation of sweets made with genuine ingredients: eggs, sugar, and chocolate. Then raisin sweets and sapa, which is a sort of jam made with what remains after the pressing of the grapes. Even the *island bread*, a term put in italics by Deledda herself, underlines the specificity and originality of the sweets presented.

We have already seen how important the guest is in the Sardinian tradition. And it is for a friend of her husband’s, who suddenly arrived, that Madalena cooked a nice piece of fatty meat on the spit over the fire, inside the large fireplace that was present even in the poorest Barbaricine houses.

Orphans' Lunch

He recognized the gentleman he had seen on the train, Don Salvator Angelo, pale and fat. What did he come to do? She childishly thought, "He found out I'm a widow and he came looking for me (...) like in the old days." And remembering that she was almost old, now, dumb and torn, she felt the need to laugh.

"He can see how I am!" she murmured, crossing her arms on her breast, as if to hide her lacerated corset, but he put a finger on his lips, and she in turn, realizing that Antonietta was approaching, no longer acknowledged the mysterious lord.

And he went quickly to the fireplace, sat down, and laid the yellow box next to him.

"Well, what new ones? Tell me."

She began to tell, and at moments she cried, at moments she laughed, with her carefree and happy laughter that still bloomed on her face as roses bloom on the ruins: but more than the story, the man looked after the curious and anxious children who had gathered around her again, and observing those beautiful and wild heads, those black and dusty curls, the reddish hair, and those yellow braids to which the reflection of the sun of the flame gave golden tones, those black eyes, and those greenish eyes that looked at him

fascinated, giving him in turn a charm of joy and sadness together, he thought:

“If I married her, all these rascals would be mine”; and he thought he saw a beautiful dining room worthy of the bourgeoisie, with the Christmas tree on the table, and all those children dressed in lace and velvet, and that beautiful blonde with the eyes of a hesitant cat standing on a chair, reciting a poem on the occasion.

No, it was better this way: it was more picturesque, more romantic and also more comfortable. And suddenly the black gentleman took off his glove and stretched his finger to a dark face full of pleasure within which seemed to spark a great, mischievous joy.

“You rascal, what is your name?”

“Murru Giovanni Maria, or even Bellia.”

“Are you going to school?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“In Bonifai?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Even when it’s raining or snowing?”

“I don’t care!” Bellia said with a bold accent. Driven by the woman’s hand, he had planted himself in front of the foreigner, while his brothers and cousins looked at him and looked at each other, barely holding back the rice: laughter of envy, as we know. But then the black man turned to the whole company.

“Did you have dinner?”

In response, some people yawned.

“By chance, would you like to eat something while you wait for this real Battista? Murru Giovanni Maria, help me open this box. Slowly, slowly! This is what you find at the station in Bonifai, which is not the station in London. Oh, it’s better to sit here at the table.”

“What are you doing? Don’t bother! So you get dirty!”
The woman screamed, running here and there confused.

“Calm down! That’s it.” (...)

Like flies around the honey pot, the heads of the children crowned the hem of the table: and on this, as in fairy tales at the touch of the magic wand, many good things appeared. Even pears, yes, even grapes, yes in that age! Even a yellow bottle with a golden collar!

“I like black wine,” proclaimed Bellia, and the woman yelled: “Brazen, brash!” but the black man said: “you’re right!”

(from the novel *Il Natale del Consigliere*, from the collection *Chiaroscuro*, 1912)

This story presents us, once again, with a Sardinia risen from the grip of need. On the other hand, with the advent of the Kingdom of Italy, Sardinia experienced new taxes, especially the compulsory leverage that took away arms and work from the poorest.

An article in the newspaper of Sassari, *La Nuova Sardegna*, titled, “At the End of the Century, Sardinia at Auction,” described the worrying phenomenon of the mass sale of rural land by those who could only cope with taxes in

this way. But often, the sale of the countryside also meant entrance into poverty. Between the late nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, therefore, Sardinia had its highest level of emigration, and also a disturbing resurgence of banditry.

A luxury emigrant is the protagonist of the story *The Christmas of the Counselor*. It tells of the return to the island of a Sardinian who has made his fortune on the continent, becoming a counselor in the public administration. He found out that Antonietta, the lover of his youth, has become a widow, and she is a toll clerk at a railroad crossing. He goes to visit her, and he generously feeds Antonietta's children, who have been orphaned.

I would like to underline how, because of the poverty of the time, even pears and grapes became real delicacies, "fairytale" things, as if they had sprung up out of the house by the touch of a magic wand!

The Feast for the Holidays

For the feast of St. Anastasius, the families, even the least well-off in the village, even those who were in debt or who had their children at school, set the table, put on piles of focacce, cutting boards full of roasted meat on a spit, cheese, giuncata, wine, and honey, and they opened the door to those who wanted to enter to feast. Guests from nearby villages, the poor and the brats of the village, flocked like flies: The more they came, the happier the masters were, but in the afternoon, while the bells rang out and seemed to announce that in the sad world had finally begun the kingdom of God, entire heifers and columns of focaccia were distributed in equal portions (so the feast was called *de su corriolu*) to the guests and the poor who took home for the old disabled, the sick, and shameful women dinner, and even lunch for the next day.

Sennòra Rughitta, the wife of the owner Costantino Fadda, was very fond of this feast, which allowed her to show all the village her approval and to show that it is not necessary to be noble not to count the cost.

(from the novel *Un po' a tutti*, from the collection *Chiaroscuro*, 1912)

The peasant societies that based their wealth mainly on primary production goods, produced by agriculture and

sheep farming, had rituals of genuine generosity. For example, before the 1816 law of closure, there were public pastures where even poor shepherds could take their livestock to pasture, and where it was possible to collect wood free for heating and cooking.

With the advent of the United Kingdom and the importation to Sardinia of a model of economic development based on private property, commerce, and the tertiary sector, with the bourgeoisie “in attack,” the traditional agropastoral model underwent a regression, and the forms of social solidarity, as described by Deledda in the novel *Un po' a tutti*, slowly disappeared. That is, people no longer opened their houses during particular festivals and rituals and set the table for all who needed it. Roasted meat on a spit, the basis of the diet of the rich shepherd, and then cheese, giuncaia, a particular product of milk, honey, and wine, are, as you can see, all products of the agropastoral economy that, with their presence, emphasize the richness and uniqueness of the banquet.

Seductive Fruit

She is waiting there, with a gift of fruit that her Paulo sends to the landlady. And the mistress comes, almost running but a bit suspicious; she comes from the dark rooms; dressed in black: her pale face, caught between two shells of black braids and her bare, white hands emerge from the shadow like those of the figures in the paintings around her. And even when she appears in full, in the light of the room, her small, subtle person has something elusive, suspicious. Her big, gloomy eyes immediately stare at the fruit basket placed on the table; then, they wrap the waiting woman in a deep look, and a quick smile, which is of joy, but also of mockery, and which illuminates her sad and sensual mouth. And the mother's first doubt, she still doesn't know why, was born at that moment. She still did not know why, but she remembered the care with which the girl had welcomed her, making her sit next to her and asking her news of Paulo. She called him Paulo, like a brother; but she treated her not as an ordinary mother, but almost as a rival who had to be softened and put to sleep. She had her coffee served in a large silver tray, by a barefoot servant who had her face blindfolded like an Arab; she spoke to her of her two distant and strong brothers, pleased, without pardon, to appear between them as between two columns that supported the building, of her solitary life. Finally, she led her to see the garden from the

door of the room. Purple figs covered with silvery dust, and pears, and clusters of golden grapes appeared among the sparkling green of the trees and vines. Why, then, had Paulo sent his gift of fruit to those who already had so much?

(from the novel *La Madre*, 1920)

D. H. Lawrence, the famous English writer and author of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, after a trip to Sardinia, defined the novel *La Madre* by Grazia Deledda as the most powerful erotic text he had read on the island and perhaps in contemporary Italian literature.

It tells the story of a young priest, Don Paulu, who is bewitched by one of his parishioners, and throughout the story told in the book is torn between following his instinct, which suggests that he should leave the clergy, and his moral and ethical duty, which keeps him tied to the Church. The mother represents the call to order and faith. Her death, at the end of the novel, comes at the same time as Paulu's decision to remain a priest and not to follow Agnes. It was as if the mother had sacrificed herself to save her son's soul. In a poor society, where meat and milk, as products of the sheep, were undoubtedly within everyone's reach, unlike fruit, in the passage we have reported it is precisely grapes and figs that are attributed the discreet charm of wealth.

But their location in Agnese's house (both the fruit basket given as a gift and the fruit found in the cozy dining room) determines, through a metaphorical trope, a sort of fascination, of seductive attraction perceived by the mother who, from that moment on, begins to have suspicions about

the nature of the relationship between her priest son and the young parishioner.

Macaroni

He had prepared the macaroni: this is what he called certain gnocchi as big and hard as almonds, seasoned with dried tomatoes sauce. The two friends ate in the company of a gray kitten who, with her burnt foot, took the gnocchi from the common dish and wily took them to a corner of the kitchen.

“How curious he is!” Anania said, following him with her eyes. “We were robbed by the cat.”

“Even from us. They stole a lot of it from us! They disappear and we don’t know where they end up.”

“All the cats in the neighborhood disappear! Who steals them, what does he do with them?”

“Well, he roasts them. The meat is good, you know; it looks like hare meat. On the continent they sell it for hare: that’s what my father says.”

“Was your father on the continent?”

“Yes. And I will go too, and soon.”

“You?!” said Anania, laughing with a little envy.

(from the novel *Cenere*, 1904)

The passage reported talks of two important characteristics of traditional Sardinian cuisine in the work of Grazia Deledda. First, macaroni. The term does not indicate the particular pasta, the “spaghetto,” of Neapolitan origin,

but on the contrary, it presents a type of short pasta, quite elaborate, of which the young Anania and his friend were fond.

The second “culinary” trait is the allusion to the habit on the continent of cooking cats, whose meat was as good as that of the rabbit!

The almost fabulous reference to the continent, that is to say to peninsular Italy, is to be inserted in the vision by Deledda, and Sardinian people in general, of the journey across the sea, in a different and fabulous land. What was not known about Sardinia outside the island is also mutually true for Sardinia in relation to the continent. That is, the rest of Italians saw the Sardinian people as different people, almost drowned in the darkness of the centuries, just as the Sardinian people imagined fabulous and amazing things in the mythical continent.

Cenere was a novel very dear to Deledda and particularly famous, so much so that Eleonora Duse in 1916, in the middle of the Great War, chose it as the only feature film on which he worked. The reference to social hunger that led to eating even cats is essential to the story itself. In fact, *Cenere* refers to the contents of a superstitious bag that Oli, Anania’s mother, put around her son’s neck to protect him from bad luck, before abandoning him in the house of his father who, being already married, had not wanted to recognize the fruit of his clandestine union with Oli. The woman lives in the most complete misery, she feeds on herbs, and she needs to prostitute herself out of hunger and necessity. At the end of the novel Oli, recognized by his son Anania, who in the

meantime has graduated on the Continent, will kill herself out of shame.

Breakfast

Now she cooks the milk carefully on the stove above the large oven: for the birth of the mistress she has put on shoes, without socks of course, ready for all orders: a wrinkle furrows her forehead and her ears are stretched like those of the hares. The responsibility for the house is now all her own, and she takes advantage of her mastery to have a few more cups of coffee, just her passion.

The boys come one by one to have coffee and milk, which she pours into the round cups of yellow and red clay: even the oldest, who are adolescents, and who already attend the gymnasium in the small town. The major, Santus, is a handsome boy with a fine profile and big eyes of a light blue grey, with a blue sclera. He has a pensive and loyal look: he already dresses with some refinement, and while he drinks his coffee and milk, he ends up going through the Latin lesson. (...)

The little girl, Cosima, who is still not old enough to go to school, looks with admiration and envy, but also with a certain fear, because they, especially Enza, not only don't play with her willingly, but they use their fists, shoving and hitting her and swearing: all stuff they learned from schoolmates.

Andrea, the brother, is better with her: so, when the two sisters are already on their way to school, the boy comes

down, but he disdains to have coffee and milk; weasels' stuff, he says. He would eat a slice of red meat half raw, but as there is no such thing, he is happy to take down the servants' basket and to gnaw the hard bread and a crust of cheese with his strong teeth. Nanna goes with him appealingly, with the cup full in her hand: for this Andrea is his greatest idol, his breathlessness, and his only concern.

“You look like a shepherd to me,” she says, putting the cup in front of him.

“Take this; take the lamb; the master will smell the cheese.”

(from the novel *Cosima*, 1937)

Banquet with Friends

One of these trips was memorable, also because there was good company. In addition to Antonino's brother, there were other friends of Andrea's, almost all failed students, who preferred the accordion to the tormenting pomp of vocabulary. They created the Odyssey by themselves by fighting for their Elena, a beautiful countrywoman, and then reconciling in banquets where the bones of the lambs roasted in the living flame piled up at their feet as under the tables of the heroes of Homer.

One of these banquets was certainly prepared that day, in the sheepfold of the paternal tancas – fenced lands - of Andrea and Cosima. The swineherd shepherds, who had finished their season, were followed by sheep and goats. The sheep grazed the dry asphodel, whose long golden stems cracked between the teeth of the beasts like breadsticks, and the black goats with diabolical heads were outlined on the mother-of-pearl in the rocky peaks. (...)

But the banquet was served in a clearing, on the ground, of course, all surrounded by a colonnade of trunks as a royal hall: for Cosima Andrea prepared a saddle and a saddlebag and a comfortable armchair, and she got the best morsels: for her the lamb's kidney, tender and sweet as a ripe rowan, for her the top of the cheese roasted on a spit, for her the most

beautiful bunch of early grapes brought specifically for her
by her caring brother.

(from the novel *Cosima*, 1937)

Olive Oil

Next to the brothers' house, there was an olive crusher, also owned by the family: it was a long, irregular room, dark and yet shiny, as if dug into a mountain of schist. Black, as if greased, was the strong, patient horse that made the wheel spin inside the round tank where the olives were crushed: the purplish paste they produced, poured into dubious, round bags, squeezed the iron press, but in this press, located in a kind of niche dug into the wall, were the men who maneuvered it with a rod: the miller and one of his helpers. The oil fell black and fat into a large pot, and the pomace, after the dough was squeezed, was thrown from a large window down into the garden, forming a sweet mound that was bought by a shopkeeper, who in summer bought the almonds of the family: and it was a fair return, along with that of the oil, which the owners of the olives left in return for handling them. But you had to be very careful, because the miller, a small religious man with the eyes of a true saint, who served the family for years and years, and who was sincerely fond of it, stole from both customers and owners.

The place was always full of people, because in a corner, between the window and the press, there was always a big fire with a pot of boiling water, where the bags were immersed and washed: and around this fire gathered a group

of individuals who, especially in the evening, formed a picture worthy of Rembrandt.

(from the novel *Cosima*, 1936)

As I mentioned at the beginning, *Cosima* is a very important novel both for Deledda's writing activity and for us who, reading these pages, can receive a good approximation of the stages of her adolescence, from the certainty of literary passion to the threshold of Roman marriage.

The first passage brings back a habit dear to all homes, Sardinian and not, of serving breakfast, especially to young schoolchildren who are preparing to go to class. Nanna, the inevitable figure of the servant, prepares milk and coffee, underlining the temporary possibility of enjoying greater "power" and autonomy in a kitchen without a mistress. In fact, *Cosima's* mother is in bed, on the upper floors, because she has just given birth. As she used to do in the past, and as many obstetricians still tend to propose today, childbirth was an entirely domestic event, part of the normal rhythm of life of the family.

Thanks to the ritual of breakfast, Deledda focuses her autobiographical novel on the kitchen, whose utensils, furniture, and infrastructure are described in such detail that they are still recognizable today in the house that has become the museum of Deledda in Nuoro.

The brothers are introduced: Santus, the scholar, who, after an accident with fireworks, will leave school and start an alcoholic existence; Andrea, his rebellious brother, the

only one who has accepted the “diversity” of Grazietta, who expresses his tendency to rebellion by refusing coffee and milk to prefer the bread and cheese of the shepherd servants.

Interesting to me is the motivation that refers to the rigid, sexist division of the Barbagian civilization: Andrea refuses milk because it is “weasels’ stuff,” while the balentia of the Sardinian male is precisely in choosing “a slice of red meat half raw” or, failing that, this “hard bread and a crust of cheese.”

Since Grazia is a girl, she does not have to continue her studies as her siblings do; for the education of a woman, who has to stay at home and have children, primary school is enough. So it is Andrea who convinces his parents to have Grazietta take private lessons with a retired high-school teacher who is a relative; it is Andrea who leads his sister to the old shepherds, in parties and countryside, to make her teach as much as possible about Sardinian traditions.

One of these country banquets is described, organized by Andrea and the shepherds of the Deledda’s countryside. The menu is the traditional one, and it is still offered today to those who visit the tancas: lambs, roasted in a lively flame, roasted cheese on a spit, early grapes.

The oil mill owned by his father was another place where Grazietta learned and refined her knowledge of traditional Sardinian culture. Since olive oil is undoubtedly one of the most important ingredients in Mediterranean cuisine, and therefore also that of Sardinia, I thought it appropriate to reprise the passage in which little Cosima describes, fascinated, the pressing of olives. I would add, for the record,

that another great Sardinian writer of the twentieth century, Giuseppe Dessì, in what I consider his best novel, *Introduction to the life of Giacomo Scarbo* (1959), captures the protagonist in the oil mill to listen to the stories of the old Sardinians and together to admire the ancient art of oil.

Bread and Cakes for the Guest

Lady Ester made bread on purpose, a white bread, thin like a host, the one you make only for parties, and without being seen by her sisters, she also bought a little basket of cookies. After all, a guest was coming, and hospitality is something sacred. Lady Ruth, in turn, dreamt of her nephew's arrival every night, and every day around three, when the coach arrived, she spied through the door. However, time went by, and everything was still and quiet around there.

(from the novel *Reeds in the Wind*, 1913)

Frugal Supper in the Kitchen

Now Lady Ester and Lady Ruth were sitting, humble and black like two nuns with white bands on their heads and their hands under their aprons, thinking about the far away Noemi, about the far away Giacinto.

Their supper had been frugal: a milk soup that didn't upset the stomach and that kept the mind bright and clear, like the wide spring sky. By the way, sometimes lady Ester had a sort of contrition shiver, an almost secret thought of guilt.

Gacintino (...) the letter written in secret. Next to them, sitting on the floor with her back to the wall and her arms around her knees, Grixenda laughed while watching the boy who was playing the accordion. In the hut nearby, the relatives with whom she had arrived at the festival were eating sitting on the ground around a pannier that was open like a tablecloth; and while one of them was cuddling a baby who was falling asleep, shaking his soft hands, the other called the girl. (...)

Noemi was setting the table, silent: here was the same basket, darkened by the time, smoothed by use; here was the same bread and the same filling. Efix was eating and narrating, using uncertain words, veiled with shy lies. But after that, he had thrown the crumbs on the floor and what

was left into the glass, since the heart always wants its little part of nourishing.

(from the novel *Reeds in the Wind*, 1913)

In an interview with Grazia Deledda, when she was already popular, a reporter asked her which of her books she felt most affection for: with no hesitation, she answered *Reeds in the Wind*. The novel was published in serial form in a magazine, like almost all the works written by the most popular authors of the time. It was soon a great success, with both the public and critics. It also became the subject of one of the first television dramas on RAI, unforgettable for some of its performers.

Sardinia, as it was described there, appeared archaic and pretty far from the farming habits and traditions in the rest of Italy. The story narrated in *Reeds in the Wind* is, on the other hand, set in the same period as the War in Libya, which is totally parallel to the year the book was published.

The three Pintor sisters, unmarried because they are too noble and poor to find a husband in the village of Galte, overwhelmed by malaria and misery, host their nephew Giacinto in their house; he will bring emotional disarray among his aunts. The central character is Efix, the last old servant, loyal to the Pintor ladies, who atones for his double sin: having fallen in love with the little mistress of the house, Lia; and having – though accidentally – killed his master, Don Zane, to save her.

The public and critical success gained by *Reeds in the Wind* was great, and maybe even Palazzeschi with his *The Materassi Sisters* was indebted to the Deleddian work.

In the extracts reported here, I wanted to underline how poor the Sardinian dinner table was, in a supper made of bread and milk, while people are gathered in the *cumbissias*, little houses next to the rural sanctuary.

Later, though, as the most natural Sardinian tradition requires, even in the poor house of the Pintors, a guest must be honored. And the honor dedicated to him is food. Here is Ester, the “good” aunt, who makes the white – special – bread, while waiting for her nephew. Finally, the old Efix, after his wandering as a beggar among country churches, comes back to his master’s house and advances a pathetic lie, claiming that he had been in America to work at the digging of the Panama Canal. Efix is also treated as a guest, not as an old servant any more. Ester always insists that he eat in the kitchen, the very same kitchen where the reconciliation of different social roles is possible; the very same kitchen where Efix, lying in front of the lit fireplace, will die on the day of his mistress Noemi’s wedding.

The Festival Lunch

And he came back into the kitchen, followed by the guest, while Annesa, sad and sarcastic, was leaning before the fire, and she lightly hit an egg on the stone that served as a hearth.

Rosa heavily stepped down from the cart and came back inside, curious to know what was in the basket.

In the room of the old asthmatic man, which was also used as a dining room, the table was set for four people: Lady Rachele placed another piece of cutlery, and the guest went over to Uncle Zua.

“How are things, how are things?” he asked him, looking at him with curiosity.

“The tavern is open!” muttered Annesa, but she went to Don Simone, to tell him that his friend’s godson had asked for hospitality, and the old nobleman’s answer was just to place another piece of cutlery on the table.

But the new guest wanted to stay in the kitchen, and as soon as Annesa put a basket of bread, cheese, and lard in front of him, he started eating in a voracious way. He had to be very poor: his clothes were almost miserable, and his big, sad eyes were like the tired eyes of a sick man. Annesa looked at him and felt her spite fall. After all, since the Decherchis insisted on opening their house to everybody, it

was better to feed the poor ones than the rich spongers like that Ballore Spanu.

“Here it is, eat this trout,” she said, offering a part of her dinner to him. “Now I’ll also give you something to drink.”

“Will God pay it to you, my dear sister?” he answered while eating.

“Are you here for the festival?”

“Yes, I came here to sell spurs and bridles.” Annesa poured him something to drink.

“Will God pay it to you, my dear sister?” (...)

She came back into the dining room, and after the trout, she served fried eggs with onions, and at the end, a flat bread of dough and fresh cheese.

“We weren’t expecting guests,” Lady Rachele said to excuse herself, addressing Ballore Spanu with visible humiliation. “Please excuse us then, Ballore, if we are treating you badly.”

“You are treating me like a prince,” the guest answered, and he kept eating and drinking with joy.

Also, the two old men were joking. Don Simone was, or seemed to be, happy and serene, as Ballore had always known him. In Uncle Cosimu’s laugh, on the other hand, some sad note screeched. And the old asthmatic man, who slowly chewed the rosy pulp of a trout, took part in the conversation, and he giggled when the guest talked about Paulu. (...)

“Here, let’s go this way: let’s go into the big kitchen.”

They entered the big kitchen, where the festival promoters were preparing a Homeric banquet.

“Ohè, Miale Corbu, here we are,” Uncle Castigu proudly shouted, advancing at Paulu’s side.

The Great Prior, that is the president of the committee for the festivals, seemed to pop out of a cloud of thick and fat smoke, which covered the kitchen background like a veil. And he was a man worthy of being surrounded by clouds, like a wild god: a sort of giant, dressed in a red suit vest and a pair of brache di saja - woolen pants,- so wide it looked like a short skirt hanging over the black woolen gaiters. Under the long cap, folded on the top of his head, and between two bands of long black hair, oiled with grease, his face was earthy red, with a hooked nose, a jetting chin, a reddish wavy beard: he seemed to be carved in clay. He smiled, almost touched, since Paulu Decherchi honored that gathering of simple and poor shepherds with his visit. He led the young man through the kitchens and the rooms, letting him look at everything, as if he were a stranger.

“A good festival, this year?” Paulu asked, looking around.

“Not bad. There are fifty promoters, and another hundred shepherds have helped with the festival, bringing a sheep and a measure of wheat each.”

In the big hearths, oak trunks were burning, and in the copper cauldrons, whole sheep were being cooked. Some men, sitting on the ground, with their faces alight and their eyes watery from the smoke, slowly made whole gigots of ram roll over the ambers, pierced by long wooden skewers.

A huge amount of meat appeared red on the benches set along the walls; and in the wooden and cork containers, the guts were still steaming. Here and there were heaps of black and yellowish skins of the hundred and more sheep gutted to celebrate the little Saint Basilio, guardian of Barunei, in a respectable way.

While Miale Corbu was leading Paulu to a sort of covered loggia, where a woman was serving coffee and liquors to the people who deigned to visit the Prior, Uncle Castigu introduced Rosa and Annesa to the rooms next to the kitchen. In one of these rooms, the men had to have lunch; in another, women and children; in a third one, called the room of sugar almonds, there were cakes; in another one, bread. And in every room, low and smoky, strange shapes of bearded men fidgeted, preparing cutting boards and knives for the banquet.

A big and burly man, with a thick reddish beard, entered the bread room at that moment. He was holding a slice of boiled meat, still steaming, in one hand, and a pocketknife: and sometimes he tore a bite with his teeth, and if some tendons were too resistant, he cut them with his knife, without pulling the meat out of his mouth. And he chewed with voracity, while his dull, blue eyes, bright and cold, expressed a feral delight.

“Yes, I remember,” Annesa said. “Last year, I passed by while you were having lunch, and you looked like a lot of wolves. Each of you had a cutting board full of meat on his knees, and while eating a slice, you looked at the next one. It was as like you had never seen this grace of God.”

“It is a festival: we must eat,” uncle Castigu said, without offence. “We eat, and we feed others. That’s it!” (...)

She went out of a little door that opened across the bread room, and the servant followed her. On that side, the place was almost deserted: only some beggars, crouched among the rocks and the bushes, were devouring the bread and meat that the Prior had ordered distributed to them. Precisely at that point, where the mountain path started, the old blind man, who had led Annesa to the village, had died. She didn’t remember anything of the mysterious event, but every time she had to go through that place, she had the impression she saw that old dead beggar again, and she felt a confused feeling of anguish and humiliation.

(from the novel *L’edera*, 1906)

Widow's Dinner

Paulu walked in and sat down in front of the set table on which the carta di musica bread still stood: from the coagulated blood-colored wall, the brigadier looked even more peaceful than usual, in the silent twilight of that veiled and warm day.

Paulu ate very little and drank a lot: the more he drank, the more it seemed to him that his mind, clouded like the sky, would become lighter, and that many problems would be solved.

“What is the difference between a usurer and a widow like Zana? None. What’s worth one is worth the other.”

Zana would go in and out. He needed a box of sardines, then two eggs, then a plate of fried food.

“What, and you said you had nothing? As long as you don’t bring me too big a bill afterwards.”

Zana looked at him and smiled.

“It was my modest dinner, Don Paulu. Don’t make fun of me.”

“How!” he said, standing up. “Your dinner? And you, then? How will you do that?”

“Don’t think of me, Don Paulu.”

But he was already half drunk, and he stood for a moment, comically mortified for having eaten Zana’s lunch. Then he laughed and said:

“To think that you’re dying at my house, you’re giving six poor people lunch, and my mother herself has to serve them; on the table are our most beautiful dishes and silver cutlery. And I’m here to eat the widow’s lunch.”

“Does your mother have to serve them? And a vote?”

“No, it’s a legacy, or rather a tax that weighs on one of our bequests.”

He immediately thought that perhaps that poor man’s lunch was the last one his holy mother would serve.

(from the novel *L’edera*, 1906)

Lunch of the Poor

Every year, Donna Rachele had called a few women from the neighborhood to help Annesa to prepare the lunch for the poor. (...)

For years and years, perhaps even centuries, a Lady Decherchi fulfilled the sacred obligation to serve with her hands “six modest poor, possibly hidden in poverty.”

And Donna Rachele had always been opposed to the sale of the tanca burdened with that tax, precisely because she had cherished the pitiful ceremony.

So the tanca had remained the last one, but now we had to resign ourselves to the inexorable violence of events. Patience. Paulu had not come back yet, and he was the last hope of Donna Rachele and his grandparents. (...)

Then came the other guests, of whom one was very young, blind since childhood. Don Simone sat down at the table with the poor, something he had never done before, and he wanted Rosa at his side.

“Donna Rachele” cried, joking, “we’re ready. But this year, instead of six, you invited seven poor people, or rather seven and a half.”

Rigid and pale, in her black costume, Donna Rachele entered, carrying a large plate full of macaroni; she smiled, but when she saw her old father-in-law sitting among the

poor diners, she shook; and bitter tears moistened her eyes.
(...)

When the widow came in, carrying the roast, everyone realized that she had changed her appearance: an almost febrile joy animated her gaze, words of love and sweetness came out of her slightly colored lips.

(from the novel *L'edera*, 1906)

L'Edera is one of Deledda's luckiest novels. Its title refers to the characteristic of the plant, in that "where it attacks it dies." So is Annesa, "the daughter of the soul," who is an orphan taken home by the noble Decherchi family, but her "parents" then exploit her as a servant. Annesa loves her master Paulu, who remains a widower and who squanders the family fortune. For him, she kills her old Uncle Zua, a rich, asthmatic relative, whose legacy she hopes will save her lover from ruin. For Annesa, there will be only remorse as expiation of sin.

The first of these passages remembers the custom of the Sardinian people of offering hospitality to relatives and friends on the patron saint's holidays. In fact, in the agropastoral society, there were no hotels, and hospitality for eating and sleeping was a courtesy that was exchanged.

The dinner that Annesa offers her guests is considered poor, as she prepares the table with the products available in the countryside and in the rivers: the egg cooked directly on the grill of the fireplace or fried with onions; the trout with

pink meat, which is rich in the mountain rivers of Sardinia, focaccia, and fresh cheese.

The feast of the patron saint Saint Basilio is at its peak. The eldest prior, that is the president of the committee of fifty shepherds who were in charge of preparing the banquet, is honored by the visit of the nobleman Decherchi. Here are entire rooms full of provisions: the room of the bread, the room of the confetti, that is, of the sweets from bakery, while in the open air, the lambs are skinned and roasted. The Sardinian diet is essentially based on meat, roasted meat.

As in other stories, this feast of Saint Basilio does not forget the poor, to whom the prior has bread and meat distributed.

I close the series of quotations from L'edera with the reference to an authentic feudal "wreck" that is sometimes found in the folds of contracts of Sardinian landowners. The Decherchi are almost in ruins; the last tanca, that is the last farm, that the mistress does not want to sell, is the one on which for centuries the burden of the lunch of the poor has fallen: macaroni and roast meat, served on fine dishes and silver cutlery for six people chosen from the truly needy people of the village. A sign of humiliation (hence the unique "tax" paid for the tank) was precisely the mistress who was to serve at the table. Donna Rachele willingly accepted this burden, because she hoped it would, mysteriously, help their ruined economic situation.

Coffee, Pastries and Roast Meat for the Feast of Saint Francis

Uncle Portolu spoke seriously; and every now and then, he turned his eyes of wild affection to the girl.

“When this is the case, let’s be careful,” warned Priest Porcheddu. “And now let’s go and drink.”

“To drink, yes, good priest Porcheddu. Whoever does not drink is not a man, nor a priest.”

While they were walking. Aunt Annedda was waiting for them with her coffee pots and jugs and her baskets of sweets. Maddalena and her procession broke into the cumbissia laughing and chatting; in brief there was a confusion of voices, of shouts, of laughter; a tinkling of glasses and grains. Uncle Portolu was heard telling that he had made the whole journey with the sheep, already promised to Saint Francis, tied on the back of the horse.

“It was my most beautiful sheep,” said the prior.

“Such long wool. Eh, Uncle Portolu is not mean.”

“Go to hell!” The prior answered him. “You don’t see that it’s a white-haired sheep, as old as you!”

“Canute, it’s you, Antoni Carta! If you insult me again, I’ll put my leppa in you” (Sardinian knife).

And Porcheddu the priest kept his glass high, his head a little reclined on his humerus, his flattering eyes turned to Magdalene and the pretty daughters of the prior. (...)

Uncle Berte, sitting on the ground next to the hearth, roasted a whole lamb on a long wooden skewer. He boasted that no one in the world roasted a lamb or a pig better than him.

“I will go, I will go,” he answered his wife, “let me first deal with this little animal.”

“The lamb is roasted, Berta; go in search of your son.”

“The lamb is not roasted, my wife: what do you know about it? Oh, what do you have to say about this to Berte Portolu? Let the boys have fun, after all; they have to have fun.”

(from the novel *Elias Portolu*, 1903)

A poor society in economic decline, like the one described by Deledda in Sardinia at the end of the nineteenth century, had very few moments of recreation. One was certainly the feast in rural sanctuaries.

Elias Portolu has just returned from the continent, where he was in prison probably for rustling. He returns to the village, and he is bewitched by Maddalena, his brother's future wife. He has a relationship with her from which a son is born who then dies, almost to increase the pains of the two.

Elias decides to become a priest and, to atone for it, renounces forever Maddalena, who in the meantime has remained a widow.

In the piece, we are at the feast of the sanctuary of Saint Francis, who a great poet from Nuoro, a little older than Grazietta, Sebastiano Satta, will call “Saint of the bandits and robbers.” In fact, when even the bandits were in the parvis of the small country church of Saint Francis near Lula, not even the Carabinieri could arrest them. The people of the village went to the sanctuary for at least three days, living in the cumbissias, houses built next to the church to accommodate pilgrims. They prayed and were happy in company. Even priests drink and eat with taste. The meat is, of course, for the use of Sardinian shepherds, cooked on a spit next to the fire after the coffee and sweets have also cheered the families of the “prior,” that is the influential villager who started the collection of alms for the saint.

Lunch for the Guest

Concezione, still in bed, had heard her mother's godmother bursting in; godmothers of San Giovanni since they had met, brides and on their honeymoon, at a country festival and, while their husbands drank and played morra, they had become friends, switching their handkerchiefs, knotted seven times. She was happy for the diversion that the guest brought into the little house.

You always had fun with Maria Giuseppa: with her stories, her conflicts, her superstitions, her noisy and honest behavior. Her presents, then, were wonderful and refined. She had brought uncommon things for the young girl: fresh grapes, pears, almond cakes, and a jar of honey; and for the godmother, a whole ham and dry curdled cheese.

To get free of her thoughts, she stood up, although she felt really cold, and she told her mother that they needed to prepare at least a good lunch for their guest. She kneaded some flour with eggs and lard, and she made a lot of little plaits out of it. Then, after frying them, she spread some honey on them: yes, she really felt as if she was a child again. Her mother was also busy: good scents spread around the little house – scents of hospitality, and therefore almost of festivity. The horse wasn't neglected either: Giustina gave him some water, mixed some straw with the barley from the bag, and patted him on the head. It was a good and patient

animal, it seemed to be made of black varnished wood, so that the aggressive rooster, completely yellow and red like a flame, used to peck at his legs, almost as to see whether they were real or fake. (...)

“Do you know that stuff that is in my house? I don’t know it precisely either, actually. Wardrobes full of bed sheets, table covers, and ancient canvas; chests full of woolen, cotton, and silk blankets. Actually, I want to give one of them to you as a present, so that you can see their manufacture. Good stuff, not spider webs like the ones they sell in the shops. And we have golden and silver things that make up a treasure: rings with carnelians, and earrings and coral necklaces, and a filigree rosary, with golden beads and a cross in which you can see the real image of Christ. It is a talisman, and they say it comes from the Holy Land, and it protects from bad death. Then I can’t tell you the supplies: every kind of God’s good is awaiting you: ollas full of olives and wheat and flour, and almonds and legumes, lard and dry fruit. We even have jujube and dry olives that look like plums. When the stallholders arrive at the village, the house where they download their goods is ours: but what is it worth, if nobody takes advantage of that?”

“My husband only wants spelt soup, and I like barley bread and salted codfish. Children are necessary to crack nuts and chew dry chestnuts; and young people to eat roasted lambs and pork’s liver. A house with no people, like ours, I’ll say that again, is the sacristy of a cemetery: there is no fire to keep it warm, nor bags of money to keep it merry.”

“It’s true and sacrosanctly true,” admitted Maria Giuseppa, and feeling a bit charmed and also a bit moved to pity by the mournful accent of her host, she also looked at the relentless Concezione with pleading eyes. She had finished her grape, and she was nibbling at one of the cakes she had made. The ones brought by the guest, although they were covered with sugar and in vague shapes of little birds and flowers, made her feel sick. And she felt suffocated just at the idea of having to live in a house full of the stuff of the rich country lady.

(from the novel *The Church of Solitude*, 1936)

Concezione, back home after she has been diagnosed with cancer, resumes her life as a seamer with her mother, refusing every suitor, the continental Aroldo and the son of the rich Maria Giuseppa, her mother’s godmother.

In the text, I wanted to underline some recipes of Sardinian cakes, well known and appreciated even today, made of flour and honey. Deledda also remembers the Sardinian tradition, according to which the day of Saint Giovanni is particularly favorable for love bonds.

Maria Giuseppa, visiting at her godmother’s house, brings to the young Concezione almond and honey cakes as a present, while she gives a ham to her godmother. In the strict economy of the country society, the useful present is particularly important, not the superficial one. What can be better than food?

To reply with similar generosity, Concezione also prepares a “good lunch for their guest.” Fried honey plaits,

made in the shape of little birds and flowers, and also for the horse, abundant straw and barley!

When Maria Giuseppa has to convince Concezione of the convenience of the wedding with her son, she not only reminds her of the gold and necklaces they own, but with similar plenitude, she also describes the supplies that may be even more valuable: oil, spelt, wheat, legumes, almonds, dry fruit, and olives.

The Bread in the Oven

As soon as it got cold, towards the end of November, the poorest men of the village – the ones who weren't even servants, who didn't have wheat to sow, and who didn't have fire either – gathered in the little room at the entrance of the hut where Maria Franchisca made and sold, at a very low price, a dark bread mixed with barley and wheat flour. And leaning against the wall, or sitting on the ground, having bought and eaten a loaf, they lingered until evening, and even then they couldn't make up their minds and leave.

Some of them brought some filling, a herring or a piece of goat cheese, white and hard like marble, and also wine, in a little black pumpkin, which was well hidden under their armpits. They drank and fell asleep.

The secret is that in the little unpaved entrance, without a window, lit only by the brightness of the oven that was on in the nearby kitchen, and by the light of the door that was sometimes opened and closed, there was a pleasant warmth, the sweetness of a nest.

When the door was completely open, you could see, across the yard in front of the little house, the skyline of the black mountains, hooded with the ermine of the first snow. From up there, the wind came down galloping like a wild horse, slamming against the house and making it shake. And it pushed the smoke from the oven into the kitchen again,

intensifying little Maria Franchisca's bad mood and stubborn cough. Then she looked out of the door, complaining with few but rude sentences against the clients who were loitering inside. The cough cut her words short, and some of the indiscreet patrons left for pity, to avoid making her angry and therefore worsening her cough. Two or three, however, always stayed there, dumb and quiet, withdrawing into the corners like spiders, and they didn't leave until evening.

The woman left them alone and in peace, and she went back to her chores. At that point, you didn't hear anything but the sound of the wind outside, continuous and monotone like the roar of the sea; and in the kitchen, the tapping of the peel in the oven and the murmur of the flame.

Through the threshold, the men saw the little lady, minute and gentle like a child, and the huge baker woman, black, toasted by the oven heat, going to and from, dragging the baskets, taking the bread out of the oven and cleaning the ash from it with a bunch of mallow leaves. Next to the door, a little basket of hot bread exhaled a scent of hay. The front door was sometimes opened, and some woman was pushed inside by the living force of the wind, entering with her bloated skirt, going straight to choose the bread and make her hands warm with it, finally handing out a coin that Maria Franchisca shoved into her pocket, without even looking at it.

(from the short story *Il padrone*, in the collection *Il fanciullo nascosto*, 1915)

The text describes Maria Franchisca putting the bread into the oven, but it also offers to the writer the possibility of describing an anthropological feature, typical of the agropastoral economy of her homeland, where still not everything is fit for sale. Therefore, even though Maria Franchisca sells her bread, when she meets those who can't pay, she lets herself be involved in a sort of rough charity.

Cakes

Her thoughts were always for Elias. She could already feel like seeing the young boy as a priest; she felt like receiving gifts of wheat, little urns of wine plugged with flowers, pies and gattos¹ that friends would give as presents to the new priest.

(from the novel *Elias Portolu*, 1903)

In Barbaricine society, where a son was a treasure because he could work in the country or look after the animals, the family where a son was consecrated to God, leaving therefore the family work, was compensated by the community that recognized their sacrifice in several ways.

On the other hand, a priest was necessary to take care of all the souls; therefore, it was as if the community of that village somehow had to get out of debt with that family, above all with the mother, who had offered her son as a present to the whole community.

This is this sense in which we should read the wait of Aunt Annedda – Elias Portolu’s mother – who well knows that, if her son is to become a priest, her house will be full of delicacy.

¹ Cake from Nuoro, made of almonds, sugar, and honey.

Cheese Soup

Little by little, the noise and confusion ceased: everyone had taken their places, even the illustrious chaplain, a priest just a meter and thirty centimeter tall, very red in face, very cheerful, who whistled arias and sang songs almost like a coffee concert.

The horses were taken to pasture; the hotbeds were lit; and the magnificent prior and the women of the tribe began to cook certain frightening soup boilers seasoned with fresh cheese.

(from the novel *Elias Portolu*, 1903).

Probably in the large pots for the feast of St. Francis, a soup typical of the cuisine of Nuoro was cooked, made with fresh cheese, which abounded in the agropastoral society, that went on pilgrimage to the sanctuary of St. Francis. The prioress mentioned in the text became the wife of the prior, a term used to designate the person who, year after year, organized the feast in the rural sanctuary. Being a prior – and prioress – was a great honor, but also a reasonable financial burden, so this role could only be played by rich landowners and shepherds.

Christmas Dinner

That evening, then, of course, she had more to do than usual. The economic conditions of the family were very modest, almost poor, but Christmas had to be celebrated anyway: she, moreover, prepared with abundance, so that there would be some leftovers on the table set for the dead, who return to the houses where they lived on the night of the eve. (...)

And so, the happy Christmas dinner was begun with the prayer for the dead. Bardo alone did not respond, with his lips asleep, locked in an enigmatic smile. He knew very well who the dead were who had to return, but he was careful not to say so.

Meanwhile, Gina served her soup in bowls, pulling up the long noodles as thin as blond hair with an iron ladle. The first bowl was for Pinon; she took it in her hands like a sacred vase, and she began to eat slowly, wrapping the noodles in the fork, as civilized people do. Uncle Dionisio also ate slowly, using his left hand; and he closed his eyes so as not to see his grandchildren, including women, drinking wine, that is to say eating some of the soup inside the cups filled with sparkling wine. Only Giovanni deprived himself of this pleasure, to keep his uncle company in his misfortune, but also because the example of his uncle, who, having drunk

too much, could no longer drink, curbed him with the natural instinct of the family.

Gina, on the contrary, who as usual did not sit at the table, took advantage of the first general cheerfulness to fill her cup of wine twice: immediately she too made herself happy, and while at the cupboard, she broke a large boiled mullet with the scissors and piled up the best parts in secret, she seemed to hear, in the great outside silence, the sound of a carriage. (...)

She served the mullet at the table, with a green sauce she had already prepared that smelled of the vegetable garden and summer: everyone, cheered by the good food, congratulated her; and when she passed by the side where Osea was with the children, she felt herself taken by the dress, and she stopped.

(from the novel *Annalena Bilsini*, 1927).

Through the description of the Christmas dinner, Deledda makes known to the public other culinary uses typical of the people of the north, starting with the soup broth that opens the meal, followed by boiled fish seasoned with a green sauce. The village where Annalena Bilsini lives is next to the banks of the Po, in the lower Po Valley between Viadana and Cicognara, where the Madesani family lived and where the writer went every autumn for long periods after the beach holidays.

Unlike her native Sardinia, where lunch was always based on meat, the delicacy of mullet, a water fish from the

Tyrrhenian Sea, whose cultivation was also introduced in fresh water, reminds us of the river habitat that in other novels, such as *L'Argine*, Grazia Deledda remembered from the title.

Polenta

The other brother, on the other hand, took comfort in watching his mother make polenta: she had already leaned against the cauldron hanging from the chain, to keep it at the bottom of the fireplace, an axis, on which she pressed a knee; and bent, without fear of fire, she turned the hot mixture with a long torch with an inclined tip. Inside the pot the polenta began to puff, hinting at detaching itself from the shiny copper walls: the woman then doubled in strength, without ceasing for a moment to be attentive to the evolution of the dough that seemed to take shape with pain: and when she saw it all detached and dense, with a hook she quickly stood out the pot from the hook and a bang, with a skill that allowed her not to feel even the heat of the container she emptied it on the axis of the kitchen chest.

Then even the little Second was reassured: with his face stretched out on the board, he saw his mother adjust the polenta with a ladle, to form a kind of cake that was round and prominent: above, with the cut of the hand, she marked a cross, and to the child who asked insistently why, she said she was a little annoyed that her grandmother wanted it so. “Because it is the first polenta that is made in this house.” (...)

She laid the tablecloth, so that it would not make a fold, cleaned the plates and glasses once again before putting

them on the table, cut the salami into transparent slices, and whisked endlessly the eggs for the omelet: and it was she who distributed the slices of the polenta, bringing them hot on the palm of her hand as on a nice live dish: first to Uncle Dionisio, then to the mother, then to her husband and brothers-in-law, and finally to the children.

(from the novel *Annalena Bilsini*, 1927).

In many letters, the writer asks for detailed information on new customs and traditions with which she came into contact, for example, when she began to attend the family and relatives of her husband in the area of the lower Po Valley between Viadana and Cicognara. Deledda spoke little, but she was particularly interested in habits that seemed new to her; household chores and especially food fall into this kind of interest, which is quite natural, given the education of the time that saw domestic care as the main task of a woman.

For this reason, also in the so-called Italian novels by Grazia Deledda, we see descriptive scenes of the preparation of food that are strictly functional to the story; indeed, the food often characterizes the protagonist. This is the case of *Annalena Bilsini*, the protagonist of the novel of the same name, the first novel published after the Nobel Prize, set among the peasants of Bassa, as if with this Italian novel, Deledda wanted to underline the national character of her work. *Annalena Bilsini* is one of the few novels by Deledda that has as its title the name of the protagonist, like *Marianna Sirca* and *Elias Portolu*. *Annalena* is a woman just over forty

years old, strong willed, the true head of the family, who will proudly remember at the end of the novel how the sons always do what their mother wants! Therefore, the cooking of polenta, a typical dish of northern Italy, described down to the smallest detail, on the one hand attests to the attention already mentioned to domestic and daily gestures, and on the other hand, it reinforces the indomitable and decisive character of Annalena, who seems not to be afraid even of the high temperature at which the polenta cooks in the pot. And this is even more important if we consider that the scene of polenta is almost at the beginning of the novel.

The Preparation of the *Gnocchi*

The invitation, though sudden, didn't alarm him: among other things, the old lady had sold him a whole mountain ham, flour, preserves, and cheese. In order not to disfigure it, he needed goodwill and expertise: if the second was lacking, he had the first in abundance.

He then set the water to boil, and he pulled the ham down in the meanwhile: it was hanging, protected against rats, like a lamp dangling from a rope in the middle of the room. He put it on the table, looked at it, and turned it again and again, looking for the right spot to attack. The right side seemed good to him, but he soon noticed that it was too lean, and for several reasons he needed fat. Therefore, he tried the opposite side, and actually, after the first coarse salt skin, he saw the white and red of lard and meat.

However, the knife is lazy; it doesn't want to cut thin slices, and he sharpens it with another little knife. The two blades blaze and creak in a wild battle, but with leaps of joy. And here is the big knife, burning in its victory; it sinks again, with silent fierceness, into the patient ham: and now the slices come away diaphanous and wide. The teacher looks at them backlit, as if they were patches of a precious cloth: the fat seems white velvet to him, the damask lean of mahogany color.

After setting a big rose of these slices on a round tray, he cut again from the fat side, and on these miserable slices, casually thrown on the mallet board, the knife raged loudly, until they were reduced to a mush. The pot, already hot, was taken to the edge of the cooker, giving place to a little black pan containing the minced lard, which had received, as consolatory companions, pieces of butter, onion, and garlic. And all started to fry, to lament, quietly at first, then louder, until the tomato sauce mixed its dense blood in it, apparently turning the sorrow into joy.

Setting the water to boil again, the teacher pulled the big board for the pasta down, clean and almost virgin in its wooden white nakedness. And remembering the actions of women performing these chores, he poured a little mountain of flour in the middle, in which he made a hole using a finger, like the crater of a volcano. It was really similar to a volcano, that little mountain, when he poured boiling water into the hole: smoke rose, the heap collapsed, and he plunged his hands in it, as if willing to support and rebuild it.

However, the flour fled everywhere, and the part that was already soaked with water got stuck to his fingers, spiteful and vengeful. In a short time, his hands were covered with white woolen gloves, and the flour that kept fleeing, desperate, from the board, went directly onto the front of his dress.

It was a difficult moment: he looked desolately at his jacket, without daring to touch himself with those horrible fingers; then he remembered that he had nothing more to fear in his life, and little by little, he used one hand to free the

other from the envelope of the mixture. With both hands, he gathered the scattered flour in the middle of the board, poured more water, and his fingers proudly squeezed and forced the rebel material into a compact form.

An elation of sighs and strength, and pain in the right hand, the hard and wood-like mixture made elastic, pulled and folded, rolled and stretched again. Little by little it gave up, became warm, and finally round and soft like a woman's breast.

At that point, he took the little knife again, and he scraped the leftover coat from the board; he cut a slice of mixture, and, by rolling and stretching it, he reduced it to a long white snake, which the knife hurried to cut into small pieces, as if it was really a dangerous beast.

Afterwards, the little pieces, carved inside with the index finger, like long shells, became the gnocchi, and their army, well arranged on the board and then covered by the tent of a napkin, waited for the pot to boil.

At the agreed time, the two guests arrived. While the oldest entered into the teacher's house and offered his help, the other wandered, curious and suspicious, around the table that had been set outside, under the trees, sniffing with strength, as if he wanted to make sure that there was no poisoned food.

The ham rose, the bread and the yellow wine, and above all the scent of the sauce that came from the house reassured him. He sat on the bench in front of the table, and he reached into the big internal pocket of his jacket, pulling out with strength a little yellowish cheese, glossy like ivory: he put it

cautiously next to the ham dish, between the two potbellied towers of full bottles. Then he kept looking at everything with the rapture of a lover in front of a nice still-life painting. However, when his brother came out of the little house's front door, holding the tureen with the gnocchi between his hands in a religious fashion, as if it was a sacred vase, and behind him came the teacher, brandishing the little ladle, he sprang up, remembering the attention position, when he was a soldier and the general passed by.

At first, as always happens, a mysterious silence accompanied the meal of the three men, around whom a court of uninvited guests had gathered, that is, the cat and her kittens, the farmer's dog, and the hens of the house. This company reminded the master of another house, of another family, and the gnocchi seemed hard to him.

They were actually a little hard, but the sauce, married to the abundant cheese, was like a colorful and delicious dress that makes older women beautiful too. Gesuino himself, maybe more than the others, abandoned himself to the delight of swallowing them one by one, after having savored them like sugared almonds. And while the fork grabbed one, the eyes looked at the other, until the plate was empty. At that point, he took a piece of bread to finish everything, but the host was ready to replenish his plate abundantly.

Gesuino sighed, too happy; he took his fork again with a resigned gesture, and he started again. Now, though, he was aware of what was happening around him, and since the dog was looking at him, moving its tail like a begging finger, he

threw a gnocco to the animal. But a little cat was fast enough and caught it.

(from the novel *La fuga in Egitto* 1925)

The scene I am presenting here, taken from the novel *The Flight into Egypt*, is one of the longest and more carefully described cooking scenes. The protagonist is a teacher called Giuseppe di Nicola who, once retired, joins his adoptive son Antonio and meets the servant Ornella, Antonio's mistress, also desired by two farmers, Proto and Gesuino. The two men, described as Magi, host Ornella when she is going to give birth to "the fault's son," and they cook hen in broth and pork for the new mother. Proto and Gesuino are the guests, for whom the teacher cooks the rich and detailed lunch described above. There are several courses, from the ham as appetizer, to the sauce with traditional sautéed lard, butter, onion, and garlic, and above all, the strong first course, with the preparation of the gnocchi, from the mountain of flour, with "a hole like the crater of a volcano," to the army of little pieces of mixture carved with the index finger and set on the board. The table is enriched by the little yellowish cheese and the bottles full of wine.

From the name of the protagonist, it is soon clear that the novel is not set in Sardinia, and from some landscape descriptions, we may guess that the village where Giuseppe De Nicola arrives is in the inner Romagna, an area known by Deledda after her summer stay in Cervia from the beginning of the Twenties.

Only a female writer (or a writer with cooking abilities) could be so precise in describing the preparation of the gnocchi, thus reinforcing one of Grazie Deledda's narrative abilities: she is always very accurate and careful in the description of details.

Lunches and Banquets for the Honeymoon Trip to

Cervia

Even during the dinner (in my village they called the midday meal lunch, and the one in the evening dinner), he didn't do anything but joke with my brothers. (...)

“Now we are going to eat and you'll get warmer,” he started again, remissive. “Marisa's husband gave me a homemade bread and a salami: as a wedding gift, it is not bad. We still have some chicken and the wine. Now, I'll set the table.”

He knew the house inside out: it had previously been cleaned and supplied with necessary things by Marisa. But the most needed thing, when the light faded, was not to be found. The oil lamp was empty, and there were no candles. (...).

The words whispered by my friend when he stuck his face out of the door didn't unsettle that feeling of charm; instead, they boosted it:

“Do you want Marisa to bring you some coffee? She has already bought bread, a hen, fish, fruit and vegetables as well.” More than welcome, then, this Marisa, who has apparently brought, together with the horn of plenty, also the gift of peace and serenity. (...)

Already knowing that that thing would go on and on, I pretended I wasn't interested anymore, until the moment we were sitting at the table and he confirmed the news, already announced by the way by Marisa, of a big banquet that the authorities and the notables of the area – and also peasants – want to offer to me and him.

“To me too? What have I got to do?”

“Here you represent the perfect person: it is therefore necessary to accept the invitation.”

“We'll accept.” (...)

Great preparations were being made: it had to be one of those classical region banquets: a region that was popular for its impressive and gourmand eaters. The list of the courses was already known, and I had a stomachache just at the thought of it. (...)

“Oh, in case of disasters happening, they will be of a different sort, and anyway, at the end of the banquet. You'll see,” she announced with malice. “First of all, there are going to be fifty wine bottles for the meal, thirty bottles of old wine, twenty for the sparkling wine. Then there will be a hundred chickens, half a quintal of fish, one dairy heifer, five trifles.” In the meanwhile (...)

Also, the person at my left was starting to give signs of taking part in common life. Having eaten the fourth dish, which was very fine fried fish, he had stopped in his tracks: like a person who reaches his goal and isn't willing to move.

“Mr. Fanti, won't you take some roast meat?”

“No, thanks, it's enough.”

“Look, it’s pheasant. (...) The one who is never satisfied is the person at my right.”

“Pheasant? They stuck a tail on it, but it is an old rooster from the henhouse. Oh, Fanti, if you want to report to your eminent mister brother-in-law, please, report to him.”

The blind man keeps rummaging on his teeth and doesn’t answer.

“And this salad? With all the hectares of our vegetable gardens, grown with lettuces, you directly picked up the radishes. Pay attention, ma’am; if a stem goes into your throat, there’s a danger of choking.” (...)

The pop of champagne bottles was accompanied by new applause: it seemed to be a joyful country (...) and all of a sudden, after drinking my glass of champagne, I felt like I was being grabbed by Gabriele’s hands again. It was his memory coming back.

“After all, we have been at the table for two hours already,” he started again, with his nice shining smile “I think it is enough. You must be tired.”

(from the novel *Il paese del vento*, 1931)

A good example of descriptive scenes, the preparation and the consummation of food, is the popular novel *The Town of the Wind*, set in Cervia, one of the very few in the first person, partially autobiographical, since it uses a long flashback to tell not just the honeymoon trip from the island to the town of the wind, that is, Cervia, on the Romagna coast, but also the youthful love of the first person

protagonist for Gabriele, her brother's friend, who has come to her parents' house and been hosted there. Probably Gabriele hides the blonde journalist Stanis Manca, Duke of the Asinara, with whom the young writer fell in love and who made her suffer so much after describing her as a dwarf in his article!

Perhaps, to punish him for that mocking refusal, Grazia Deledda, now mature, makes him narratively expiate a terrible penalty, since Gabriele, seen by the protagonist in the seaside town, dies there of an incurable illness, probably tuberculosis.

In other flashback sequences, the first person narrator, a young bride on her honeymoon following her husband, a ministry official, also reminds us of the famous scene of Deledda's life, when, during a society game in Sardinia, she invited the young continental official to a love declaration, and she then married him.

Through the description of food, there is in this novel a complete awareness of the differences between the island and the continent habits, starting with the different ways they describe lunch and dinner.

The description of the many courses of meat and fish during the banquet offered for the married couple occupies the final part of the novel with great importance, and it's not by chance that, amidst the jubilation of food and wine, the protagonist has confused thoughts towards Gabriele, who right in that moment was dying, alone, in the house rented near the sea. He died the previous night, at ten o'clock. (...) "You remember, lady, how yesterday I was feeling that

something bad was going to happen in my house? This is why I left the table, but when my wife and I arrived home, the unhappy man had already gone.”

Breakfast in Rome for the Newly Married Couple

“Let’s go, what are you doing?” he said, a bit impatient. And he took her hand and pulled her into the dining room, where Mrs. Anna was waiting for her in front of the table, set for two, but with enough food for ten.

“I just want some black coffee,” Regina said.

“Just black coffee? You are crazy, my dear, crazy, so to speak. Sorry, you know. In Rome we must eat. Here is the black coffee: would you like some cognac in it?”

“No: I wouldn’t, I don’t like it.”

“Well, try. You’ll like it, you’ll see.”

“No, no.”

“Yes, yes, otherwise you’ll make me unhappy.”

She had to drink coffee with cognac, and then she had to drink coffee and milk, and then the frollata, and to eat bread with butter, and the cookies, and the bread. In the end, she had tears in her eyes: her mother-in-law’s insistence oppressed her. To comfort her, Mrs. Anna asked her if she wanted a cup of broth and a chicken wing.

“But you want to make me die!” she cried, comically desperate.

Antonio ate and laughed.

(from the novel, *Nostalgia*, 1905)

The novel *Nostalgia* was published in 1905, when Grazia Deledda had lived in Rome for five years, having settled there after her marriage with Palmiro Madesani. The protagonist Regina lives a psychological situation that is very similar to the one that sometimes must have also overwhelmed the writer's spirit: the impact of city life and the deep nostalgia for her village, left after her marriage. If Grazia Deledda had left Nuoro with great enthusiasm, full of hope for Rome, city of literary glory and fame, Regina, the protagonist of *Nostalgia*, also saw Rome as a city in which she could fulfill her dreams.

Regina moved from Viadana, a town in the low Padua valley of the Madesani family, which Deledda learnt to understand and love when she was a guest of his husband's relatives.

Unlike Grazia, Regina would not find what she expected in Rome, and the nostalgia for her town would soon become a real existential crisis, which would influence her marriage as well. In the narrative place I presented, you can see, through a food scene, how Grazia Deledda highlights Regina's unfamiliarity towards the Roman environment that has embraced her.

Her husband Antonio points out that "here in Rome" it is necessary to eat a lot, while she refuses the food with a sense of nausea, which is a herald and prelude of the existential discomfort that will soon overwhelm her.

Conclusion

Grazia Deledda remains unique amidst the most notable writers of the early 20th century; an individual with characteristics that distinguish her in the national and cultural panorama.

For decades, after leaving Sardinia and settling down in Rome, when she went about her daily life, she continued to say, “we Sardinians do this and that,” or “in Sardinia we think this is so,” and so on and so forth, thus displaying a rooted attachment that is not easy to detect in other intellectuals.

Many Sardinian writers, even when they write in Italian and reach national and international success, just as Grazia Deledda did, still remain the bearers of a world view, of an ethical cultural patrimony, that is original and different from the anthropological attitude considered national. Cooking, with all its traditions, responds to the primary need for food, and it is also connected with customs that, in Deledda’s narrative, help to define the Sardinian nature.

In Barbagia, the heart of the island, meat is a staple ingredient in many recipes and the product of local farming, like the other components of its peasant cooking. It is the same food that shepherds still offer their visitors, curious to see their pens and animals; it is the sort of food that is also offered in one’s friends’ hospitable houses. Today, when everyone is fond of a return to nature, nothing could be more natural than lamb on a skewer, eggs, and fresh cheese.

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that one can recapture the solidarity, the simplicity of those gifts described in Deledda's novels, or the frank relationship with food that plays an important role in the rites of hospitality and life.

Sardinian culture, today demonized as a culture of violence, was originally marked by a strong connection with life's currents or primordial drives, known to those human beings who are complete, who are "whole," and who live according to rhythms and times that allow the enjoyment of *eros* and food, which could not be more distant from the rush of fast food. This humanity was immersed in nature, drinking new wine in autumn and full-bodied, warming wine in winter.

Grazia Deledda learned the importance of food, hospitality, and conviviality, and the essence of nutrition, within her native culture; but later, they became essential and meaningful to her whole work, even the Italian novels.

After leaving for the mainland, where she spent more than half her life, she was aware that her stories narrated very distinctive human destinies. They belonged to her compatriots, so dear to her; but with time, she also came to tell the stories of the people of Italy. In a letter addressed to Edouard Rod and dated February 2, 1907, she wrote: "As I had occasion to write before, I have two novels ready. The first, *L'edera*, will be published in February in *Deutsche Rundschau*. (...) But it is not *L'edera* I am thinking of, as I am certain of its uniqueness, despite being one of my Sardinian novels. No, right at this moment I am concerned with *L'ombra del passato*. Its first chapters have appeared in

this issue of *Nuova Antologia*, and it is set in an area surrounding Mantua, in Lombardy. I believe I have achieved something new and profound with this work.”

This brief catalogue of recipes in Deledda’s novels creates a better picture, more complete and truer, of Grazia Deledda’s work, which comprises not only her unforgettable Sardinia, but also other regional and individual realities that she came to know when she went to live on the peninsula. Grazia Deledda was a truly Italian writer too.

Sardinian Cooking

MAIN COURSES

Culurgiones de patata (Potato Ravioli)

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 1 HR 30 MINS

500g flour

Water

600g potatoes

200g grated Pecorino cheese (or Viscidu: a hard cheese, sour and salted)

100g fresh mint

2 garlic cloves

500g tomato sauce

150g grated Pecorino

1. Mix a little water with the flour and knead until homogeneous. Leave to rest.
2. Cook the potatoes in their skin in salted water.
3. Skin and mash the potatoes, and leave in a container.
4. Add 200g grated Pecorino, chopped mint and garlic to the potatoes.

5. Roll out the dough and obtain 2mm-thick layers. Cut discs of 8cm diameter.
6. Make little balls with the potato mixture.
7. Place the balls on the dough discs and fold them, pressing the edges together firmly.
8. Cook the culurgiones in plenty of boiling salted water.
9. Drain and mix with tomato sauce and add the remaining Pecorino.
10. Serve hot.



Malloreddus a sa sarda
(Sardinian Gnocchi)

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 1 HR 30 MINS

500g malloreddus (striped shell pasta similar to little gnocchi)

50g lard

300g horse meat

50g tomato purée

50g dried tomatoes

150g grated Pecorino

1 onion

2 garlic cloves

1 glass Vernaccia (white wine)

1 cup broth

3 basil leaves

Saffron, black pepper, and salt

1. Dice the meat.
2. In a pan, fry the chopped onion and garlic in the lard, then add the meat.
3. Pour over the wine and leave to evaporate.
4. Add broth, tomato purée, chopped dried tomatoes, basil, and saffron.
5. As it cooks, add salt and pepper to taste.
6. Cook the malloreddus in plenty of boiling salted water.

7. Drain the pasta, mix with the meat sauce, and sprinkle with Pecorino.
8. Serve hot.

Frattau Bread

SKILL: EASY

TAKES 15 MINS

6 sheets carasau bread

6 medium eggs

400g tomato sauce

200g grated Pecorino

1. Dip the sheets of carasau bread in boiling water – break the sheets to fit your dish if necessary.
2. Poach the eggs in salted water.
3. Drain the bread and arrange the sheets on a dish, alternating with tomato sauce and grated Pecorino, to obtain 2-3 layers.
4. Place an egg on top.
5. Serve hot.

Fregula with Artichoke Hearts and Lamb Meat Sauce

SKILL: MEDIUM-DIFFICULT

TAKES 40 MINS

450g Fregula (Sardinian pasta made with coarse semolina)

300g artichokes

150g chopped tomatoes

300g ground lamb

80g Pecorino

100g Casizolu del Montiferru (Sardinian cow's milk cheese)

400g vegetables: carrots, onions, and celery

30g garlic

Cannonau wine

Extra virgin olive oil

Salt

1. In a saucepan, dice half the carrots, onions, and celery to obtain regular cubes (1.5cm) and make a vegetable stock.
2. Finely chop the remaining vegetables and fry lightly in a pan.
3. Add the ground lamb and pour the wine: leave to evaporate.
4. Pour the chopped tomatoes and season to taste. Add the artichokes cut into halves.
5. In another pan, lightly fry the chopped garlic and add the fregula. Leave to toast for a few minutes. Sprinkle with wine and leave to evaporate.
6. Add the stock to the fregula and cook until al dente.

7. Mix the meat sauce, add a little olive oil and the grated cheese.
8. Top with flakes of Casizolu cheese and serve hot.

Simbua frita
(Fried Durum Wheat – Sardinian Polenta)

SKILL: EASY-MEDIUM

TAKES 20 MINS

350g durum wheat flour

200g bacon

100g sausage

100g mustela (dried pork loin)

1 small onion

1l water

80ml extra virgin olive oil

15g lard

Salt

1. Chop the mustela and bacon, add the sausage, and brown in a little oil.
2. Add the boiling salted water slowly.
3. Pour the flour, stir well and cook for about 2 minutes, until the mixture is thick.
4. Serve preferably hot.

MAIN MEAT AND FISH COURSES

Stewed Boar

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 2 DAYS 2 HRS 15 MINS

1kg boar meat

1 large onion

2 carrots

2 celery sticks

3 bay leaves

Red wine

8 cloves

Extra virgin olive oil

Salt

1. Chop the onion, carrots, and celery, add the bay leaves and the boar meat. Pour the wine and leave to marinate for 2 days.
2. Dice the meat.
3. Brown in a little olive oil. Add the vegetables and cloves, and season to taste.
4. Pour the wine used to marinate the meat.
5. Cook gently for 2 hours.
6. Serve hot.

Figadu de porcheddu a sa nuogresa
(Pork Liver in the Nuorese Style)

SKILL: EASY

TAKES 1 HR

300g pork liver

3 tender celery sticks

1 glass Filu 'e ferru (Sardinian aquavit)

50g lard

100ml extra virgin olive oil

1. Dice the liver.
2. In a pan add oil, lard, and thinly chopped celery.
3. Place over a high heat, add the liver and brown, stirring constantly for a few minutes.
4. Pour the aquavit and leave to evaporate.
5. Serve immediately.

Impanada
Savory Pie

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 4 HRS 30 MINS

500g pastry flour

100g lard

250g pork

250g beef

50g sausage

100g dried tomatoes

100g stoned olives

2 garlic cloves

40g parsley

150ml extra virgin olive oil

Salt and black pepper

1. In a tureen, mix the diced beef and pork; add the crumbled sausage, olives, dried tomatoes, garlic, and parsley, previously chopped, and salt and pepper to taste.
2. Pour the oil and leave to marinate for 3 hours.
3. Melt the lard in a bain marie.
4. On a work surface, pour the flour, make a well in the center, add the lard and lukewarm salted water. Mix well and knead until the dough is smooth, soft, and elastic.
5. Leave to rise for 30 minutes, then cut the dough into two pieces.

6. With a rolling pin, roll out the dough to a thickness of 2mm and cut two discs of different sizes.
7. Grease a deep, round baking dish. Place the larger pastry disc in the dish and pack the meat in the center.
8. Top with the other pastry round and press down the edges to seal.
9. Prick with a toothpick to let the steam out.
10. Bake at a moderate temperature for about 40 minutes.



Roast Leg of Mutton

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 2 HRS

1 mutton leg

150g lard

80g parsley

2 garlic cloves

80g rosemary

Extra virgin olive oil

Salt

1. In a bowl, mix the lard, finely chopped garlic, rosemary, and parsley, and season to taste.
2. Make some cuts in the meat.
3. Massage the mixture into the cuts.
4. Place the mutton in a baking tin and brush with oil.
5. Bake for about 1 hour and 30 minutes, turning often.
6. Serve hot.

Partridges with Potatoes

SKILL: MEDIUM-DIFFICULT

TAKES 2 HRS 15 MINS

6 partridges

6 potatoes

250ml meat stock

180ml Vernaccia wine

2 garlic cloves

70g parsley

6 fresh sage leaves

6 bay leaves

70g rosemary

200ml extra virgin olive oil

Salt

1. Pluck the feathers from the birds, remove the innards, then wash and dry them inside and out.
2. In a bowl, mix the finely chopped parsley, garlic, rosemary, sage, and bay leaves. Season to taste.
3. Fill the partridges with half of the mixture.
4. Massage the remaining mixture over them.
5. Heat the oil in a pan, then add the partridges. Pour the wine and stock.
6. Cook on a low heat for about 90 minutes.
7. Add the potatoes, previously peeled, washed, and cubed.
8. Cook for another 15 minutes, still on a low heat.
9. Serve immediately.

Roast Piglet on a Spit

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 2 HRS

Half a suckling pig (about 3kg)

Salt

1. Place the piglet on the spit.
2. Light a fire in the fireplace and position the spit at the appropriate distance.
3. Place the embers all around and along the meat.
4. Roast slowly until the skin is crisp.
5. Serve preferably hot.

Trataliu
(Lamb Offal)

SKILL: MEDIUM/DIFFICULT

TAKES 1 HR

200g heart

200g liver

200g lungs

Intestines

Caul fat

Salt

1. Wash the lamb intestines carefully and thoroughly.
2. Cut the heart, lungs, and liver into cubes.
3. Bake the offal in a tin.
4. Half way through the baking time, add salt to taste.
Wrap the offal in the caul fat, then wrap the intestines tightly around it. Bake for another 30 minutes.
5. Serve hot.

Stewed Eels

SKILLS: MEDIUM

TAKES 50 MINS

6 eels

2 garlic cloves

10g tomato purée

70ml extra virgin olive oil

1 small chili pepper

2 bay leaves

Salt

1. Clean the eels, emptying them and removing the head. Wash and cut into logs.
2. Heat the oil in a nonstick pan, brown the garlic, add the eels, and leave to brown. Then stir in the tomato purée, the bay leaves, and the chili pepper. Season to taste.
3. After a few minutes, add enough water to cover the eels. Place the lid on.
4. Leave to simmer over a low heat for 20-30 minutes, depending on the size of the eels.

SIDE DISHES

Tùvara de arena cun crannatza
(Sardinian Sand Truffles with Vernaccia Wine)

SKILL: EASY

TAKES 20 MINS

600g Sardinian truffles (*Terfezia leonis*)

50g parsley

80g onion

160ml extra virgin olive oil

200ml Vernaccia di Oristano wine

Salt and black pepper

1. Peel and finely slice the truffles.
2. In a pan, brown the finely chopped onion and parsley.
3. Add the truffles, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and leave to simmer over low heat.
4. Pour the Vernaccia wine and leave to evaporate.
5. Serve hot.

Fae cun allu e menta areste
(Baby Broad Beans with Garlic and Mint)

SKILL: EASY

TAKES ???

1.2kg baby broad beans

3 garlic cloves

50g wild mint

70ml extra virgin olive oil

Salt and black pepper

1. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil. Add the beans, bring back to the boil. Add the crushed garlic and some of the mint.
2. Check that the broad beans are cooked and drain.
3. Place in a bowl, sprinkle with the remaining chopped mint, and season with oil, salt, and pepper.
4. Serve straight away.

Stewed Cauliflower “*alla Campidanese*”

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 30 MINS

1kg cauliflower

40g celery

40g carrot

50g onion

350g chopped tomatoes

12 bitter olives

40g parsley

90ml extra virgin olive oil

1. Remove the stem and cut the cauliflower head into florets.
2. In a pan, lightly fry the chopped garlic and parsley and add the florets.
3. Brown the cauliflower and add the finely sliced carrots and onion, the chopped tomatoes, and the stoned olives.
4. Season to taste before taking the pan off the heat.
5. Serve hot.

Aubergines “*alla Sassarese*”

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 1 HR

3 long aubergines

2 garlic cloves

30g parsley

30g basil

80ml extra virgin olive oil

Salt

1. Peel, wash, and halve the aubergines lengthwise.
2. In a bowl, mix the finely chopped parsley and basil, and moisten with the oil. Season to taste.
3. Using a sharp knife, score a crisscross pattern over the cut sides of the aubergines.
4. Place them on a baking tray and brush with the oil, parsley, and basil.
5. Bake at medium heat for about an hour, until golden.
6. Serve hot or cold.

SWEETS

Amaretto Cookies

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 4 HRS

300g sugar

200g almonds

100g bitter almonds

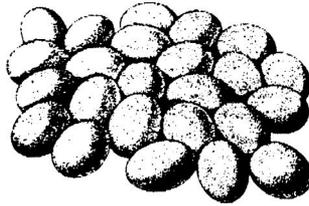
3 egg whites

40g icing sugar

20g pastry flour

1. Blanch the almonds to remove the skin. To do this, bring a small saucepan of water to the boil, add the almonds, and boil for a few minutes.
2. Drain the almonds immediately, shell them, and grind them in a mortar.
3. Slowly add the sugar and mix until the mixture is thick.
4. Beat the egg whites until stiff, and slowly add to the mixture.
5. Transfer the mixture to a piping bag fitted with a plain tip.
6. Pipe small rounds on a baking sheet dusted with flour, leaving enough space between them.
7. Sprinkle with icing sugar and leave to rest for 2 hours before baking.

8. Bake at a very low heat for 50-60 minutes.
9. Lift the amaretti with a spatula and leave to cool.
10. Place on a tray or in a sealed biscuit tin to store.



Galletina Cookies

SKILL: MEDIUM

TAKES 1 HR 15 MINS

750g sugar

150g pastry flour

6 eggs

Icing sugar

Salt

1. Beat the egg yolks with the sugar and a pinch of salt until homogeneous.
2. Slowly add the flour and mix well.
3. Whisk the egg whites to stiff peaks, and gradually fold them into the mixture.
4. Mix until well combined.
5. Place little portions of the mixture well spaced apart on a well-greased and floured baking tray.
6. Use a small sieve to dust with icing sugar mixed with a little plain sugar.
7. Heat the oven to 180°C and bake for 15 minutes.
8. Serve cold.

Caschetta Pastries

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 2 HRS

400g almonds

4 oranges

90g honey

200g pastry flour

1 medium egg

50g lard

For the filling:

1. Blanch the almonds, then shell, dry, and pound them.
2. Place the orange peel in the oven to dry out. Once dry, chop and grind.
3. In a bowl, mix the almonds, the orange peel, and the honey.
4. Cook the mixture in a non-stick pot over a low heat, mixing constantly until it is creamy.
5. Take the pan off the heat and leave to cool.

For the pastry:

1. Mix the flour, egg, lard, and a pinch of salt together. Knead the dough, shape into a ball, and leave to rest.
2. Form the filling into cigar shapes, approximately 3cm thick by 10cm long.
3. Cut the dough into pieces. Flatten and roll them out to very thin strips, about 2 x 12cm.

4. Place the cigar-shaped filling in the center of these strips.
5. Form the caschettas into semicircles, spirals, figure-of-eight knots, and horseshoe shapes. Place on a greased baking tray.
6. Bake in a moderate oven for about 30 minutes, until golden.

Pàrdulas – Formaggelle
(Sweet Ricotta-Filled Pastries)

SKILL: MEDIUM/DIFFICULT

TAKES 90 MINS

500g pastry flour

250g sugar

1kg ricotta cheese

300g lard

3 oranges

2 sachets of vanilla powder

2 medium eggs

Salt

1. In a bowl, combine the ricotta cheese, sugar, egg yolks, orange zest, a pinch of salt, vanilla powder, and 150g flour. Mix well and leave to rest.
2. In another bowl combine the remaining flour, a spoonful of lard, and a pinch of salt. Roll out the dough into thin sheets.
3. With the help of a glass or a cookie cutter, cut out discs of dough. Put two spoonfuls of the ricotta filling on each disc.
4. Pinch the edge at intervals to get a raised border.
5. Bake in the oven at a temperature of 250°C for about 20 minutes.
6. Leave to cool. Glaze with icing sugar if preferred.

Pabassinos
(Raisin Cookies)

SKILL: MEDIUM/DIFFICULT

TAKES 1 DAY 1 HR 45 MINS

500g almonds

200g walnuts

500g raisins

1 orange

0.5l *sapa* (grape syrup)

150g sugar sprinkles

1. Blanch the almonds for 5 minutes, drain, and remove the skin.
2. Grind the almonds and walnuts.
3. In a bowl, add the walnuts, almonds, raisins, grated orange zest, and *sapa*. Mix well until homogeneous.
4. Cook over low heat for 30 minutes, stirring constantly.
5. Leave to cool, then stretch out the mixture into sheets (1.5cm thick). Cut into diamond shapes with a cookie cutter.
6. Leave to dry for 24 hours, then decorate with the sugar sprinkles.

Sebadas/Seadas
(Deep-Fried Dumplings)

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 1 HR 45 MINS

400g fresh or soured cheese (from sheep's or cows' milk)

350g bread flour

10g durum wheat flour (semolina)

80g lard

1 lemon

120g honey

100ml water

Salt

1. Slice the cheese and add to a pan. Cover with water, add the grated lemon zest, and cook over a gentle heat to combine.
2. Add 50g flour and mix well.
3. Pour the melted cheese onto a damp cutting board and divide into small portions.
4. Flatten the cheese and leave to rest.
5. Make a dough with the flour, lard, and salt.
6. Roll out the dough to about 2mm thick; place the portions of cheese filling on one side of the dough.
7. Fold the dough over and cut out discs around the filling.
8. Deep fry the *sebadas* in hot oil until golden.
9. Serve drizzled with honey or dusted with sugar.

Pirichito Pastries

SKILL: MEDIUM/DIFFICULT

TAKES 2 HRS 45 MINS

600g pastry flour

400g sugar

12 eggs

3 lemons

100ml water

80ml extra virgin olive oil

1. Beat the eggs until frothy, adding the oil slowly.
2. Arrange the flour on the table, make a well in the center and pour the eggs. Mix until homogeneous.
3. Leave to rest for 1 hour.
4. Shape the dough into small balls, place on a floured baking tray leaving space in between the pirichitos.
5. Bake at 200°C for about 45 minutes.
6. In a pan, melt the sugar with the water and add the grated lemon zest.
7. Pour the melted sugar onto the pastries and leave to dry.

OTHER RECIPES

Carasau Flatbread

SKILL: EASY

TAKES 1 HR

1kg durum wheat flour (semolina)

15g yeast

Water

Salt

1. Mix the ingredients until homogeneous. Shape the dough into a ball and roll out to a very thin sheet.
2. Bake until it rises.
3. Carefully remove from the oven and cut the risen bread in half.
4. Place the two halves back in the oven to toast.

Gutiau Flatbread

SKILL: EASY

TAKES 15 MINS

Carasau flatbread

Extra virgin olive oil

Salt and black pepper

1. Drizzle the oil over the flatbread and season to taste.
2. Bake for a few minutes
3. Serve preferably hot.

Sapa Bread

SKILL: DIFFICULT

TAKES 20 HRS

For the sapa:

5kg white grapes

2 quinces

2 oranges

For the bread:

1kg bread flour

500ml sapa

400g almonds

100g pine nuts

100g walnuts

400g raisins

30g yeast

Sugar sprinkles

Cinnamon

Salt

To prepare the sapa:

1. Deseed the grapes and squeeze the juice into a pot.
2. Slice the quinces, then add to the juice.
3. Add the orange peel, cut into strips, and cook over low heat for 12 hours.
4. Remove the quinces and the orange peel.
5. Sift the juice and pour into bottles.

To make the bread:

1. Bleach the almonds for 5 minutes, remove the skin, and grind.
2. Dissolve the yeast in a little sapa and 100ml lukewarm water. Add the yeast and the remaining sapa to the flour and mix well.
3. Knead and add a pinch of salt and one of cinnamon, the almonds and pine nuts, the walnuts previously ground, and the raisins.
4. Continue to knead, adding more sapa if needed.
5. Place the dough in a bowl, cover with a blanket, and leave to rise for about 2 hours.
6. Cut the dough into large pieces and place into floured baking tins.
7. Bake at 200°C for an hour.
8. Brush the bread with sapa and decorate with sugar sprinkles.

Filindèu Pasta, “Threads of God”

Choosing the right kind of flour is important to obtain a good quality pasta. The dough is made with durum wheat, semolina, and water. It is kneaded by hand, with the gradual addition of water and salt, until it is smooth and elastic, so that it can be stretched into long filaments. The dough is then cut into 100-gram pieces. On a floured wooden surface, each piece is rolled into a cylinder, then pulled and stretched by hand into long filaments. The numerous stages of hand-pulling and stretching are critical to produce threads of the desired thickness. Another important ingredient for the success of this preparation is the round frame used for drying the pasta: traditionally, it is made of dried asphodel leaves, plaited and arranged in concentric circles. The resulting surface is uneven, and it favors the drying process, further helped by the fiber of the asphodel leaves, which keeps moisture away. *Filindèu* pasta is prepared with a special sheep broth: broken into small pieces (roughly 5cm in diameter), it is added to the simmering broth with sour *Pecorino*, fresh sheep’s cheese. Et voilà! The soup is ready. In May every year, it is prepared in a little town in the province of Nuoro, on the feast day of St Francis of Lula. In her *Elias Portolu*, Deledda introduced this special dish on exactly the same occasion. The tradition is still alive, but very few women are capable of making *Filindèu* pasta and mastering the art of its spectacular preparation.

Casizolu Cheese

Casizolu is a traditional cheese from the Montiferru area with a characteristic rounded “pear” shape (*peretta*) topped by a little head. White to pale yellow, the paste is compact and elastic, or hard, depending on its maturing time; the rind is thin and presents a yellowish straw color. Mild versions have a sweet finish, but mature Casizolu tends to be spicier in flavor; sizes and weights also vary, from 500g to 3kg.

It is prepared with cows’ milk coagulated at 34-38°C, to which liquid calf rennet is added. The curd is then broken into small nuggets with a tool called a “spino,” and the paste thus obtained is placed in special containers until it reaches a specific stage of lactic fermentation. Once the curd is stretchy, it is sliced, immersed in hot water (90-93°C), kneaded, and stretched. Cut into various portion sizes, the paste is given its “pear” shape, and the *peretta* is placed in cold water to help the rind set; then, it is salted in saturated brine.

In *Colombi e sparvieri*, Grazia Deledda describes a “bunch of small cheeses” (*formaggelle*), Casizolu pear-shaped cheeses, tied with a string and hanging from the ceiling. N.B. Formaggella is also used to refer to the cheese-filled Pardulas pastries.

POSTFACE

By Andrea Vargiu²

This essay is born of the same love for and dedication to our island that both Grazia Deledda and Neria De Giovanni have revealed. It is its purpose to confirm our shared goals in a country, Sardinia, that possesses great value and potential, but that sometimes lacks a common, strong desire to show its best side to the world. Sardinian cuisine, rich and poor, unique and yet universal, also reflects these contradictions, which in some ways define our food and give it an aura of mystery still waiting to be revealed. To this effect, recipes and local products of Sardinia are proudly simple; a simplicity born of poverty that fortunately has turned into sobriety and authenticity. Its richness, therefore, derives from the historical experience of its people, their rituals, behaviors, anecdotes, and from linguistic and cultural influences, which inevitably lends additional value to the recipes of the island. Such quality might well make it unique among other cuisines.

Sardinian food is rather complex, far more than one might expect. Some of its dishes make an appearance on kitchen tables all over the region, but many are recipes that resolutely belong to specific areas or even a single town. Their names are a manifestation of the language varieties

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present on the island, and they tell the story of different foreign influences. In fact, the names of food and dishes derive from various languages: Spanish, as in *ghisàu*, *bombas*, *cassòla*, or the delicious sweet *guéfus* and *pirichittus*. *S'azada di Bosa* and *burrìda*, on the other hand, derive from Genoese, and *suppas indòradas* from Portuguese. The Arab presence in Sardinia is commemorated by *casca*, a version of *couscous*, which is still prepared in the picturesque villages of Calasetta and Carloforte. But even this necessarily simplified list would not be complete without *merca*, a name of Punic-Phoenician origins.

Often, identical names are used for different recipes in different locations, of which an example occurs in Cuglieri, where *sa timballa* is a large *panada*, whereas in the nearby town of Scano Montiferro, it is a rice timbale and a wedding dish. Another such example comes from Nuoro, Deledda's native town, where *merca* is a kind of salty cheese, while in the coastal town of Cabras, it is a dish of mullet boiled in salted water and served with *ziba*, a herb that grows in marshes. But in this case, the two dishes have good reason to share a name, which etymologically derives from the Phoenician for "salty food." In Sardinia, however, identical dishes can also bear different names, as is the case with the *zeppole* pastries, which appear in Deledda's *Elias Portolu* under the name of *sas cattas*, as they are still known in the area surrounding Nuoro; but in other towns they are called *zipulas* or *zippuasa*. Aside from cultural and linguistic differences, there are other obstacles to a rigorous study of

the Sardinian cuisine, whose recipes have been passed on orally through families that have guarded them jealously, committing to memory approximate quantities of ingredients for portions much larger than is fashionable in today's catering industry. Besides, many traditional dishes are closely linked to sacred and profane celebrations that are not always common to the various subcultures. Yet, I believe that these complications render our cuisine more intriguing and less predictable, contrary to the belief of those who wish to underestimate it.

The rediscovery of the island's wines and gastronomy owes a great deal to the works of Sardinian artists who have woven flavors, food, and recipes into the fabric of their work. It is my belief that these authors have represented our cuisine with more clarity and honesty than many of the recipe books still in print. Quite recently I happened to reflect on the "food quotations" of Antonio Garau, the playwright from Oristano: how relevant they are, how well they convey the dietary habits of the people of Sardinia in the 20th century. This is not a unique occurrence, and one is tempted to reread some of Antonio Gramsci's letters from prison where special foods are remembered, and they betray a pining nostalgia for the flavors of his country: in a letter addressed to his mother in 1927, for example, he wishes for a "banquet" of *kulurzones* and *pardulas* and *zippulas* and *pippias de zuccuru*. In less suspicious times, the famous actor and singer Maria Carta often talked of traditional recipes on radio and TV programs; she described the *curasàu bread*, *seadas*, and *panadas*, for instance, and she

contextualized these foods within our culture. Another such artist was Peppino Mereu, the poet from Tonara who composed the famous poem for “Nanneddu meu,” his dear friend Nanni Sulis. In fact, in other verses, he praised the *torrone* (nougat) of his town, and the *carapigna* (sorbet) from Aritzo, both prepared according to traditional, ancient recipes; both loved in Sardinia and abroad. Sardinian wines have had their share of famous quotations: between 1795 and 1796 a magistrate by the name of Francesco Ignazio Mannu composed the ode “*Su patriota sardu a sos feudatarios*” (*The Sardinian Patriot to the Landowners*), and among many precious wines, he remembered the *cannonau* and the *malvasia*. The *malvasia* wine of Sardinia makes another appearance in a novel by Salvatore Mannuzzu, *Procedura* (*Procedure*), set in the evocative Bosa, the capital town of Planargia, which is indeed the region of the *malvasia*.

In this cultural journey through the gastronomy of Sardinia, Grazia Deledda occupies a place of her own: in her books, food and recipes are more than mere quotations. They are slotted into the plot and described consistently, elevating the food and its preparation, the toil required, and the appreciation of those who make and eat it. In her novels, one encounters detailed accounts of her mother’s bread making, from cleaning the wheat and preparing the flour, to making the dough and baking it: these scenes are so vivid, with almost ritual gestures that mark the days of the week in a way I remember from my own childhood, when I watched my mother perform the same actions many years later and in

another region of the island. This proves that in Sardinia some customs and traditions are still alive and thriving.

Preparing and sharing a meal is an important custom among the Sardinians, noted for their hospitality. In *The Road to Evil*, to quote just one, many are the roasts prepared by the men of the family for special occasions, as tradition dictates, or the ceremonies of coffee and cookies, the latter expertly made by the women. On St Francis of Lula's feast day, the characters of *Elias Portolu* celebrate with a lavish lunch where *filindèu* pasta is the star. Scrupulously handcrafted according to an elaborate method that recalls noodle making, *filindèu* is in the shape of very fine threads, which are carefully dried and cooked in a traditional meat broth.

The recipes here presented all belong to the culinary tradition of Sardinia, although a new twist might have been added here and there to highlight some local product that is worthy of attention. They are intended as a sampler of the range and complexity of the Sardinian cuisine. There are several traditional dishes from Nuoro, which are also mentioned by Grazia Deledda; but some names and food products are from other regions of the island. The novelist herself did not disdain the various kinds of Sardinian cooking, as evidenced by the *vernaccia* wine from Salarussa, which makes an appearance in *Reeds in the Wind*, as well as in some of the short stories of *Chiaroscuro*. Reflecting the reality of her society, the food of Deledda's novels is simple and exceptional at the same time, just like the real stuff. This is why it was decided to exclude starters from our list of

dishes, as they do not belong to the traditional gastronomy of the island. Appetizers are a rather recent novelty; in today's catering industry, they are provided presenting other dishes that lend themselves well as starters. Similarly, a single-dish meal was all that could be afforded once, but in our time, people choose to have only one course in an attempt to adapt to the pace of modern society. This leads us to a further consideration: in the gastronomic landscape of Sardinia, the inevitable challenge between innovation and tradition can only be met with a wise, honest reinterpretation of its cuisine to balance these two essential elements.

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