



CUCINARE NELLA PREISTORIA

by
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Today we will talk about something that we find on our daily dining tables, but which has a history rooted in thousands of years of cultural, social, and technological evolution: **bread, a staple food with a history stretching back thousands of years.**

According to nutritionists, bread is an essential food for a proper and balanced diet. It is a source of complex carbohydrates that are gradually absorbed, ensuring a feeling of fullness and a lasting energy supply. The nutritional properties of bread are enhanced if it is made with whole wheat flour, as this contains more fiber and nutrients and has a lower glycemic index.

Its daily role in our diet makes us forget that it is a product whose roots go back in time to the dawn of sedentary human communities.

The first doughs date back over 12,000 years. They were simple mixtures of water and flour obtained from **wild cereals**, ancestors of einkorn wheat. No yeast, no oven. Probably cooked on hot stones or under ashes. Later, it was produced with flour obtained from cultivated cereal varieties, including einkorn wheat (*Triticum monococcum*), emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*), spelt (*Triticum spelta*), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), and millet (*Panicum miliaceum*). Last but not least, soft wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) is used to make the flour that is nowadays widely employed in our kitchens!

The real revolution came with leavening, first recorded in **Egypt** around **3000 BC**. Someone forgot about some type of dough, and when they returned, they found it fermented and swollen. When they baked it, they obtained a softer, more fragrant... more alive bread. From then on, bread became not only a food, but also a holy symbol: offered to the gods, used as currency, distributed as wages to workers. Despite its millennial spread, bread is very rare in archaeological contexts because, as an organic material, it can only be preserved in exceptional conditions, such as by drying or, more often, charring.

One of the most extraordinary discoveries comes from the Natufian site of **Shubayqa**, in Jordan. Charred fragments of a flat, unleavened bread, similar to modern pita bread, were found in a domestic hearth. The date? Approximately **14,000 years ago**. One of the oldest known examples of bread making.

Italy has also seen some important discoveries, although they belong to more recent periods. In several pile dwellings from the Early and **Middle Bronze Age** (c. 2300-1300 BC) - such as those in **Ledro**, **Bande di Cavriana**, **Quercia di Lazise**, **Castione dei Marchesi** and, more recently, **Lucone di Polpenazze del Garda** - charred remains have been found that can be traced back to baked goods. In **Ledro**, for example, small burnt objects appear to be pieces of bread. On the other hand, a flattened loaf of bread was recovered in **Lazise**; it was burnt but in excellent condition, with a diameter of over 9 centimeters. At **Lucone**, a charred focaccia was analyzed under an electron microscope. The result? A dense type of dough, almost pore-free, with traces of phytoliths—tiny plant particles—probably linked to spelt coatings.

An astonishing discovery has been made in **Sardinia**: at **Nuraghe Arrubiu** in Orroli, a bread-making site dating back to the **14th-13th century BC** was discovered in one of the tower's chambers. Clay baking surfaces and charred remains of unleavened type of dough, possibly focaccia, were found along with cooking pots and acorns. Then, the village of **Genna Maria**, in Villanovaforru, archaeologists have found tiny organic fragments—about 20 milligrams in total—interpreted as bread residues. They have regular 1–3 millimeter holes, which seem to indicate partial leavening, perhaps a sign of a still primitive but already refined technique.

In today's **globalized world**, we can find all kinds of bread everywhere. At the same time, despite this great variety, there is a growing desire to return to the “old-time” bread, made with sourdough, ancient flours, and a process of cold milling and slower baking. Here, then, is how to rediscover with new eyes an ancient knowledge linked to the agricultural world and **peasant tradition**.



Preisto-ricetta

Imagine preparing focaccia as they used to do in the Bronze Age, using simple and natural ingredients.

Ingredients

*300 g spelt flour
50 g bran
approx. 200 g water
salt to taste
optional: rosemary, chives, or
raisins*

The dough is made with spelt flour mixed with a bit of bran to add flavor and rusticity. No yeast is used, so the focaccia is more compact but just as tasty. After kneading the dough with water, you can leave it to rest for an hour, but this is not essential. To season it, in addition to salt which was certainly used, you can add rosemary, chives or, for a sweet touch, a few raisins.

It can be baked in a traditional oven at 180°C, or for a more authentic effect, under the ashes of a fire or in a clay dome oven. In both cases, the focaccia will have a rich, smoky flavor, just like the one the Bronze Age inhabitants would have eaten.



Curiosita'

Did you know that at the **Egyptian Museum in Turin** you can admire some of the oldest bread finds in the world? Among these are round loaves and loaves shaped like animals, found in tombs and archaeological sites.

Would you like to learn more about this topic?

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