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# In-Cult



**CULTURAL TREASURES, ITALY**

**EDUCATOR SECTION**

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## CULTURAL TREASURES - ITALY

### IT\_1

#### **Altamura bread**

The bread of Altamura DOP (Puglia), still today produced following the ancient recipe with the same ingredients —durum wheat, sourdough, salt and water— and cooked in wood-burning and stone ovens, stands out for its fragrance, flavour and aroma. It has a very crunchy 3-millimeter-thick crust and a soft straw yellow crumb and comes in two traditional forms: one high, overlapped; and the other, lower, called "a priest's hat". This bread, as a basic element of the population's diet in Alta Murgia, was kneaded by women, baked in public ovens and marked with the initials of its owner, to prevent loaves from getting confused. The main characteristic of this bread was its durability, essential to ensure the livelihood of farmers and shepherds during the weeks that they spent away from home, working in the fields or pastures. These workers' lunch consisted of a bread soup flavoured with olive oil and salt. Horace seems to refer to this bread as the "best bread in the world" in his poems "the Satires" (37 B.C.). The traditional bakery activity of Altamura was confirmed in "The Municipal Statutes of the City" of 1527. Probably even the milling activity entirely concentrated in Altamura; in fact, there were 26 processing plants in full activity in the early 17th century.

### IT\_2

#### **Knowledge and collection of medicinal and alimurgic plants**

(Calabria and Emilia Romagna) Just like animals, human beings have used plants to heal and feed themselves from the beginning of their existence: it was probably by observing them that they discovered in prehistoric times how some herbs could heal some ailments and others could satisfy their primary need to eat. The custodians of this knowledge were above all women, who handed it down from generation to generation and, through word of mouth, and they still do, though without using criteria or scientific study. During the Middle Ages, such knowledge could prove very dangerous: many of the people burned as witches were none other than women who knew how to cure with herbs. The knowledge and food use of wild herbs is very ancient too. They have always symbolised the goodness of nature that offers vegetables to human beings without the need to cultivate them and, in times of famine, have ensured the survival of the poor and enriched the diet, which was almost exclusively based on flour. In recent years, we have been witnessing a growing interest in the research and consumption of wild herbs, even if their knowledge and use is often a heritage owned by a few people who have preserved the recipes and passed them on orally across generations.

### IT\_3

#### **Launeddas: a typical musical instrument**

Launeddas are a very ancient musical instrument typical of southern Sardinia, built with three river reeds of different sizes and thickness. The discovery of Nuragic paintings and bronze statues depicting the launeddas player testifies to their use in distant times. Launeddas are played with continuous breath, a technique that consists in accumulating a reserve of air inside the cheeks during the exhalation phase that is later expelled when the player inhales with the nose. In this way, it is possible to channel an uninterrupted column of air inside the instrument. The repertoire of launeddas is linked to times of celebration during which they perform

a socialising function. On religious occasions, launeddas accompany the liturgy of the Mass and processions. However, it is in the accompaniment of dances that the expressiveness of this instrument becomes more manifest. Many young people are currently approaching this tool thanks to the appearance of schools. Live launeddas can be heard in patronal festivities such as the festival of Sant'Efisio in Cagliari (1st May), when the sound of dozens of launeddas precedes the Saint's passage in his procession to the sea. There are also a lot of builders of launeddas nowadays.

#### **IT\_4**

##### **The art of embroidery, sewing and weaving**

Many women with no work and study prospects had a future thanks to the embroidery, sewing and weaving schools of Novilara (1929) and Candelara (1942). There, in addition to learning a trade, they received training through reading, songs, prayers, sports and theatrical activities. Testimony of their work can be found in the Parish School museum. One of its rooms exhibits sewing tools and materials, alongside embroidery artifacts. On the walls are exposed different types of haberdashery. A corridor contains carded and non-carded wool of various colours. Finally, there is an electric carding room, forbidden to girls because they are dangerous. The client's room shows images documenting life in both schools, specimens of industrial machines and a wide range of artifacts. A corner of the museum is dedicated to Egizia Bargossi, creator of Textile Art, teacher and skilled artist, appreciated both in Italy and around the world. Visiting the museum means retracing the lives of our ancestors, appreciating their industriousness and great competence, and understanding the key principles of sewing, embroidery and fabric that are the basis of what we buy so carelessly at present. Today, the relevance of an embroidery school for girls and boys gathers broad consensus.

#### **IT\_5**

##### **Feast of Our Lady in May**

The protagonists of this ancient carnival (Basilicata) are: the Bear (Urs), the Hermit (Rumit) and Lent (Quaremma). In the Middle Ages, people experienced frequent famines while the rich lords continued to live without any problems. The Bear identified the rich and lucky man; the Hermit, the poor man; and Lent, the old lady struck by bad luck. Each mask represents a social condition. During the party, each character plays a different role, the Hermit pricks people with a stick; the Bear inspires fear with his wild character and stuns everyone with his bell; Quaremma walks slowly and sadly among people. The Rumits go around the village on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday, when "THE WALKING FOREST" comes to life: the tree-men leave the forest and walk around the village crawling with a stick at the doors and remaining silent. Those who receive the visit give them what they can in exchange for a good omen. On Shrove Thursday, we can see the traditional masks and the procession of the "Zita" that reproduces the peasant wedding with 'A Zita (the bride) accompanied by lu Zit (the groom) followed by the priest, the altar boys and the guests. The wedding procession runs through the streets of the village dancing and joking, with the roles being reversed: women impersonate male roles and men do so with female ones.

#### **IT\_6**

##### **Feast of Our Lady in May**

Mount Soratte (Lazio), in the form of a sleeping man and at its more than 600 meters of altitude, is lit up with hundreds of bonfires and, all around, the town celebrates. Since 1814, the feast of the Madonna di Maggio

has been repeated every year on the last Sunday of May, culminating in the Torchlight procession of Mount Soratte. In the previous days, the streets are decorated with flowers and lights; hundreds of bundles of reeds, specially collected since February, are arranged along the mountain too. On the evening of the festivity, when the procession passes, all the reeds are lit offering a unique and exciting show followed by a cheerful and colourful explosion of fireworks: natural fires and fireworks are lit up to conclude a day of great celebration. This celebration brings together devotion to the Virgin Mary and ancient cults of fire in the heart of spring, linked to earth fertility. Due to its particular shape, Mount Soratte was already considered a sacred place in pre-Roman times.

## IT\_7

### **Fair of OH BEJ! OH BEJ! A typical Christmas market**

The first news of this tradition dates back to 1288, when the festivity of St. Ambrogio took place at Santa Maria Maggiore (Milano). The origins of the current festival can be found in 1510, when Giannetto Castiglione arrived in the city, sent by the Pope to rekindle devotion and faith in the people from Milan. Giannetto, fearing not to be welcomed by the population who had no sympathy for the Pope, prepared packages with sweets and toys which he distributed among the children gathered around the procession that reached the Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio surrounded by a festive crowd. It was 7th December. Since then, people began to organise the fair of "Oh bej! Oh bej! " during St. Ambrogio's day, setting up stalls of clothes, toys, and gastronomic products of the time: mustard, castagnaccio and firòn: smoked chestnuts, soaked in white wine and arranged in long strings. The name "Oh bej! Oh bej! " comes from the children's exclamations of joy at the sight of the gifts: the expression "Oh bej! Oh bej! " means "Oh beautiful! Oh beautiful!" in English. The fair, initially held at Piazza dei Mercanti (The Merchants' Square), moved to the Castello Sforzesco from 2006. Today the stalls of Oh bej! Oh bej! exhibit handicrafts, antiques and confectionery.