

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

On June 1, 2015, Gianfranco Cardinal Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, already the author of more than 160 books, published the small volume *The Significance of Eating* on recycled brown butcher's paper. In a pre-publication interview (JTV April 2015) he told me that, although bread is mentioned 97 times in the New Testament, food is mentioned more often in the Old Testament because the Old Testament describes historical events and bread is one of the oldest man-made foods.

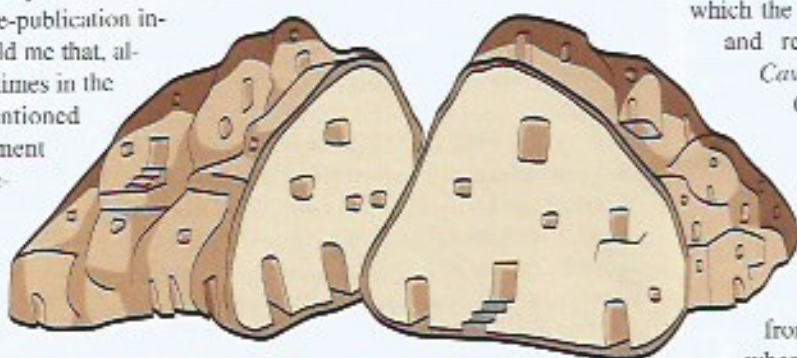
According to the most recent statistics published in the 2000 in the *Guinness Book of World Records*, Turkey had the largest annual per capita consumption of bread in the world with 199.6 kilos (440 pounds) per person, followed by Serbia and Montenegro with 135 kilos (297 pounds, 9.9 ounces) and Bulgaria with 133.1 kilos (293 pounds, 6.9 ounces). In the EU, Germany, France, and Italy are the top bread-consuming nations.

"Because of its history of regional political division," Wikipedia tells us, "Italy specializes in many different kinds of bread, reflecting its great regional variation and widely different bread-making recipes and traditions. In general rolls are typical of the north, while large loaves are typical of the south, with those from Altamura in Puglia and Matera in Basilicata being particularly popular." So, during a press trip to the Basilicata, our group visited the Cifarelli bakery on Via Istria 17 in the Piccianello neighborhood of Matera, one of only four remaining bakeries with a wood-burning oven. There third-generation baker Massimo revealed his professional secrets to us.

Bread from Matera is tied to local traditions. Given that, up to the 1950s, the town's wood ovens in the *Sassi* were shared by several families, each family impressed its own sort of brand on the sourdough they made at home by using a wooden stamp. That way they could recognize their loaf once it was baked. These stamps were traditionally made by traveling shepherds. Today many of them can be admired in Matera's Domenico Ridola National Archeological Museum.

Massimo's grandfather, Antonio, was an apprentice to a breadmaker in the *Sassi*. The bread-

BREAD IN MATERA A WORLD PATRIMONY



maker had no children, so he left his business to Antonio, who, it's important to remember, did not "make" bread; he only baked it. Over the years, Antonio owned three different "ovens" in the *Sassi*. The first one, which the Cifarellis hope to buy back and restore, was in the *Sasso Caveoso* in the deconsecrated Church of San Leonardo with votive icons on the walls. It was Massimo's father, Giovanni, who started to "make" bread on Via Istria in 1981.

What makes the bread from Matera different from anywhere else is first and foremost

the yeast made with spring water and chopped seasonal fruit (often figs or grapes). The one-kilo loaves remain fresh for 9 to 10 days and the dough's unusual cone-shape is so that approximately 250 one-kilo loaves can fit into the wood-burning oven at one time twice a day. The "cones" are supposed to represent the mountainous landscape, Massimo says. Instead, in the splendid 90-minute documentary, *Mathera*, directed by Francesco Invernizzi, Matera's Archbishop Antonio Giuseppe Caiazzo, a loyal customer of the Cifarellis' store at Via San Francesco d'Assisi 13 near the cathedral, recounts that the "cones" represent the "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." *Mathera* was featured at the festival LA ITALIA, which took place at Hollywood's Chinese Theater from February 17-23. In Italy it will soon be available for purchase as a DVD.

In December 2007 Matera's bread received the recognition of IGP, with which the EU established its Protected Geographical Indication. As a member of the Consortium for the Protection of Matera's Bread, Cifarelli must use local durum wheat only. At least 30% must be the durum wheat called Senatore Cappelli. The remaining 70% must come from nearby: Genzano, Acerenza, Stigliano and Irsina.

In addition to bread, Cifarelli sells *concelle* (salted cakes flavored with fennel), *strazzate* (biscuits flavored with chocolate and coffee), *taralli*, *cantucci*, and *friscoli* (bread sticks), but only in house. The website www.panificiocifarelli.it for online purchases is under construction but not in a hurry, so you'll have to come, see, and sample for yourself! ☺

Baker Massimo Cifarelli with his father, Giovanni



Left, loaf with bread stamp. Below, taralli

